

## Chapter 9

# The Redfern Aboriginal Housing Company Planning Process: Resilience, Resistance and Innovation

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The Redfern riot of 2004 was seen as a crisis point in the Australian Indigenous–Settler State relationship. The riot between Indigenous youths and the police was sparked by the tragic death of a young Aboriginal teenager, TJ Hickey, who fell off his bike and was impaled on a steel fence. New South Wales (NSW) police were deeply implicated in Hickey's death, with witnesses reporting that they saw police chasing the boy moments before he crashed his bicycle. The Aboriginal community reacted with anger and hostility to police denials of any responsibility for Hickey's death. After a night of rioting, between 40 and 50 police were injured, the Redfern Railway Station was set on fire, cars were fire-bombed and police in riot gear were pelted with bottles, rocks, petrol bombs and firecrackers. Approximately 200 police had been called in from around the city to deal with the violence. The Redfern conflict was labelled the worst race riots in Australia's history. Aboriginal leader, then Senator, Aden Ridgeway (2004) was quoted as saying the riots 'peeled back the thin veneer of an undercurrent of racial tension building up over the past ten years'.

The aftermath of the riot and its causes gained national and international attention, highlighting the most contested urban Aboriginal area in Australia. Redfern's history has heralded many significant political and civil rights movements and has a strong political and cultural significance for the Aboriginal community. The area was the birthplace of the first Aboriginal-controlled organisations in Australia, including the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service, the Aboriginal Medical Service, the Aboriginal Children's Service, the National Black Theatre and an Indigenous radio station.

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