

STEREOTYPING A BARRIER TO ABORIGINAL ADVANCEMENT

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ROY AH-SEE

The hurt and humiliation of everyday racism deters indigenous self-improvement

On Sunday, August 7, Father's Day came early for Aboriginal dads. On that morning, Aboriginal people gathered on one of the modern forms of the Koori grapevine — Twitter — to have their say about the Bill Leak cartoon that had offended so many earlier that week.

Aboriginal fathers and children shared personal family moments on social media, presenting an image of Aboriginal life mainstream society rarely sees.

#IndigenousDads was empowering and a reminder to the Australian community that the first nations peoples of Australia are much more than the stereotypes that exist today.

Stereotypes and racism continue to hold back the potential of Aboriginal people in Australia. The hurt and humiliation of everyday racism affects the physical health and the mental wellbeing of our mob.

Anyone who takes the time to look at the images of #Indigenous Dads will quickly appreciate why our people are so offended by these racist stereotypes.

Organisations such as the one I lead — the NSW Aboriginal Land Council — invest so much effort into strengthening culture and identity and ensuring Aboriginal people can participate in our communities and economies.

In NSW, the land rights network is in a unique position. Since 1983 local Aboriginal land councils in NSW have been able to claim certain lands as freehold title and use that land for the cultural, social and economic benefit of our people.

Democratically elected local Aboriginal land council boards make informed decisions about land use. In some instances, land is kept for healing and to protect culture. Land is also leveraged for economic development. Like any owner of freehold title, local Aboriginal land councils can buy, sell or lease land for the benefit of Aboriginal people.

Local Aboriginal land councils are engaged in property development on the NSW central coast, international tourism ventures in the Hunter and social enterprises on the mid-north coast.

During the past 33 years, the land rights network has worked hard to shift public perceptions of Aboriginal people. We've sought to convert the gains from land rights to self-determination and economic independence.

Despite this success, disadvantage continues. The Close the Gap campaign confirms that compared with the general population, Aboriginal people die 10 years younger, lose people from suicide at twice the national rate and, despite comprising 3 per cent of Australia's population, our people make up 27 per cent of the prison population. Of course there is the crisis in the juvenile justice sector, including in the Northern Territory where Australians were confronted with the horror of the mistreatment of children at the Don Dale juvenile detention centre.

The Prime Minister was so appalled he announced a royal commission and in the weeks after those shocking images were broadcast, the debate has broadened from the actions of staff at Don Dale to questions of why some 95 per cent of young people incarcerated in the Territory's juvenile detention facilities are Aboriginal, and assumptions that the actions of Aboriginal parents should headline the terms of reference.

In publishing Leak's cartoon, *The Australian* argued it was justified as an open question about the role of parental responsibility in Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal people and organisations have no objection to issues of parental responsibility being debated. It is undoubtedly a factor alongside the ongoing impact of European invasion, racism and discrimination, child removal policies and entrenched intergenerational disadvantage.

However, a cartoon that reprises outdated race-based stereotypes is no substitute to the high level complex policy discussion this issue demands. For decades, *The Australian* has played a constructive role in the coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues including the Mabo and Wik High Court cases, national native title legislation and deaths in custody.

Recently, *The Australian* has been relentless in helping secure justice for the families of Mulrunji Doomadgee in north Queensland and the victims of the Bowraville murders in NSW. It is the efforts of *The Australian's* team of reporters that add value to important national debates affecting Aboriginal people in Australia.

For too long, Aboriginal people have felt marginalised by Australia's mainstream media, but slowly coverage is shifting away from stereotypes about Aboriginal people living in remote communities to the modern realities and challenges of our people, most of whom live in urban populations.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council complained about the cartoon because it fell well short of the standards set by *The Australian* in its coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues for many years. It also presented a misleading and hurtful picture of who we are.

As the spontaneous expression of Aboriginal identity and pride of #IndigenousDads demonstrated, Aboriginal fathers are teachers, lawyers, academics, employers, actors, animators, athletes.

Above all they are dedicated and devoted role models for future generations and give them hope that they can rise above discrimination and racism, be proud of their identity and culture, and be encouraged to reach their potential.

Roy Ah-See, a Wiradjuri man, is chairman of the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, the largest member based Aboriginal organisation in Australia.

BEING HURTFUL IS NO HELP TO KIDS

The Australian. 5 September 2016. Page 10.

GERRY MOORE

Debate around cartoon detracts from the real issues faced by indigenous children

A few weeks ago this newspaper published a cartoon that hurt a lot of people and challenged our collective social conscience.

This cartoon was never going to foster a constructive debate about intergenerational trauma, or issues of alcoholism and family breakdown that are born from it, or the lack of support for frontline services that work to address these issues.

Personally, as an Aboriginal father, the cartoon offended me. It saddened me to see such tired old stereotypes trotted out in a national publication. It upset me that the cartoon, and all of the debate that has followed, has distracted us from the real issues our children face and the strengths of our communities to respond.

But it has allowed us to have one important discussion, and that is how we approach racism and the portrayal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our national media.

Let's reflect on the fact that the day this cartoon was published, August 4, is National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day. It was a day to celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids, parents and families. One of the key reasons Children's Day is needed is that things like domestic and family violence, substance abuse and poverty do exist, and our kids aren't immune to the trauma that comes with them.

These issues are connected to intergenerational trauma. They aren't Aboriginal issues. They're issues that are born of colonisation, of oppressing people, marginalising people and disempowering people.

It shouldn't be hard to imagine that if you had your child taken away from you, this might leave a grief that lasts for the rest of your life.

Generations of our children grow up with this grief in their lives. They see it in others — in their families and communities. And while they might not quite be able to place where it comes from, they nevertheless understand it.

That grief is inherited, like anything else, and the impact — that intergenerational trauma — contributes to these issues just as any life-defining trauma would.

The question we should be asking ourselves is why are we, as a nation, ready to absolve ourselves of our complicity in this disadvantage and to perpetuate this denial of history. Instead we get lost in misguided arguments of equality and continue to ignore the fact that not all of us are afforded the same advantages in life.

To illustrate this, Tom Calma, the former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner, often used the analogy of two people stuck down two separate wells, one 5m deep and the other 10m deep. Throwing them both 5m of rope may correspond to formal equality, he said, but it does not achieve fairness. We need to recognise that each person requires a different amount of rope to put them both on a level playing field.

There's some irony in the way this all started via a cartoon with some very ignorant claims about responsibility.

Responsibility isn't something we've seen from the illustrator or those who ultimately made the call to publish the cartoon. Instead we've seen a defence of the decision to publish the cartoon and we've seen a denial that anything untoward was done.

Instead of mockery in a cartoon, real responsibility comes from constructively addressing these issues through community-developed and controlled programs that are showing genuine results.

The organisation that I represent, SNAICC — National Voice for our Children, is the national non-governmental peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, in particular to ensure their safety, development and wellbeing.

We have 100 community controlled member organisations, located right across Australia, that are working to address local problems with local solutions.

Talk to them about responsibility.

Look to the research of Fiona Stanley on overcoming intergenerational trauma and you'll see solutions lie in community control, in privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and recognising that we are in the best position to meet the needs of our communities.

The notion that the cartoon was needed to create conversation is offensive. SNAICC has been having that conversation — a nuanced conversation with communities, families, and agencies; not one that should be reduced to crass oversimplification — for decades. Take a look at our Family Matters campaign, which aims to eliminate the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care within a generation.

It is led by more than 120 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous organisations — with more joining the campaign every day

— all of which understand that the strengths to address these challenges already exist within our communities.

The only way we're going to make real progress in addressing disadvantage is to allow and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations to bring those strengths to the fore.

It is this work that makes real advancements in our society and for our people. Not the publication of a disrespectful, hurtful cartoon that completely misrepresents what we represent, what we do and what we're trying to achieve for our children.

Gerry Moore is Chief Executive of the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.