

What myths are evident in ‘Racism and the Australian Dream’? What myths does the text rely upon? Which myths does it reject?

At the end of the second world war, when the phrase ‘the Australian Dream’ first appeared, it referred to owning one’s own home. Home ownership in Australia in the decades following the second world war jumped 70% (*End of the Great Australian Dream?*, 2003) and so the Australian Dream expanded to mean not only owning a house, but having the perfect nuclear family to live in it. Of course the Australian Dream applied exclusively to *white* Australians. In 2015, journalist Stan Grant of the Wiradjuri people argued that the ideas most would now recognise as the Australian Dream had existed for centuries, long before the end of the second world war. They were the same ideas brought by the British when they invaded what would eventually become Australia and declared it *terra nullius*: empty land (*Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream* - The Ethics Centre, 2015). This essay will look at this myth and the others that are evident in Grant’s speech. They are the myths that make-up the Australian Dream and the first and most brutal of these myths is that of *terra nullius*.

Prior to invasion, Australia had been occupied for at least 60,000 years by the Indigenous people, who were “a people of law, a people of lore, a people of music and art and dance and politics” (*Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream* - The Ethics Centre, 2015); none of this mattered to the British. Australia was declared *terra nullius*: empty, uninhabited and there for the taking. This myth of an empty, unoccupied land allowed Indigenous Australians to be “rounded up and put on missions from where if [they] escaped, [they] were hunted down...roped and tied and dragged back” (*Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream* - The Ethics Centre, 2015). The stolen land was then given to white Australians, to allow them to realise the Australian Dream, while the Indigenous were systematically excluded and deliberately thrown out. Despite the legal doctrine of *terra nullius* being overturned by the High Court in 1992 in *Mabo v Queensland*, this myth continues to permeate the Australian psyche to this very day and is at the heart of the Australian Dream.

But *terra nullius* is not the only myth evident in Stan Grant’s speech. He acknowledges, he’s done well, as have many other Indigenous Australians. Grant says he’s done well “because of who has come before [him]. [His] father who lost the tips of three fingers working in sawmills... [His] grandfather who served to fight wars for this country when he was not yet a citizen...[His] great grandfather, who was jailed for speaking his language” (*Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream* - The Ethics Centre, 2015). Here, Grant’s speech rejects the popular ‘bootstrap myth’, that anyone who is prepared to put in hard work can and will succeed. A white Australian, working hard, has a chance to realise the Australian Dream, but as Grant illustrates, an Indigenous Australian can literally work their fingers to the bone and be no closer to the house on the quarter-acre block. The function of this myth, of course, is to absolve White Australia from any responsibility for the exclusion of the Indigenous people from the Australian Dream.

Another myth evident in Grant’s speech does the same: the myth of post-racial Australia. In 2015, Sydney Swans star footballer Adam Goodes was booed to such an extent that he turned his back on AFL. Other Indigenous Australians listening to those jeers were assailed with “the howl of the Australian dream and it said to us again, you’re not welcome” (*Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream* - The Ethics Centre, 2015). Grant does not explicitly talk about the myth of post-racial Australia, but it is implicit within the text. After all, if Australia was some

kind of post-racial Utopia, Grant would not have made this speech, Adam Goodes would still be playing AFL, Indigenous children would be more likely to finish school than end up in prison, and Land Rights would be a reality. The post-racial myth allows the Australian Dream to continue to be realised by White Australia, without needing to acknowledge that the whole concept is based on racism and, by participating, they are complicit in it.

What Grant's speech illustrates by using these myths is that the Australian Dream itself - the block with the hills hoist clothes lines, the semi-detached, three bedroom house, the perfect nuclear family - is a myth in itself. It is a myth propped up by other myths, all of which are grounded in racism and oppression, but it doesn't have to be. Grant reminds Australia that "we're better than this" and by acknowledging that, Australia can build a new dream accessible to *all* Australians.

Reference List

THE ETHICS CENTRE. 2015. *Stan Grant: Racism and the Australian dream - The Ethics Centre*. [online] Available at: <<https://ethics.org.au/stan-grants-speech/>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].

The Age. 2003. *End of the Great Australian Dream?*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theage.com.au/national/end-of-the-great-australian-dream-20030714-gdw1lb.html>> [Accessed 19 April 2021].