SBS CQ is a debate series on issues relating to the Australian media. The third SBS CQ debate poses the questions:

**Who Should Tell Indigenous Stories?**

**What is the right way for the media to cover Indigenous stories?**

Hosted by Stan Grant, the SBS CQ features debate between prominent Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians about the current state of Indigenous reporting and the impacts on community perceptions & Government policy.
The program itself will be uploaded to the ‘Forum 3’ page on the CQ Website.

As with the other 2 Forums, this page will include a section for user comments.

There will also be a link provided to a ‘Resources’ tab on the top blue banner. This tab will have to be added and will house the tertiary resources.
Tertiary Resource

Following the SBS Indigenous CQ program, SBS and NITV are inviting University academics, lecturers, tutors and student to access the online resource, aimed for undergraduate journalism students.

The resource contains information arising out of the CQ Indigenous program and will include case studies; a list of significant media events relating to Indigenous affairs and access to relevant academic articles.
What is the current state of reporting on Indigenous Affairs in Australia?

Is there enough reporting on Indigenous affairs?

“I think that the mainstream media has an obligation to report Aboriginal Affairs a lot more than we do.”

Patricia Karvelas

“There’s no doubt that indigenous people are a great mystery to the rest of Australia…”

Charlie King

✓ Agree

✗ Disagree
“I have great concerns about the future if we continue to run stories on indigenous people and indigenous communities that are negative.”

Charlie King

“…it’s as if good media is media that only tells the good stories and bad media is the one that only tells the bad stories. **Bad media is stories that don’t tell you the journalistic truth**, that’s what a bad story is.”

Liz Jackson

“Back in the old days I think there might have been a tendency to be a bit of a **cheer squad for our communities** but I think that is less and less so…”

Kristie Parker

Is there a fair balance of positive/negative?

Is a story which exposes a problem or tragedy necessarily a ‘negative’ story?
Diversity of Aboriginal voices heard?

Do you think that you hear from a range of different Aboriginal voices in the media?

“You need to talk to ordinary people in communities to get the real story”

Charlie King

“I think you need to really make an effort to get behind the people whose voices tend to be loudest and that often is, in remote communities, the men in positions of power. And I know that in my reporting on the ground in the Northern Territory, I’ve made a real effort to speak to ordinary people in communities and not necessarily the power brokers, you know, taking up all the time and all the space. And the women who, who, it’s true, often don’t get a voice in these, in these situations.”

Natasha Robinson

Do you think that some Aboriginal voices are ‘louder’ than others? Why or why not?
Does reporting reinforce negative stereotypes?

“When they did report on it, it was done very intensely over a short period of time and a large number of news items on a particular issue, and the way that issue was reported was in a sensationalist and conflict sort of frame.”

Kerry McCallum

“We are trapping Aboriginal men and women in a picture as if they are the only people who ever do these terrible things to children”

Jeff McMullen

“I’m very bored with the argument coming from white men that I’m demonising Aboriginal men”

Marcia Langton

Read the research here
On 26 January 2012 Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott were attending an event at the Lobby Restaurant when the site was surrounded by protesters who had arrived from the nearby Tent Embassy. The protesters were angry at comments Abbott had supposedly made in an ABC interview that morning. Gillard and Abbott were hastily escorted from the restaurant under the protection of police officers.

**Focus question:**
Follow the Tent Embassy story from the original quote by Tony Abbott to the final analysis of the media coverage from Media Watch and Crikey. Where along the way do you think mistakes were made? How do you think the media might have handled it better?

The original ABC Interview
‘Abbott’s Embassy comments’, 27 January 2012

The original AAP Report
‘Time for tent embassy to fold: Abbott’, 26 January 2012

How Channel 9 News covered the event
26 January 2012

How NITV News covered the event
26 January 2012

Media Watch analysis of coverage
‘An Australia Day Beat Up’, 6 February 2012

AAP Response to Media Watch
1 February 2012

Crikey commentary on the coverage
‘The tent embassy; fact v fiction, black v white’, 15 February 2012

**Beat-up? or Headline news?**

“It was not a violent protest, and in fact, a truthful reporter would’ve smelt the rat from the beginning”
Patricia Karvelas

“Really, I don’t know anyone who wouldn’t put that anywhere not at the top of the news”
Jeff McMullen

What do you think about this statement? An honest admission? Is it an adequate explanation in this case?

“…journalists being under constant pressure… with social media driving this information flow… There’s a constant race, there’s a constant under checking of facts and as a consequence the level of inaccuracy is very disconcerting.”
Jim Carroll
What impact is this reporting having on Indigenous communities?

**Q** How should a community manage an ongoing relationship with the media?

“Well it certainly has *alienated* Aboriginal people, there’s no doubt about that, in the Northern Territory. I mean they are *suspicious* of the media because they well know that on their communities there’s more than just bad stories.”

Charlie King

“You can’t *say we’re not talking to the media because they demonise us and then complain about not being covered* by the media.”

Marcia Langton

**Q** What consequences should journalists take into account before publishing a story?
What impact is this reporting having on Government policy?

Q What’s the role of the media?
Criticising current government policies
AND/OR
Advocating for new government policies

“...what criticisms you may have about the intervention and whether or not it was appropriate... those are all different questions from the question of whether or not it should have been reported and that’s the role of the media. And the role of the media is to make that report.”
Liz Jackson

“It is worth pausing at this point to affirm that there is nothing wrong with newspapers having an opinion and advocating a position, even mounting a campaign. Those are the natural and generally expected functions of newspapers. Notable examples include The Australian on problems in remote Indigenous communities...”
Kerry McCallum
Case Study 2

Mutitjulu and The Intervention

On 21 June 2007 the Australian Government initiated its Northern Territory Emergency Response. This was initiated in response to the Little Children Are Sacred report that came about after media reports on supposed child sexual abuse occurring in some Indigenous communities. The media was instrumental in framing the imaging around both the child abuse claims and the intervention that followed. It highlights significant issues surrounding the media’s ability to trigger Indigenous policy.

Focus question:
How would you compare the reporting which, arguably, led to the Intervention and the reporting on the Intervention itself?

The story that sparked the public attention
‘Interview with Nanette Rogers’, 15 May 2006, Lateline, ABC Television
‘Sexual abuse reported in Indigenous community’, 21 May 2006, Lateline, ABC Television

The response of Indigenous members of the community
‘Mutitjulu women hit back at pedophilia claims’, 16 September 2006, Sydney Morning Herald
‘ABC clears ABC over Mutitjulu reports. Quelle surprise’, Chris Grahams, Editor of the National Indigenous Times, 10 June 2006, Crikey

The Territory Government Report that was commissioned
‘Little Children Are Sacred Report
‘The Report of a Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 15 June 2007

The Federal Government Response:

The Northern Territory Intervention ‘Intervention Overview’, SBS Living Black, 18 September 2011
‘The NT Intervention explained’ SBS World News, 20 June 2012

“We shouldn’t be criticizing the journalism that exposed child abuse”
Liz Jackson

“The policy was political and the media was complicit”
Jeff McMullen

“The intervention was a template for media-driven government policy”
Kerry McCallum

“The idea that, you know, we didn’t then scrutinise the intervention I think is fallacy…”
Patricia Karvelas
Who should tell Indigenous stories?

Indigenous journalists represent just 1.8% of Australian journalists, according to research.

Does it make a difference who is telling the story?

“It is important, it is imperative that we have indigenous people telling indigenous stories…”

Julian Wilcox

“…if the question is who should be reporting about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the answer is absolutely everyone.”

Kirstie Parker
Most Australian journalists across mainstream media are thinly educated and have little experience of Aboriginal life

Jeff McMullen

…indigenous reporters get access to communities that no other people can and they can tell the stories that haven’t been told, the voices that haven’t been heard for a number of years.”

Julian Wilcox

What cultural protocols should non Indigenous journalists be aware of?

Should indigenous affairs reporters get special training?

Does newsworthiness override cultural sensitivity?
What should happen in the future?

How do we make sure media are accountable to the Indigenous communities they report on?

“I think a lot of white media aren’t accountable, where they’re not held accountable, whereas Aboriginal journalists are held accountable to their own communities…”

Amy McQuire

How do we encourage Indigenous participation in media?

“Communities need to encourage their people to be part of the media”

Charlie King
Reporting the media

The 2011 Finkelstein Report into the Media and Media Regulation looked at how the media dealt with people who were vulnerable – identifying people with certain identity, such as Indigenous Australians, as those who are most often misrepresented or stereotyped in media coverage.

Complaints to the Australian Press Council by Indigenous groups:

- 2010-11: 5
- 2009-10: 2
- 2008-09: 1

“Making a complaint to the Press Council requires knowledge that the complaints mechanism exists and a relatively high level of literacy about the steps involved in that process.”

Finkelstein Report
Case Study 3

The Bolt Articles

Nine high-profile Aboriginal people in 2010 took Herald Sun columnist Andrew Bolt to court claiming racial vilification over articles he wrote describing fair-skinned Aborigines as ‘rorting the system’. In October 2011 the court ruled that both Bolt and his employer had breached the Racial Discrimination Act 1975. The ruling sparked much debate over the limits of free speech.

Focus question:
Look at the Federal Court ordered warning that now accompanies the online version of the Bolt articles. What do you think about this response to the complaints the articles received?

Andrew Bolt articles

‘White is the new black’, 15 April 2009, The Herald Sun

‘White fellas in the black’, 21 August 2009, The Herald Sun

The case

Case against Bolt to test racial identity free-speech limits, 30 September 2010, The Age

Angry Bolt rejects ‘eugenics’ claim, 30 March 2011, ABC/AAP

‘Bolt loses high-profile race case’ 28 September 2011, The Age

Federal Court Decision

Eatock v Bolt [2011] FCA 1103 (28 September 2011)

Reaction

‘In black and white, Andrew Bolt trifled with the facts’, David Marr, 29 September 2011, The Sydney Morning Herald

‘The extraordinary assault on Andrew Bolt’ Bernard Keane, 29 March 2011, Crikey

‘Bolt decision: ‘Irresponsible journalism illegal’? Think again’ Margaret Simons, 29 September 2011, Crikey

The Issue

‘Aboriginal or Not’, 7 August 2012, Insight
Timeline of major media events

Significant Media Events
The following is a non-exhausting list of significant or controversial media events relating to Indigenous Affairs in Australia.

15 February 2004 – Redfern Riot

The Redfern Riot
On 15 February 2004 there was a violent confrontation between police and civilians in the Sydney suburb of Redfern. The violence followed the death of Indigenous teenager Thomas Hickey, who became impaled on a metal fence after coming off his pushbike. Witnesses came forward claiming that police had been chasing him when the accident happened. The mainstream media largely sensationalised the violence.

19 November 2004 – Palm Island Riot

The Palm Island ‘Riot’
On 19 November 2004 an Indigenous Palm Island resident, Mulrunji Doomadgee was arrested by police for being drunk and disorderly and died in custody. This led to civic disturbances on the island and an investigation into the death. The media’s portrayal of the protests and the case were typically sensationalist.

2007 – Aurukun Rape Case

Aurukun Rape Case
In 2007, nine Aurukun men received probation and other light sentences after pleading and being found guilty of raping a ten year old girl. The mild sentences received extensive media coverage and were the catalyst for a review of sexual abuse sentencing in Queensland Indigenous communities.

2007 – Gang of 49

The Gang of 49
Since 2007 the Adelaide media have run more than 150 articles on a supposed Aboriginal gang terrorising the city. However, there is no evidence to suggest there was ever a real organised gang. This kind of unsubstantiated media coverage encourages stereotypes that have negative effects on the perception of Indigenous people.
Timeline of major media events

21 June 2007 – The NT Intervention

**The Intervention**
On 21 June 2007 the Australian Government initiated its Northern Territory Emergency Response. This was initiated in response to the Little Children Are Sacred report that came about after media reports on supposed child sexual abuse occurring in some Indigenous communities. The media was instrumental in framing the imaging around both the child abuse claims and the intervention that followed. It highlights significant issues surrounding the media’s ability to trigger Indigenous policy.

13 February 2008 – The Apology

**The Apology**
On 13 February 2008, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd moved a motion of Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples for past laws, policies and practices that devastated Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – in particular members of the stolen generations. The event was met with extensive media coverage, both positive and negative.

October 2010 – Court finds that Bolt articles breached the Racial Discrimination Act 1975

**Bolt Articles**
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26 January 2012 – Tent Embassy Protest

**Tent Embassy Protest**
On 26 January 2012 Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Opposition Leader Tony Abbott were attending an event at the Lobby Restaurant when the site was surrounded by protesters who had arrived from the nearby Tent Embassy. The protesters were angry at comments Abbott had supposedly made in an ABC interview that morning. Gillard and Abbott were hastily escorted from the restaurant under the protection of police officers.
Media Codes of Conduct

ABC Code of Conduct

SBS Code of Conduct

Commercial Radio Codes of Practice & Guidelines

Commercial Television Code of Conduct

MEAA Code of Ethics

Fairfax

News Ltd

Australian Press Council Decisions
http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/apc/
Web links and relevant academic articles for ‘online timeline of events’:

**Redfern Riot**

**Links:**
  http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2004/s1140171.htm
- ‘Report by the NSW State Coroner into deaths in custody/police operations’ NSW Coroner, 2004, pages 71-90

**Academic articles:**

**Palm Island Riot**

**Links:**
- ‘The Tall Man’, Tony Krawitz, *SBS*
- ‘Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody’, *National Archives of Australia*, 10 August 1987

**Academic articles:**


Web links and relevant academic articles for ‘online timeline of events’:

Aurukun Rape Case

Links:
'Rape case ruling shocks Australia', BBC News, 10 December 2007
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/7136269.stm

'Tortured history of violence', Russell Skelton, The Age, 22 December 2007

'Stop the abuse of children', Marcia Langton, The Australian, 12 December 2007


Academic articles:

Gang of 49

Links:
ABC Television, 7 April 2010
http://www.abc.net.au/tv/hungrybeast/stories/gang-49-gang-never-was/

'Editorial: Tackling the gangs of Adelaide', The Advertiser, 8 April 2010

Northern Territory Intervention

Links:
Case Study 2
Web links and relevant academic articles for ‘online timeline of events’:

The Apology

Links:
‘Sorry, Kevin Rudd’s Apology to “The stolen Generation”,’ Channel Ten, uploaded 12 February 2008
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b3TZOQpG6cM.

‘Saying ‘sorry’ not enough: Brough’, ABC, 3 July 2009,


The Bolt Articles

Links:
Case Study 3

The Tent Embassy Protest

Links:
Case Study 1