

Face up to racist past

At a seaside Sunday market, a stall flogged tea towels with images of picaninnies and golliwogs. Black-face caricatures are racist and demeaning. Even more insulting was the artist claiming copyright and ownership of the images.

Meanwhile, earlier in the year, Brisbane Airport sold "Aboriginal lucky dolls", while iTunes promoted a video game that encouraged players to kill Indigenous Australians. Such products not only promote racism but profit from it, causing further trauma to Indigenous people.

Each time these sorts of stories are aired, debate rages about whether golliwog dolls are a loveable icon or a racist symbol. Recently the website "Starts at 60" asked: "Are golliwog dolls racist"? This question generated comments that were abusive, with white Australians telling Indigenous people what they should feel.

Golliwogs, like other "primitive" black stereotypes of minstrels, mummies and picaninnies, may conjure up happy childhood memories. However, children grow up to learn the history behind the caricatures. Insisting that a golliwog is "just a doll" denies our racist history.

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