LANGUAGE ANALYSIS: RACISM in AUSTRALA

**Stan Grant: racism and the Australian dream**

On the IQ2 stage in **2015**, Stan Grant opened the hearts and minds of the audience with his powerful speech on racism in Australia.

The IQ2 debate, **‘Racism** is **Destroying** the **Australian Dream’** was a finalist in the **United Nations Media Peace Awards** for its role in **stimulating public awareness** and **understanding**. Stan’s iconic talk continues to **move** and **inspire millions**.

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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

“Thank you so much for coming along this evening and I would also like to extend my respects to my Gadigal brothers and sisters from my people, the Wiradjuri people.

In the **winter** of **2015**, Australia turned to **face itself**. It looked into its soul and it had to ask this question. **Who are we?** **What** sort o**f country** do we **want to be?** And this happened in a place that is most holy, most sacred to Australians. It happened in the **sporting field**, it happened on the **football field**. Suddenly the front page was on the back page, it was in the grandstands.

Thousands of voices rose to hound an Indigenous man. A man who was told he wasn’t Australian. A man who was told he wasn’t Australian of the Year. And they hounded that man into submission.

I can’t speak for what lay in the hearts of the people who booed **Adam Goodes.** But I can tell you what we heard when we heard those boos. We heard a sound that was very familiar to us.

We heard a howl. We heard a **howl of humiliation** that echoes across two centuries of **dispossession, injustice, suffering** and **survival**. We heard the **howl** of the **Australian dream** and it said to us again, **you’re not welcome.**

**The Australian Dream.**

We **sing of it,** and we **recite it in verse**. ***Australians all, let us rejoice for we are young and free.***

**My people die young in this country**. We **die ten years younger** than average Australians and we are **far from free**. We are fewer than **three percent** of the **Australian population** and yet we are **25 percent**, a quarter of those Australians locked up in our **prisons** and if you are a j**uvenile**, it is **worse**, it is **50 percent**. An Indigenous child is more likely to be locked up in prison than they are to finish high school.

***I love a sunburned country, a land of sweeping plains, of rugged mountain ranges****.*

It reminds me that my people were **killed** on those **plains**. We were **shot** on those **plains, disease ravaged us** on those **plains.**

I come from those plains. I come from a people west of the Blue Mountains, the Wiradjuri people, where in the **1820’s**, the soldiers and settlers waged a **war of extermination** against my people. **Yes, a war of extermination**! That was the language used at the time. Go to the *Sydney Gazette* and look it up and read about it. **Martial law was declared** and my people could be **shot on sight**. Those rugged mountain ranges, my people, women and children were herded over those ranges to their deaths.

**The Australian Dream.**

The Australian Dream is **rooted in racism**. It is the very foundation of the dream. It is there at the birth of the nation. It is there in *terra nullius****.*An empty land. A land for the taking**. Sixty thousand years of occupation. A people who made the first seafaring journey in the history of mankind. A people of law, a people of lore, a people of music and art and dance and politics. None of it mattered because our rights were extinguished because we were not here according to British law.

And when British people looked at us, they saw something **sub-human**, and if we were human at all, we occupied the **lowest rung on civilisation’s ladder.** We were **fly-blown, stone age savages** and that was the language that was used. **Charles Dickens**, the great writer of the age, when referring to the noble savage of which we were counted among, said **“it would be better that they be wiped off the face of the earth.”** **Captain Arthur Phillip, a man of enlightenment,** a man whowas instructed to **make peace** with the so-called **natives** in a matter of years, was sending out **raiding parties** with the **instruction, “Bring back the severed heads of the black troublemakers.”**

**They were smoothing the dying pillow.**

My people were **rounded up** and put on **missions** from where if you escaped, you were **hunted down**, you were **roped** and **tied** and **dragged back**, and it happened here. It happened on the mission that my grandmother and my great grandmother are from, the Warrengesda on the Darling Point of the Murrumbidgee River.

**Read about it. It happened.**

**By 1901** when we became a **nation**, when we **federated** the **colonies,** we were **nowhere**. We’re **not** in the **Constitution**, save for **‘race provisions’** which allowed for laws to be made that would **take our children**, that would invade our **privacy**, that would tell us **who** we could **marry** and tell us **where** we could **live.**

**The Australian Dream**.

By **1963**, the year of my birth, the **dispossession** was **continuing**. Police came at **gunpoint** under cover of darkness to Mapoon, an aboriginal community in Queensland, and they **ordered people from their homes** and they **burned** those **homes** to the ground and they gave the land to a **bauxite mining company**. And today those people remember that as the **‘Night of the Burning’.**

In **1963** when I was born, I was **counted** among the **flora** and **fauna**, **not among the citizens of this country.**

Now, you will hear things tonight. You will hear people say, **“But you’ve done well.”** Yes, I have and I’m proud of it and why have I done well? I’ve done well because of **who** has come **before me.** My father who lost the tips of three fingers working in saw mills to put food on our table because he was denied an **education**. My grandfather who served to fight wars for this country when he was not yet a citizen and came back to a segregated land where he **couldn’t** even **share a drink** with his **digger mates** in the pub because he was **black.**

My great grandfather, who was jailed for speaking his language to his grandson (my father). **Jailed for it!** My grandfather on my mother’s side who married a white woman who reached out to Australia, lived on the fringes of town until the police came, put a gun to his head, bulldozed his tin humpy and ran over the graves of the three children he buried there.

**That’s the Australian Dream**. I have succeeded in spite of the Australian Dream, not because of it, and I’ve succeeded because of those people.

You might hear tonight, **“But you have white blood in you”.** And if the white blood in me was here tonight, my grandmother, she would tell you of how she was turned away from a hospital giving birth to her first child because she was giving birth to the child of a **black person.**

**The Australian Dream.**

**We’re better than this**. I have seen the **worst** of the **world** as a reporter. I spent a decade in **war zones** from Iraq to Afghanistan, and Pakistan. We are an **extraordinary country**. We are in so many respects the **envy** of the **world**. If I was sitting here where my friends are tonight, I would be **arguing passionately** for this **country**. But I stand here with my ancestors, and the view looks very different from where I stand.

**The Australian Dream.**

We have our **heroes.** **Albert Namatjira** painted the soul of this nation. **Vincent Lingiari** put his hand out for Gough Whitlam to pour the sand of his country through his fingers and say, **“This is my country.” Cathy** **Freeman** lit the torch of the Olympic Games. But every time we are lured into the light, we are **mugged by the darkness** of this **country’s history**. Of course **racism is killing the Australian Dream**. It is self-evident that it’s killing the Australian dream. **But** we are **better** than that.

The people who stood up and supported **Adam Goodes** and said, **“No more,”** **they are better than that**. The people who **marched** acrossthe **bridge** [Harbour Bridge] for **reconciliation, they** are **better than that.** The people who **supported Kevin Rudd** when he said **sorry to the Stolen Generations,** they are better than that. **My children** and their **non-Indigenous friends** are **better than that.** **My wife** who is **not Indigenous is better than that.**

And one day, I want to stand here and be able to say as **proudly** and sing as **loudly** as **anyone else** in this room**, Australians *all*, let us rejoice.**

**Thank you.”**

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**COMMENTS**

1. **Samuel**

I have followed Stan Grant’s career over many years and wished him well. I hope he continues bringing the **conditions Indigenous Australians** live under to the **view of mainstream Australia**. I wonder what Stan’s opinion is of communities who have trouble getting their children to **attend school** because they probably think **what is the use** of **attending schoo**l when there are **very few jobs available** in the remote areas of Australia. Can we get the likes of **Stan himself, or Jessica Mauboy, Yvonne Goolagong, Adam Goodes** and other Indigenous success stories to **help young Aborigines** see there is a **future** fo**r them**.

Some issues that need addressing such as **domestic violence** linked with **substance abuse** is a difficult matter only the **people concerned** can stop. It is the same **dreadful situation in white homes**. As a former social worker I know there is no difference in these issues. They **affect both communities.** The only difference is the **publicity surrounding indigenous substance abuse** is more **publicised**. I know of a very prominent white former politician whose wife was often driven to a women’s shelter because of his violence. It was never publicised but most taxi drivers in Melbourne knew about it. it happens in every level of society. **This violence** needs to **stop.**

When **Adam Goodes** was being **racially abused** I posted against this on Facebook. I was told I did not know what I was talking about. That Mr Goodes was an **arrogant person** who **deserved** what was **happening**. I was **surprised** at the **reaction** I got. I should not have been because it is **everywhere.** I have had **family members abused** when **nursing patients.** People demanding to speak to the person in charge when my relation was the person in charge. A friend’s brother trying to help a patient who had had a heart attack. Only to be told the patient refused to allow this man (the head of cardiology) to touch him because he was Indian. It is a constant battle to get these views stopped. A neighbour of Greek origin said he migrated to Australia because they had the **White Australia Policy** and he was **angry** it had been **lifted**. It should be called the **Never ending story**. **Racism** gets **knocked down** in one **area,** only to pop its **ugly head** up **somewhere else. It has to stop.**

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1. **Dr Anthony Ablong**

Grant’s emotive transcript is indeed an indictment on **Australia’s treatment** of its **indigenous people**. Sadly and with regret his words are not reflective of the views held by many **other indigenous communities**. Perhaps it’s time that **‘one voice’ be established** given the recent election of an indigenous member into our Parliament.  
During my military career, I served with a number of indigenous ‘mates’ and cannot ever recall the difference in color or race **ever being problematic.** We all had a job to do for the nation and we did it to the best of our abilities. The issue of racism was **NEVER brought up** or arose as a result of individual conflict, and was **NEVER discussed** or manifested in any context. Perhaps I have been out-of-step with mainstream activities, yet I can truthfully state that I have **NEVER been witness to public exhortations of racism** in this great country.  
Could we be making **too much** of what **appears** to be a **sensitive issue** **with some?**

Most of all, we **cannot** be held **responsible** for events of the past however regrettable. The world we live in **turns daily and we move on.**

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1. **JC**

As an Indigenous person born in **1987,** I have **suffered racism** from people for **most of my life.** It is there, and **it has affected every single Indigenous person I know.** The events of the past are only brought up because of **how it is affecting us now.**

**“An Indigenous child is more likely to be locked up in prison than they are to finish high school.”** This is what concerns me now, and most Indigenous Australians. Yet we are still seeing the same **paternalism** from Australia **since segregation**, where we are unable to come to the table to **work together to find solutions**.  
I wonder what your Indigenous mates would say if you asked them about their **experiences with racism?**

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1. **Marco McCue**

How does the saying go? **‘A country unwilling to acknowledge its history is bound to repeat it’**. I sincerely hope this is not the case. Stan Grants speech is **eloquent, articulate, succinct yet razor sharp**.

I was born **1961**, began school in 1965 and completed my HSC in 1978. **Fourteen years of institutionalisation** within a system that simply **did not acknowledge a pre- colonial Australia nor the Aboriginal people of this land**. Despite having met Aboriginal people in my 20’s whilst working in inner Sydney, it wasn’t until my mid 30’s during the **mid 1990’s,** that I discovered a **hitherto unknown ‘other’ Australia whilst living in the far north of this country,** that **preexisted the invasion** and colonisation by some 60,000 years.

My education is **ongoing**, and I believe it is up to **we privileged white folk** to **liberate ourselves** from our **ignorance** and the **entrenched denial** of the **grotesque, brutal** and **horrific modern history** upon which the **‘lucky country’ delusion** was and is **built.** It’s time for **justice and recognition.**

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**TASK: ESSAY**

Discuss the **main arguments** being presented in the **speech** and ***TWO*** of the **comments** above, including in your discussion how the composers have used **specific language features** to enhance the presentation of their ideas.

Also, to what extent do you **agree** with the opinions being presented on **racism in Australia**?

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Please type your essay in a **WORD document** and email it as an attachment to Carl at [didactic.educator@yahoo.com](mailto:didactic.educator@yahoo.com)

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