
THE BATHURST EXAMINER

JRN527 | Assessment Three | Erin Archer

Editorial

By Erin Archer

Each year in Australia, the choice of 26th January to celebrate “Australia Day” becomes the topic of heated debate. The date has very different meanings for different people. It marks the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and the proclamation of British sovereignty. For Aboriginal people, January 26th marks the beginning of two centuries of dispossession, theft, slaughter, disease and death. In the Indigenous community, it’s regarded as “Invasion Day”, or “Day of Mourning”. Since 1938 there has been fierce conflict about the appropriateness of the date.



PHOTO: Melbourne Invasion Day Protest. Source: SBS

Year after year, the “Change the Date Movement” has gained momentum, with an increasing number of people turning out to protests and marches to object to the celebration on January 26th. In 2019 Invasion Day Protests were the largest demonstrations to date, and they attracted a substantial amount of media attention.

Multiple studies show the bias Indigenous Australians endure in the media. On a regional newspaper level, Jacqui Ewart of Griffith University has found journalists are often inconsistent when mentioning race, with those Professor Ewart interviewed agreeing it was rare for criminals to be identified as Anglo Saxons in news stories while Indigenous suspects were identified in the media as such. In his analysis of the media's reporting of the Redfern Riots, John Budarick of the University of Adelaide found media companies pick and chose certain elements of an Indigenous news story to suit the political bias, or narrative, of their publication. Research has shown the mass media plays an important role in the distribution of ideologies and has a huge influence on public knowledge of cultures. This type of influence has the potential to be harmful, especially if a publication is negative in its political leaning when representing Indigenous Australians.

By comparing two publications with notable differences in their editorial policies we can clearly see how differently the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are represented.

During the 2019 Invasion Day Protests, depending on the source, the public was subjected to both spectrums of opinion. The Daily Mail Australia tabloid is known as having a right-wing agenda and this was represented in articles that focused on a minor run-in with counter-protestors. The openly left-wing publication Junkee used its platform to endorse the development of the "Change the Date Movement", by emphasizing the large number of people who took part in demonstrations. The Daily Mail's coverage was not reflected in any way by Junkee's coverage.

In The Daily Mail Australia's [article](#), a picture was painted of "violent" indigenous supporters determined to ruin the travel plans of Saturday commuters, and undermine the celebrations of bikini-clad Australians who just wanted to enjoy their Australia Day. The decision to frame the article in this way emphasizes ingrained racism towards Aboriginal culture.

Stereotyping and bias are particularly present in the Daily Mail's [supplementary](#) article on the protests, focusing almost entirely on an altercation during demonstrations in Melbourne. The article was sympathetic towards white nationalism using language such



PHOTO: Melbourne Invasion Day Protest. *Source: The Daily Mail*

as "police form[ed] a human shield to protect him" and "escorted away from the group", while Invasion Day protesters were framed as a "frightening angry mob". The decision to base an entire article on that specific incident heightens the

organisation's conservative narrative by projecting Aboriginal people as uncontrollably violent, and problematic. Compared to centrist articles the number of people cited in the far-right counter-protest group was also grossly over exaggerated.

Junkee's coverage largely focused on the number of people involved in the demonstrations. The article featured embedded tweets that showcased large crowds of people marching and chanting. This aptly reflects the publication's progressive narrative. The [article](#) was constructed to prove a point to both supporters and opposers, that the "Change the Date" movement is gaining increased traction. Validating this political bias is

the decision to only include quotes by Greens representatives, a political party that openly supports changing the date from January 26th. This is in direct contrast to The Daily Mail, which gave a platform to the right-wing nationalist who was involved in the altercation in Melbourne.

The Daily Mail Australia and Junkee are just two examples of the extreme partisan bias that exists throughout Australian media companies. As a result of this loyalty to a political narrative, Indigenous Australians are misrepresented by an industry that many believe is committed to impartiality.

Media forums about journalistic objectivity, and various research papers on culturally appropriate journalism practice have, in the past, contributed to the improvement of media representation of Indigenous Australians. But there clearly needs to be a renewed commitment from a government perspective to hold publications to account when misrepresentation occurs. The introduction of an Indigenous Media Authority would not only enhance journalism principles, but it would also give more power for prosecutors to act when an organisation misreports Indigenous Australian affairs. A watchdog would strengthen the portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, by forcing publications to use correct terminology and assist in the establishment of a quota system of positive representative stories.

The establishment of an Indigenous Media Authority would be a forward thinking, effective, and influential action to stamp out the racism and stereotyping of Indigenous Australians in the media. It's time for media organisations to end their loyalty to a political narrative, and to rediscover their journalistic principles: Truth and accuracy,

independence, fairness and impartiality, humanity, and accountability. By practicing these fundamental ethical standards under the watchful eye of a specific Indigenous Media Authority, media representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can only improve.

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