

For protesters not all black lives matter

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<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/all-black-lives-matter-including-the-aboriginal-victims-of-abuse-and-murder/news-story/c86733e03128b31b797f57682c14e5c2>



*Black Lives Matter protesters moved their protest to Hyde Park on Friday night at the last minute to avoid police, however they were moved-on by police and eventually dispersed.
Picture: David Swift*

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Not all black lives matter equally to Australian protesters. A life lost in custody, even to natural causes, is apparently a more worthy cause than the thousands of lives lost to black-on-black violence in Aboriginal communities.

It's an issue blighted by a culture of forgetting. Those of us who were senior editors when the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody report was handed down in 1991 have always known its flaw: the commission found death rates of indigenous people in custody were no higher than for white people.

[Paul Kelly wrote here last Wednesday](#) that the 2017-18 report of the Institute of Criminology showed that year “the death rate of indigenous prisoners was 0.14 per 100 prisoners, compared with 0.18 per 100 for non-indigenous prisoners.” Add to that the fact very few of these deaths are at the hands of police or prison guards — most are by natural causes or suicide. Kelly said the different ways the ABC and Sky News treated the Black Lives Matter marches in Australia on the weekend of June 6 highlighted a “totally split culture” in media terms. “The ABC narrative was of the injustice of Aboriginal deaths in custody”, while the Sky News “narrative was the irresponsibility of mass protests ... given the health and political advice” in the middle of a pandemic. Especially so given that COVID-19 has not hit the indigenous community.

That dual media narrative highlights another problem, an issue that has plagued indigenous affairs for four decades — the left's preference for talking about race symbolism rather than

dealing with actual murder rates, domestic violence, property crime, addiction and a lack of economic opportunity.



The Aboriginal flag is seen during a Stop Black Deaths in Custody: Solidarity with Long Bay Prisoners vigil at Sydney Town Hall in Sydney on Friday.

Long-term readers of this paper will know it has been reporting the real situation on the ground in Aboriginal Australia for decades. Reporters such as [Rosemary Neill](#), Paul Toohey, Tony Koch and Nicolas Rothwell have won Walkley Awards for gritty reporting on the rape of women and children by indigenous men, petrol sniffing, the killing on Palm Island of Cameron Doomadgee, foetal alcohol babies and murder rates many times higher than in the wider society.

Three Aboriginal thinkers were prepared to tell the truth last week. The always thoughtful Anthony Dillon, of the Australian Catholic University, in a letter here on Thursday wrote: “The best way of reducing Aboriginal deaths in custody is to focus on reducing the rates of Aboriginal deaths, full stop.”

Alice Springs councillor Jacinta Price, always brutally honest, wrote that 70 per cent of indigenous people in jail were there for crimes of violence against their loved ones.

Warren Mundine, in *The Australian Financial Review* last Tuesday, said governments could not fix Aboriginal disadvantage linked to over-imprisonment rates. Economic opportunity created by business investment was the only way forward.

Here is the real problem for the media. Many leftist journalists will not report the issue as it is. They will not look at the reality of the black lives they say matter. With a couple of notable exceptions – Russell Skelton at *The Age* a decade ago and Suzanne Smith at the ABC ahead of the NT Intervention in 2007 – the national broadcaster and the Fairfax papers (now owned by Nine) have not wanted to look at the issue beyond allegations of systemic racism.

In my 2016 book *Making Headlines*, I discuss the episode that first brought home to me how wilfully blind many journalists are to the facts of indigenous disadvantage. I was a young editor, and Paul Kelly was editor-in-chief.

I was at the Melbourne Walkley Awards in 1994 when this paper’s Rosemary Neill won best feature for a piece about black women and children victimised by black husbands and fathers.

After the presentation, a group of Fairfax editors rounded on our table to criticise the decision to publish Rosemary's piece. They thought the issue should be off limits and the piece "profoundly racist".

Three decades later, not much has improved in the indigenous world, and the media is worse. Young reporters educated in the ways of identity politics are left to campaign on issues they have not yet reported honestly or begun to understand. Once, senior editors would have tested their work, but not many such positions remain as the business model for journalism continues to disintegrate.

None of this is to deny racism exists. *The Colt With No Regrets*, a new book by an old regional Australian newspaper editor, Elliot Hannay, includes fascinating discussions of his relationship with Eddie Mabo and being lobbied at the *Townsville Bulletin* by the local Ku Klux Klan. Young journalists should read it.

I worked for Elliot in the late 1970s when he ran a series of stories about local soldiers who had started throwing Molotov cocktails on to Ross River under the CBD bridge where Palm Islanders often slept on weekend visits to Townsville. Elliot faced down a backlash from local business leaders wanting the rough sleepers out of town.

Such racism should be exposed. But so should facts about black-on-black violence. Jacinta Price wrote in *The Daily Telegraph* on June 9: "In 2018 in the NT alone, 85 per cent (4355) of Aboriginal victims of crime knew the offender. Half were victimised by partners. Aboriginal women made up 88 per cent (2075) of those victims."

Aboriginal children were 5.9 per cent of the population but five times more likely to be hospitalised after an assault than non-indigenous children. "Between 2007 and 2011, 26 per cent of all deaths among Aboriginal children ... were ... (from) abuse injury," she wrote. "The leading cause of child death between 2014 and 2017 ... was suicide. This is a quarter of all child suicides in Australia (85 of 357).

"Realising that there are fundamental connections between child neglect, child sexual abuse, Aboriginal victims of crime and the high rates of incarceration will allow us to address these critical issues effectively."



A protester in Sydney's Hyde Park.

But most left-wing media don't want to know.

The Australian Institute of Criminology, in a paper by Jenny Mouzos, says that from 1989 until 2000, 15.1 per cent of all homicide victims nationally were Aboriginal, as were 15.7 per cent of all homicide offenders – and yet Aboriginal people were less than 3 per cent of the population.

Campaigners against law enforcement agencies who say “defund police”, even neo-Marxist ANTIFA protesters, should look at a *Chicago Sun Times* report published on June 8: “18 murders in 24 hours: inside the most violent day in Chicago in 60 years.”

From 7pm on Friday, May 29, to Sunday, May 31, 25 people were killed in the city and another 85 wounded by gunfire, all in the name of protesting against the police killing of George Floyd. The victims and perpetrators were almost all African-American.

Australian indigenous communities need to be able to trust police will protect them. Of course Aboriginal actor Nakkiah Lui was right on Q+A when she said “Just don't kill us”. But she and the wider ABC, especially hosts such as Q+A's Hamish McDonald, need to report why Aboriginal Australians need police more than any other group – to protect them from black offenders.

Last word to Mundine in *The Daily Telegraph* last Friday: “We won't see change unless indigenous kids go to school, indigenous people are working in real jobs and there are real economies in indigenous communities.”

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