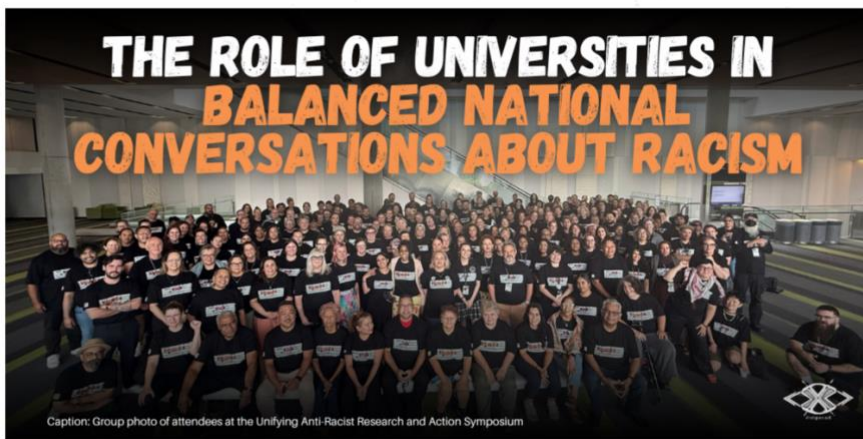




The role of universities in balanced national conversations about racism

By Gregory Phillips and Jayne Christian

24 Feb 2025



Caption: Group photo of attendees at the Unifying Anti-Racist Research and Action Symposium

EDITOR'S PICKS



I will not be lectured on violence by these women



An open letter to non-Indigenous people who work in Indigenous affairs



A milestone for Black sovereignty in this country: celebrating 50 years of the Tent Embassy



What is racial invisibility, and how do white people benefit from it?



Aboriginal English – what isn't it?

We continue to see the fallout from the [Carumba Institute's National Symposium on Racism](#) held last month, with attacks on organisers, delegates, and academic freedom. What followed was a confected pile-on by predictable conservative commentators. They claimed the conference was 'anti-semitic', 'violent' and had 'no place on campus', conveniently feeding into [Dutton's culture wars](#) and wannabe Trump [broligarchy](#). The truth is, the conference actually promoted working with each other to condemn hate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Jews, Palestinians, and anyone else experiencing racism.

Recently, QUT Vice-Chancellor Margaret Sheil AO was called to present to the federal parliament's [Human Rights Committee](#), addressing the Symposium. Disappointingly, Sheil issued an "unreserved apology", and gave assurance the institute behind the Symposium would "not be holding events like this in the future." To be clear, an event "like this" was Blackfulla-led, research-based and honoured the objectives of those who are concerned with the rise of racism and anti-semitism globally.

The Carumba Institute leads globally renowned scholarly work in anti-racism under the leadership of Professor Chelsea Watego. The conference speakers

list was wide and varied, and considered the need to respond to racism as a system of power in clearer ways. As scholarly attendees of the conference, we call into question the motivations of those saying they protect free speech, but only when it suits them. If those who possess scholarly excellence in human rights, anti-racism and Indigenous Sovereignty are not allowed to talk about important national and global issues, who can?

On the eve of the conference, Carumba hosted 'The Greatest Race Debate' to consider racism playing out in society, politics and the media, particularly for First Nations and other marginalised communities. During the debate, Sarah Schwartz, Director of the Jewish Council of Australia, presented a slide called 'Dutton's Jew' to expose the 'right kind of Jew' that Dutton likes to stereotype in his mission to exploit toxic culture wars for political gain. Professor Aileen Moreton-Robinson draws a similar parallel, in her work "[Race War and the Pathology of Patriarchal White Sovereignty](#)" where she similarly critiques the "good Indigenous Citizen" who aligns with white expectations, versus the "bad Aboriginal" who embodies their Sovereignty.

At the conclusion of the Symposium, The Australian published articles targeting key speakers including Professor Watego, Sarah Schwartz and Palestinian academic Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah. The Australian published no less than nine articles of this nature in less than a month, joined by other mainstream media outlets who seem to enjoy continuing the clickbait of tired and sensationalised narratives.

After the Symposium, attendees have continued to express their support for the Symposium's organisers. Gungarri Human Rights advocate Maggie Munn promptly circulated an [Open Letter](#) in support of the Carumba Institute, Darumbal and South Sea Islander academic Dr Melinda Mann ([Open Letter](#)), and we have also addressed an [Open Letter](#) to which has been forwarded to QUT Council and Executive, and Members of Parliament. Further, as Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah's work has been misrepresented and smeared, and her scholarship threatened and subject to speculation at the recent federal parliament's Human Rights Committee, an [Open Letter for her work is still open for signing](#).

Around the time of the Symposium, no mainstream media have sought a balanced view of the event from First Nations delegates, similar to how the Muslim Community often go unheard in 'debates' about them. Of all the people who have been outraged at the alleged antisemitism of the

Symposium, we ask why none of them were so concerned in hearing from us about why we needed the space that the Symposium offered to begin with. Apparently mainstream media outlets have given up journalistic standards when it comes to First Nations peoples.

The immediate mainstream media response to frame the Symposium as anti-semitic was contrived and relied on unbalanced coverage and commentators. Senator Lidia Thorpe, who spoke at the Symposium, told the inquiry of her attendance and positive experience, and questioned Sheil on whether she considered that “conflating anti-Zionism with antisemitism undermines genuine efforts to combat racial and religious discrimination”. While we have come to expect lop-sided media narratives and framing of our experiences as First Nations peoples experiencing, responding to and studying racism, we think universities can and should do better.

If governments and the media are concerned about a rise in anti-semitism, they need to also consider the connection to the rise of neo-Nazi fascist recruitment in the last 12 months. While the increase in antisemitic attacks are assumed to be from pro-Palestinian movements until unrelated right-wing parties are identified, and then media and government critics fall silent and idle in their outrage.

☰ The  BETOOTTA ADVOCATE 🔍



**Dutton Stops Talking About
Anti-Semitic Attacks After
Learning The Perpetrators
Don't Have Brown Skin Or
Pink Hair**

The current climate has this week been met with the introduction of the *Crimes Amendment (Places of Worship) Bill 2025* in parliament to provide greater clarity to anti-semitic crimes, with penalties for new offences to carry 200 penalty units (in NSW, one penalty unit is equal to \$110) and/or two years' imprisonment. We of course support the right of all people to be free from, and protected from, racism in all its forms, including anti-semitism, but are left wondering where such swift clarifications and proportionate penalties are for Blackfullas, Palestinian people and other groups who also experience targeted forms of racism.

The Symposium provided a space for those impacted by the racism of settler-colonial violence globally to unite and create conversations of safety and sanity for those in attendance.

What is really at issue here is academic freedom, conflation of anti-zionism and anti-semitism, and a tendency to name racism, protect free speech and support self-determination for some communities, not all, depending on what's politically convenient.

Since the Symposium, QUT has said, before an internal review has completed or issued findings, that they will be accepting the recommendations of the antisemitism review "in full". It is also unclear whether any Indigenous or other negatively racialised people will be involved in this investigation.

To the QUT Council, executive leadership and community, we would encourage them to protect academic freedom and call out racism and discrimination in the face of toxic political games. Condemning perceived threats of violence, condemning racism and condemning anti-semitism are not, and should not be presented as, oppositional positions.

We proudly stand against genocide perpetrated against Palestinian people, as we stand against anti-semitism, and all forms of racism and marginalisation, and we know that Indigenous people in Australia have historically stood by Jewish people when they've faced anti-semitism and genocide.

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples recognise the realities of genocide and racism in this country. So we call on our institutions to stand up for all marginalised peoples, and respond in an open and balanced way, not in a way that could only privilege the claims and feelings of one man.

By [Gregory Phillips](#) and [Jayne Christian](#)

<https://indigenoux.com.au/the-role-of-universities-in-balanced-national-conversations-about-racism/>



Gregory Phillips

Gregory Phillips is a Waanyi and Jaru medical anthropologist. He leads change in the art and science of decolonisation. He had a PhD addressing power, cultural safety and racism issues in medical schools, is Professor of First Peoples Health (Adjunct) in the School of Medicine at Griffith University, and Chairs the Ebony Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Institute.

SOCIAL



[VIEW ALL GREGORY'S ARTICLES](#)



Jayne Christian

Jayne is a Baramadagal woman of the Dharug-speaking peoples through the Reid/Goldspink bloodline, with kinship connections to Wiradjuri Country. Jayne is a lawyer & mediator / FDRP, and Director of Barabirang Projects, and sits on various Boards and Advisory Committees. Jayne is a cultural weaver who was the recipient of the 2023 Galang Residency based in Paris, France, where she will be returning next month to participate in a collaborative exhibition at the Cité Internationale des Arts.

[VIEW ALL JAYNE'S ARTICLES](#)