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"The Facade of the Games": The Reinvention of an Aboriginal "Friendly" Australia for the 2000 Millennium Games

On the eve of the 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games, the realities of white Australia's lengthy and brutal history of racial oppression and exploitation of Indigenous populations became an issue of national and international concern. Tara Magdalinski suggests in her 2000 article entitled, "The Reinvention of Australia for the 2000 Olympic Games," the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) 1993 decision to award Australia with the Games prompted national nostalgia in a need to reconstruct:

An imagined national history based on the projection of selected memories, the purpose of which is to define what it means to be Australian and to marginalize alternative interpretations of Australian identity and the Australian past.

The focus of her discussion is on the reconstruction, or even manipulation, of Australia's Olympic history and its assistance in constructing an Australian national identity for 2000. She further contends that Australia was awarded the first Games of the new millennium, as it possessed images of a "clean" and "progressive" nation. Due to the appalling history of human rights issues in China, the IOC could not justify awarding the Games to the heavily favored Beijing candidacy over the "clean, green" approach of Sydney's bid. However, Magdalinski briefly identifies a number of distressing economic and social issues affecting the manufacturing of an Australian identity in the late 1990s. An issue of specific importance in the exploration of an Australian identity concerned the treatment of Aboriginal people in Australia and how this matter affected the homogeneity of the political and social landscape of the nation.

Colin Tatz claims and then questions; "Australian society is racist. It also worships sport. What happens when these two values intersect?" The strategically planned and highly publicized 2000 Sydney Summer Olympic Games offers a means of

responding to this question posed by Tatz in 1987. Sydney was by no means the first host city of the Olympic Games to "plan" a national identity with the intention of appeasing international skeptics concerned primarily with human rights issues. This discussion borrows Miquel de Moragas, Nancy K. Rivenburgh, and Nuria Garcia's five step process of developing a host city identity, as was the case for the 1992 Barcelona Summer Games, and applies this to the construction of a positive Australian national identity, one which appeared to embrace and celebrate its Indigenous populations.
