

# What we're missing while we argue over individual acts of blatant racism



- [Celeste Liddle](#)

Will we ever be able to go even one week without some incident of racism aimed at Aboriginal people hitting the papers? This is the question I am currently asking myself. Barely a day has gone by lately where I haven't had someone asking for my views on something racist someone else has said or done. The emotional labour of continually having these conversations is taxing, yet I have no hopes of it letting up soon.

On Sunday morning, I woke to the news that an AFL [fan threw a banana](#) at Aboriginal player Eddie Betts while referring to him as a monkey during an Adelaide versus Port Adelaide game on Saturday. It appears that some opposition fans simply cannot abide a high-performing Aboriginal player and must therefore remind him of his place in society.



*Eddie Betts was called a "monkey" and had a banana thrown at him, but people question whether it was racially motivated.*

While it is heartening that the club has acted swiftly to punish the woman responsible by revoking her club membership, I'm left wondering if anything was learnt from [Adam Goodes' experience](#) of similar crowd behaviour. Port Adelaide, after all, have stated that they will place a life ban on her IF her actions are found to be racially-motivated, as if this fact is somehow murky.

Mere days earlier, performance artist [Marina Abramovic](#) was in the firing line after diary entries from 1979 were released detailing her then-impression of Aboriginal people she had encountered. These diary entries are being compiled to form her memoirs. Her observations were undoubtedly crude, referring to Aboriginal people as looking like "dinosaurs" while also passing comment about our stick-like legs and round torsos.



*Marina Abramovic came under fire last week after publishing offensive descriptions of Aboriginal Australians from her 1979 diary. Photo: Christopher Pearce*

On being confronted for these racist comments via social media, [Abramovic sought to clarify](#) and place these diary entries in a time of ignorance prior to any real exchange occurring. She additionally stated that she holds Aboriginal people "in her heart" for what she learnt during her immersion in desert culture and communities.

Abramovic's statement was [clearly lacking](#). She showed little understanding that her 1979 views carry the same disrespect Aboriginal people still encounter every day. Whether we're like dinosaurs or like monkeys, we're clearly being told we're not good enough in white eyes to be seen as humans of worth. We're not evolved enough, apparently.

Immediately prior to this though, [Bill Leak's cartoon](#) depicting an Aboriginal father who's a drunk and cannot even remember his son's name hit the press. It was extraordinary the lengths people went to justify what was blatant racism. Editor-in-Chief of The Australian [Paul Whittaker](#) tried to argue that his paper's choice to publish it was about fostering discussion. He then highlighted some views of conservative Indigenous commentators Marcia Langton and Noel Pearson as validation without first checking with them to see [whether they were okay](#) with their views being used to justify Leak's cartoon.

Of course, after being called out via other media sources including social media, Leak became the *real* victim (according to him). He even [drew a cartoon of himself](#) being set upon by, in his words, "white PC cops" all because he told the "truth". My heart bled for him.

The real problem with all this though is while all are examples of blatant racism, they are all used as diversions so society can avoid dealing with systemic racism. Leak's cartoon, while clearly racist, diverted the conversation from the brutality experienced by children in [the Don Dale Juvenile Detention Centre](#).

Rather than asking ourselves if it is ever appropriate that a child be incarcerated, never mind tear gassed, stripped and humiliated, we instead ended up talking about irresponsible Aboriginal parents and whether this white man is, in fact, the true victim.

I find it hard to register that a renowned artist is demonstrating her racist palaeontology skills when an Aboriginal woman dies in custody despite not committing a crime and she [barely rates a mention](#).

When I see a woman racially vilifying an Aboriginal football player, I'm less concerned about whether the club she supports will let her retain her season ticket and more concerned about when we are going to get to a point in this country where such vilification is not a given in an Aboriginal person's lifetime.

It sickens me that people can bend over backwards excusing a white male cartoonist and the editorial team which allowed it to go to print meanwhile images emerge showing further abuse of Aboriginal children in custody; [this time in QLD](#); and it nearly slides past us.

As long as a good portion of this country can continue to pretend that racism is an individual act committed by the ignorant, we are never going to get anywhere. We avoid examining how our policies discriminate, our media neglects, our education system lacks and our politicians pass the buck.

We get to ignore that Aboriginal people still are [not being paid](#) for their work, are still being [incarcerated](#) at exorbitant rates, and are [suiciding at the highest rates](#) in the world. That [Aboriginal women](#) face family and domestic violence at crisis rates yet the services which support them [continually get defunded](#) by the government.

It's easier to call out a racist individual than take a long hard look at the society we've built and analyse how it needs to change. But until we get real and address these systemic forms of racism, the racist individuals are not going to go away.