

Dark ravings of a race cadet

By Andrew Bolt
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IT'S not what she says that makes Germaine Greer a worry. Every society has its ratbags, after all.

No, it's the applause she gets once she's said it that should scare you. The louder the applause, the more irresponsible the audience. And from the cheering right now -- mainly from women, dare I note -- you can tell we're far more infantile than is healthy.

The cheers are for the worst of Greer -- an essay, *On Rage*, which perfectly captures her unreason, her racialism and her spectacularly ignorant worship of the Noble Savage.

Here is a manifesto of irresponsibility, cheered by the roars of the irresponsible.

Greer's thesis this time is that Aboriginal men are gripped by a rage caused by the humiliation of 200 years of white settlement. "Aboriginal rage, it is not an excessive reaction to friction but the inevitable consequence of a series of devastating blows inflicted on a victim who is utterly powerless to resist," Greer wrote from London. This, she claims, is the rage that helps explain the appalling violence in many Aboriginal communities -- much of it inflicted on women and children.

If Greer stopped there, it would be bad enough. But in defending her notion that Aboriginal men are in a hopeless and permanent rage over something done to ancestors centuries ago, she digs even deeper: "What I am saying is that they can't get over it, and it's inhuman to ask them to get over it . . . It's outrageous that you back off and say, 'Why can't they take responsibility?'"

Greer's preaching that Aboriginal violence is caused by whitey, and it's wrong to ask Aboriginal men to take responsibility for the violence they do, should in a healthy society be denounced as the ravings of a bigot or a clown. Or both. Instead, Greer's essay has been published by Melbourne University Press, and launched at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art by Bob Carr, former Labor premier of NSW, who praised its "ferocious logic". Greer has even been invited to preach more of this same in the Keynote Address of the Melbourne Writers' Festival.

This reception is what makes Greer so alarming. Can we really be so dead to reason, to responsibility, that many hundreds of well-read Australians see in her words a "logic" and a wisdom?

Most intelligent people should in fact know it's mad to assume all people of a (mixed) race share any one overwhelming emotion.

Is TV star Ernie Dingo also paralysed by this rage? Footballer Lance Franklin? Labor intellectual Warren Mundine? Reformer Noel Pearson?

Most intelligent people should also know enough Aboriginal men to realise it's offensive - - a New Age variant of the old racist fear of the always-potent black -- to assume none can control themselves and adapt to a society that offers more than tribal life ever could.

How about newsreader Stan Grant? Millionaire businessman John Moriarty? Surgeon Kelvin Kong?

And most intelligent people should also know it's absurd to blame any one man's angry disposition on a single event, let alone a historical one going back generations. A man might just be angry he can't, say, get a drink.

But what makes Greer's diagnosis particularly stupid is that she seems to dismiss any suggestion that this "anger" she sees might be caused not just by white culture but also by black. Even largely by black.

In fact, Aboriginal culture in outback settlements isn't just a white creation, or a reaction to white invasion, but also has roots in tribal life from long before the arrival of James Cook. Greer might like to believe Aborigines then lived in a Garden of Eden, among milk and kisses, but the skulls do not lie.

What skulls? The 1409 prehistoric ones from around Australia that were examined by paleopathology expert Stephen Webb. Webb found the commonest skull injury was the kind that comes from being smashed on the head by another person, and that women were far more likely than men to have been hit, even though men did the war fighting. For instance, women were more than twice as likely to have had two depressed fractures of their skulls, suggesting they were also more likely to have been used as punching bags. Women along the east coast in particular were also much more likely to have the "parrying fractures" you get on your arms when trying to stop a right-handed person from hitting you.

What rage was gripping the men back then? Rage at having been evicted from Indonesia?

What's more, historian Geoffrey Blainey has estimated from anthropological evidence that the rate of deaths from warfare among pre-whites Aborigines was at least as great as the rate of dying among Europeans in World War II. But World War II lasted less than seven years, while the warfare among Aboriginal tribes went on forever.

Anthropologist Professor Peter Sutton, who has lived in Aboriginal communities and worked on many land claims, says remnants of this violent, war-like culture exist still. In his powerful essay, *The Politics of Suffering*, he describes what is known in some communities as "cruelling" -- teaching children to attack people who teasingly hurt or don't feed them. "Infants who fall over things like chairs may also be encouraged to attack the offending object in a valued and approved display of physical revenge."

Sutton has pleaded for the Left to stop fighting the need to change a culture that may have been necessary for a kill-or-be-killed tribe, but which is just toxic today: "So many are in denial over the need for cultural change if indigenous disadvantage is to be addressed at its roots."

Yet here comes Greer, insisting the "rage" of Aboriginal men is caused by whites, and it's "inhumane" to ask them to change. That what is needed is not a change in Aboriginal culture, but a piece of white paper. A treaty.

Heaven help the Aboriginal children in a world created by Greer. But Greer isn't just writing about them, is she? Or even about Aboriginal men.

It's about her, and the delicious sensation she can cause.

Am I too hard? Then see how lightly she holds to her opinions, sometimes unable to believe she's actually said what she's just blurted. Take her appearance on Lateline last week.

Reporter: You write that Aboriginal women humiliated their men by seeking the white fellas' help in the intervention.

Greer: Hang on a minute. That's not how it's put.

Hang on a minute, Germaine. It is: "The already persecuted women will be seen as having colluded with the enemy to remove the few strands of self-esteem the indigenous man had left." Better believe you said it.

Another example? How about Greer denying in 2001 that she'd once said she wouldn't leave our airports without being welcomed by local Aborigines, and that she was, in fact, an "honorary Aborigine"? False, she raged: "What kind of gross and stupid statement would that be?"

Since she asks: Very. Yet here is Greer being asked on Radio National just a year earlier about those very claims -- and accepting them as true:

Reporter: You mentioned at the Literary Forum that you'd been made an honorary Aborigine, I'm wondering how this came about.

Germaine Greer: Well . . . I do this thing of having the Aborigines greet me, so that I can be admitted into the country . . . I'm usually met just outside Customs by a group of Aborigines, who belong to the place . . .

Greer was happy to own the ideas when they had people gasping, but couldn't recognise them as hers a year later, when heads had cooled.

As I said, it's really about Greer. And for her audience, it's about them -- how they feel and seem, being so "compassionate" and "daring". It's not at all about any real Aborigines, or about any real policies that must be administered and the consequences judged. This is, in fact, an orgy of irresponsibility -- and as moronic as all such orgies are.

It's as George Orwell said in praise of conservative writer Rudyard Kipling: "He does possess one thing which 'enlightened' people seldom or never possess, and that is a sense of responsibility . . . (I)t did have the advantage of giving Kipling a certain grip on

reality. "The ruling power is always faced with the question, 'In such and such circumstances, what would you do?', whereas the opposition is not obliged to take responsibility or make any real decisions. Where it is a permanent and pensioned opposition . . . the quality of its thought deteriorates accordingly."

And with Greer, always raging in opposition, her work has deteriorated badly indeed. But listen to the applause, as she gets up once more to say she barely knows what. That's a measure of the great tide of unreason that bears her along. That great dark current of the irresponsible.