

Should Captain Cook be commemorated on public statues as the discoverer of Australia?

What they said...

'Surely we need no longer maintain the fiction that he "discovered" this country'

ABC Indigenous affairs editor, Stan Grant, commenting on the inscription on the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park

'Trying to edit our history is wrong. Now all of those statues, all of those monuments, are part of our history and we should respect them and preserve them'

Australian Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull

The controversy at a glance

On August 18, 2017, The ABC published on its Internet site a comment by Stan Grant, its Indigenous affairs editor and presenter of the ABC's Friday evening current affairs program, The Link.

The article is essentially a transcript of a segment televised on The Link in which Grant compares the United States' attitude to the commemoration of its history with that of Australia.

Grant argues that the recent controversy in the United States over the removal of statues honouring Confederate leaders makes an interesting comparison to Australia, where, Grant claims, we are often silent regarding contentious aspects of our past.

Grant focuses on the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park, Sydney, which bears the inscription, 'Discovered this territory 1770'. Grant condemns the inscription as historically inaccurate and suggests it should be altered.

Grants remarks have promoted a strong media reaction and widespread debate.

Commentators such as Alan Jones have tweeted suggesting that Grant's comments are unacceptable to the Australian public. Jones has stated, 'If Stan Grant keeps going the way he is in relation to AUS history and monuments he'll go the same way as Yassmin Abdel-Magied [a former ABC commentator who has since announced her intention to leave the country].

Other commentators have debated the accuracy and/or appropriateness of the inscription. The Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull has stated that he believes the inscription should remain unaltered, while the Opposition leader, Bill Shorten, has stated it should be accompanied by a further explanatory plaque.

Subsequent vandalising of the statue and others in Sydney commemorating prominent colonial figures has been condemned by both sides in the debate.

Background

Hyde Park and its monuments

Hyde Park is the oldest public parkland in Australia. It is a 16.2-hectare (40-acre) park in the central business district of Sydney, New South Wales. Hyde Park is on the eastern side of the Sydney city centre and is listed on the New South Wales State Heritage Register. It is the southernmost of a chain of parkland that extends north to the shore of Sydney Harbour via The Domain and Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens. Hyde Park is approximately rectangular in shape, being squared at the southern end and rounded at the northern end. It is bordered on the west by Elizabeth Street, on the east by College Street, on the north by St. James Road and Prince Albert Road and on the south by Liverpool Street.

Hyde Park was named after Hyde Park in London. The park is pock marked with drain lids, many of which lead down to Busby's Bore, the first large-scale attempt at a water source system after backing-up the Tank Stream, the Sydney colony's primary water source. Busby's Bore was built between 1827 and 1837 using convict labour and fresh water from Lachlan Swamp (later known as Centennial Park) to the city.

From the very early days of the colony, the open area to the south east of the settlement was a favourite place for sport and recreation. It was known variously as 'The Common', the 'Exercising Ground', the 'Cricket Ground' and the 'Race Course'. On 13 October 1810, Governor Macquarie separated the area from the Domain to the north, named it Hyde Park and dedicated it for the "recreation and amusement of the inhabitants of the town and a field of exercises for the troops". He kept the Domain for his own exclusive use.

Monuments

The centrepiece of Hyde Park is the Archibald Fountain. The fountain was designed by François-Léon Sicard and donated by J.F. Archibald in 1932 in honour of Australia's contribution to World War I in France. Also at the northern end are the Nagoya Gardens featuring a giant outdoor chess set and the entrance to the underground St James railway station.

At the park's southern end is the ANZAC War Memorial behind the 'Pool of Reflection' and the entrances to the Museum railway station. A monument consisting of a 105-millimetre gun from the German light cruiser SMS Emden stands at the south-eastern, Oxford Street entry of the park. It was built as a memorial to the Australian Imperial Force of World War I. Fund raising for a memorial began on 25 April 1916, the first anniversary of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) landing at Anzac Cove for the Battle of Gallipoli.[8] It was opened on 24 November 1934 by His Royal Highness Prince Henry, Duke of Gloucester. Close to the ANZAC Memorial in the southern end of the park is Yinimadyemi - Thou didst let fall, a public artwork that acknowledges the service of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women in the Australian Defence Force. The artwork by Indigenous Australian artist Tony Albert was unveiled on 31 March 2015 and was commissioned by the City of Sydney as part of its Eora Journey public art initiative.

In the north-eastern sector, of the southern half of the park, there is a monument to Captain James Cook, erected to commemorate Cook's discovery of the east coast of Australia in 1770. The sculptor was Thomas Woolner (17 December 1825 – 7 October 1892) and the statue was cast by Cox & Sons, at its Thames Ditton Foundry, Surrey, England.

Internet information

On October 19, 2017, Public History Weekly published an analysis by Robert Parkes titled 'Are Monuments History?'

The article is an attempt to explain the historical significance of public monuments and draws on the recent discussion in Australia around Captain Cook's statue in Hyde Park, Sydney as well as the riots in Charlottesville when statues of Confederate leaders were to be removed. The full text can be found at <https://public-history-weekly.degruyter.com/5-2017-34/are-monuments-history/>

On September 9, 2017, The Alice Springs News Online published a letter titled 'Is the Stuart statue next?' asking whether the debate around the statue of Captain Park in Hyde Park Sydney was likely to lead to a more general attack on prominent explorers and others from Australia's colonial past.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/2017/09/09/is-the-stuart-statue-next/>

On September 8, 2017, CNN ran a news report titled 'Statue becomes lightning rod for Australian nationalists'

The report focuses on the contention that has arisen since Stan Grant's comments on the inscription beneath the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park.

The full text can be accessed at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/07/asia/australia-statue-debate/index.html>

On September 8, 2017, Medium published an editorial titled 'Alt-left blogger Stan Grant wants Aussie statues torn down' claiming that Stan Grant wanted colonial statues removed and that he was attempting to foment racial disharmony.

The full text can be accessed at <https://medium.com/@FollyOfReason/alt-left-blogger-stan-grant-wants-aussie-statues-torn-down-84ebeb2ae258>

On September 6, 2017, The Townsville Bulletin published an editorial titled 'Tearing down monuments will not right the wrongs of the past'

The comment regrets the manner in which the recent debate about the significance of historical statues has degenerated into personal abuse.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.townsvillebulletin.com.au/news/opinion/tearing-down-monuments-will-not-right-the-wrongs-of-the-past/news-story/de05cbf3c326854f83fab996db92d78e>

On September 4, 2017, Inside Story published a comment by Frank Bongiorno, Professor of History at the Australian National University. The comment is titled 'The Statue Wars' and explains the symbolic significance of public statues commemorating aspects of history. The professor calls for a capacity to recognise and value differing perspectives.

The full text can be accessed at <http://insidestory.org.au/the-statue-wars/>

On September 2, 2017, The Brisbane Times published a report titled "'Patriotic" protesters cause a stir in Sydney's Hyde Park'

The report details the actions of a group of protesters opposing the vandalism of some of Sydney's colonial statues.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/nsw/patriotic-protesters-cause-a-stir-in-sydneys-hyde-park-20170902-gy9iwo.html>

On September 1, 2017, the Centre for Independent Studies published a comment by Jeremy Sammut which disputes Stan Grant's claims that Australia's mistreatment of Indigenous peoples has been largely ignored by history.

The full text can be accessed at <https://www.cis.org.au/commentary/articles/the-roaring-silence/>

On August 27, 2017, Central Western Daily published a letter from Brian Keighran titled 'Statues and memorials must remain in place'

The letter offers a justification for referring to Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia.

The full text can be accessed at <http://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/4882061/letter-to-the-editor-statues-and-memorials-must-remain-in-place/>

On August 26, 2017, The Gold Coast Bulletin published an opinion piece by Graham Hryce titled 'ABC Aboriginal TV presenter Stan Grant cooks up a recipe for turmoil'. The comment criticises Grant for unnecessarily promoting a divisive issue. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.goldcoastbulletin.com.au/news/opinion/abc-aboriginal-tv-presenter-stan-grant-cooks-up-a-recipe-for-turmoil/news-story/a5ab78cf5e639887785f1819fe239b48>

On August 25, 2017, The Conversation published an opinion piece by Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, Senior Lecturer in Tourism at the University of South Australia, titled 'The politics of public monuments: it's time Australians looked at what, and whom, we commemorate'. The comment is essentially a defence of the issue raised by Stan Grant and of the position he adopts. The full text can be accessed at <https://theconversation.com/the-politics-of-public-monuments-its-time-australians-looked-at-what-and-whom-we-commemorate-82751>

On August 24, 2017, The Daily Telegraph published an analysis and opinion piece by Bruce McDougall titled 'Captain Cook statue row: Agreeing on history's not simple' which suggests disputes about the nature of Australia's history are difficult to resolve. The piece quotes a range of opinion. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/captain-cook-statue-row-agreeing-on-historys-not-simple/news-story/9ade38f3892405f50799f6a080386a34>

On August 24, 2017, The Illawarra Mercury published a report titled 'Clover Moore refers concerns about Macquarie statue to Indigenous panel'. The report details the actions taken by Sydney lord mayor Clover Moore in relation to statues and street names celebrating former New South Wales Governor Macquarie who has been accused of order the killing of Indigenous people. The full text can be accessed at <http://www.illawarramercury.com.au/story/4876252/should-we-celebrate-a-perfect-gentleman-who-ordered-massacres/>

On August 23, 2017, the ABC Internet site published comment by Stan Grant titled 'It is a "damaging myth" that Captain Cook discovered Australia'. This is an extension of Grant's earlier piece comparing the attitudes of Australia and the United States toward historical instances of racism. The piece is also in part a response to criticisms of the earlier article. The full text can be found at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

On August 23, 2017, The Guardian published a report titled 'Captain Cook statue: Sydney refers "discovery" claim to Indigenous board' which details the decision by the Sydney City Council to refer the matter of the inscription on the Cook statue to Indigenous board. The full text can be accessed at <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/aug/23/sydney-under-pressure-over-captain-cook-statue-claim-he-discovered-australia>

On August 22, 2017, Yahoo 7 News published a report titled 'Stan Grant questions Captain Cook's place in Australian history' which details Grant's criticisms and gives a range of responses to them.

The full text can be accessed at <https://au.news.yahoo.com/a/36804382/stan-grant-questions-captain-cook-s-place-in-australian-history/>

Arguments in favour of commemorating Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia

1. The inscription is essentially accurate from a British perspective

It has been argued that from a British or more broadly European perspective, Captain Cook did discover the east coast of Australia. This point was made by Brian Keighran in a letter published in *The Australian* on August 27, 2017. Mr Keighran wrote, 'It is absolutely correct to say that Captain Cook “discovered” the east coast of Australia, when you know that discover means “to reveal” and “to make known”.

The first documented exploration of Australia (New Holland/Terra Australia) was on the west coast by the Dutch navigator Willem Janszoon in 1606 and other contacts followed over the next 100 years or so by European explorers.

Captain Cook, after making observations of the Transit of Venus at Tahiti in 1769, sighted the south-eastern coast of Australia on April 19, 1770 and became the first recorded European to explore the eastern coastline.

His report obviously revealed to the British Government the potential for a settlement in this country and we know that happened in 1788.'

<http://www.centralwesterndaily.com.au/story/4882061/letter-to-the-editor-statues-and-memorials-must-remain-in-place/>

Associate Professor Carol Liston of Western Sydney University has made a similar comment, stressing that for Cook and the burgeoning British Empire of which he was an agent, the navigational work he undertook along the east coast of Australia was discovery. Professor Liston has stated, 'The word "discovery" is problematic... I often use the word explore. But Cook did not know the Great South Land was there and that was a discovery to Cook and his colleagues.' <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/captain-cook-statue-row-agreeing-on-historys-not-simple/news-story/9ade38f3892405f50799f6a080386a34>

2. The inscription is accurate in terms of the scope of Captain Cook's explorations

It has been claimed that the inscription on the Hyde Park statue describing Captain Cook as the discoverer of 'this territory' is accurate. According to this line of argument, Captain Cook was the first man to discover the whole east coast of Australia.

This point has been made by Keith Windschuttle, the editor of *Quadrant*, who has stated, 'It is perfectly accurate, if we take the word “territory” to mean the eastern coast of the Australian continent. Cook was in fact the first person in history to traverse the whole of this coastline and view its 2000 miles (3200km) of shores and hinterland. No Aboriginal person had done that before — they never had the maritime technology to do it.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/let-cook-and-macquarie-stand-grant-and-taylor-are-wrong/news-story/40b157aac543734a6e0417b1397c3ec7>

Windschuttle went on to explain, 'On the other hand, if the Hyde Park inscription had said Cook discovered Botany Bay, Port Jackson, Moreton Bay or any other small local area on the coastline inhabited by the Aboriginal people Cook met, it would have been inaccurate and probably worth correcting. The local Aborigines clearly knew their own areas better than any foreign seaman. But in their lifetimes they remained confined to these areas and, although their predecessors had gradually spread themselves across the continent over thousands of years, none of them gained the view of it that Cook had in his four-month journey from Port Hicks to Cape York in 1770. He was the genuine discoverer of the whole entity.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/let-cook-and-macquarie-stand-grant-and-taylor-are-wrong/news-story/40b157aac543734a6e0417b1397c3ec7>

This view has been echoed by some of those living in Witby, in England, the area within which Cook trained as a seaman. MP Simon Clarke, who represents Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland, has stated, 'The Australia of today is owed to James Cook; Australia should take huge pride in him. The nation of Australia is not imaginable without Captain Cook. He was the first person to see the eastern seaboard in its entirety, and that was a pioneering feat. The nation of Australia was discovered by Cook — there were some monsters of that time, but James Cook was not one of them.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/in-james-cooks-town-of-whitby-his-significance-dawns-every-day/news-story/cd790d5033c09ffa31a43860e91125e8>

3. The inscription is historically significant as a reflection of former cultural attitudes. Defenders of nineteenth and twentieth century statues that commemorate attitudes that are no longer universally accepted argue that the statues should remain because they are a part of Australia's history. These statues are seen as sculptural primary sources, real world pieces of historical evidence that reflect Australia in the 1800s, the early 1900s and beyond.

It has been argued that no statue or contemporary record is a complete reflection of the past. Its value lies in serving as evidence of the particular views of a given time. On August 25, 2017, a columnist for The Australian, Peter Hoysted, writing under the nom de plume 'Jack the Insider' stated, 'Statues are a form of dead history. No reasonable person expects them to contain a comprehensive, tell all biography of the subject or the subject's historical context.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/blogs/jack-the-insider-leave-our-statues-alone-pigeons-need-them/news-story/a57ff4c7a5eef0eaedc4301a79a6efc9>

This position has been put by Australia's prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who has stated with regard to Stan Grant's comments, 'I'm an admirer of Stan's but he is dead wrong here. Trying to edit our history is wrong.'

Now all of those statues, all of those monuments, are part of our history and we should respect them and preserve them.' <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/turnbull-says-no-to-rewriting-history/news-story/1a54e95eb25ae20f6fc52752ae1b78e3>

Malcolm Turnbull was more critical of attempts to damage or remove statues. He condemned such actions as 'Stalinist', referring to the efforts of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin to remove from the historical record those whom he opposed. Malcolm Turnbull stated, 'This is what Stalin did. When he fell out with his henchmen he didn't just execute them, they were removed from all official photographs — they became non-persons, banished not just from life's mortal coil but from memory and history itself.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-26/australia-day-argument-intensifies-as-vandals-hit-captain-cook/8845064>

Even Stan Grant has not called for the statue of Cook to be removed, merely for its inscription to be changed. Of it and similar statues he has stated, 'They are a symbolic starting point to discuss who we are today and who we wish to be in the future... Those statues are our history; they tell us who we have been which is why I would not want them removed.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/stan-grant-slams-disgraceful-statue-vandals/news-story/28736f38468612fbf277a4094d32bcf1>

A related position has been put by some of those who support the retention of historical monuments in the United States which commemorate leaders of the Confederacy. In an article by Zachary Fine, published in The New Republic on March 11, 2016, it was argued, 'By purging historical monuments in the name of contemporary values, we risk effacing [evidence of] the grievous errors that continue to inform the present.'

<https://newrepublic.com/article/131383/not-racist-monuments-torn>

4. The inscription should be contextualised not changed

Opponents of editing or altering the inscriptions on statues commemorating colonial figures argue that a better strategy is to contextualise the sculpture and the original inscription. This means that an additional plaque is attached to the statue explaining the historical background of the piece.

University of Sydney historian, Professor Mark McKenna, has stated, 'It is better to add to the story than erase history - to understand how and why people believed what they did in the past such as White Australia.

Obviously we don't believe in White Australia any more but we need to understand how and why people did that and then explain in the same breath why we don't believe in it any more. I would put an additional inscription explaining why they thought the way they did and why we no longer think that.

It is part of understanding how ideas have changed and why. In 1901 we didn't entertain the proposition of recognising Aboriginal people in the constitution and now we do.'

Referring specifically to the inscription on the Hyde Park statue of Captain Cook which Stan Grant has criticised, Professor McKenna has stated, 'My attitude to inappropriate statements is to leave them there and then add something because that allows you to show why people thought those things at the time.' <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/captain-cook-statue-row-agreeing-on-historys-not-simple/news-story/9ade38f3892405f50799f6a080386a34>

Gary Sturgess, chairman of Public Service Delivery at the Australia and New Zealand School of Management and an expert on Governor Arthur Phillip, who led the First Fleet in 1788, has stated, 'I'm not in favour of tearing down statues, but we need to -recontextualise statues or other public art. We've had a very British interpretation up until now. For a lot of my life, we were assuming it was discovered by Cook. If that is offensive, I get that. Should we rework the plaque? I suspect we should leave the older one and put another alongside.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/please-endeavour-not-to-rewrite-history-james-cooks-critics-told/news-story/1c1f26cb085d16531b27915c8f496463>

Historians around the world have adopted a similar attitude to the importance of establishing a context for historical monuments and their inscriptions. In an opinion piece originally published in The Times (and then republished in The Australian) on August 17, 2017, David Aaronovitch stated, 'So my own preference, where possible, is not destruction

but...contextualisation. In Lincoln cathedral is the old stone shrine to Little Sir Hugh, supposedly ritually murdered by Jews in 1255. This filthy medieval libel might have warranted destruction, but better, as the cathedral did, to leave it and add a plaque explaining the monument and the "blood libel" against the Jews. That way people can learn something.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/the-times/tearing-down-statues-wont-help-heal-us/news-story/31519a1527275ba095e74d9f61a41a20>

5. Additional monuments commemorating Indigenous losses and achievements should be erected

It is argued that rather than altering inscriptions on existing monuments, Australia should memorialise events from an Indigenous perspective as well as a colonial or Euro-centric one. This point has been made by Warren Mundine, a prominent Indigenous spokesperson and the former National President of the Australian Labor Party. Mundine has stated, 'All this nonsense about changing things — we cannot look back at history with our modern minds otherwise we would have to tear down the pyramids because they were built by slaves...

In Australia, the problem is an absence of memorials, we need more about our own people, our indigenous people.' <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/nsw/statues-of-limitations->

warren-mundine-speaks-out-on-cook-statue-removal-idea/news-story/2109e0b2a179d8a59edefac27ac5b19c

A similar point has been made by Freya Higgins-Desbiolles, Senior Lecturer in Tourism at the University of South Australia in a comment published in *The Conversation* on August 25, 2017. Higgins-Desbiolles stated, 'This recent discussion concerns memorials that glorify men or events that brought direct harm to others, in the case of Australia through invasion and dispossession. But there are...recent memorials to events telling the experience of invasion from Indigenous points of view.'

Higgins-Desbiolles went on to give an example of memorialisation from an Indigenous perspective. She wrote, 'An illustrative example is the case of Myall Creek, New South Wales. In 1998, Sue Blacklock, a descendant of a massacre survivor, collaboratively formed a Memorial Committee to see the Myall Creek massacre commemorated. In 2000, the Myall Creek Massacre Memorial was opened and attended by descendants of the victims, survivors and perpetrators of the massacre.' <https://theconversation.com/the-politics-of-public-monuments-its-time-australians-looked-at-what-and-whom-we-commemorate-82751>

Higgins-Desbiolles then gave a further example, 'The first monument acknowledging Indigenous diggers who served in Australia's wars was opened in 2013 in Adelaide. It was the result of community fundraising and activism to ensure that Anzac commemorations no longer overlooked the service that Indigenous people have given in Australia's wars, despite not having full citizenship rights in many cases.' <https://theconversation.com/the-politics-of-public-monuments-its-time-australians-looked-at-what-and-whom-we-commemorate-82751> Similarly it has been suggested Indigenous warriors' defence of their country from colonial invasion should also be commemorated when Australia honours its war dead. In an opinion piece published on the ABC's Internet site on August 23, 2017, Stan Grant stated, 'Our frontier resistance warriors deserve a place on the war memorial wall of remembrance.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

Arguments against commemorating Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia

1. The claim that Captain Cook discovered Australia is historically inaccurate

Those who object to a statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park (and others like it in other parts of Australia) bearing an inscription honouring him as the discoverer of 'this district' note that the claim is simply not factual.

This criticism has been made in detail by the ABC's Indigenous affairs editor, Stan Grant. In comments published on the ABC's Internet site on August 20 and 23, 2017, Grant stressed the historical fact, noting, 'My ancestors were here when Cook dropped anchor. We know now that the first peoples of this continent had been here for at least 65,000 years, for us the beginning of human time... surely we need no longer maintain the fiction that he "discovered" this country. It dishonours the people who reached this continent 60,000 years before Cook.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-18/america-tears-down-its-racist-history-we-ignore-ours-stan-grant/8821662>

Referring some days later to disquiet among some at being reminded of original Indigenous settlement of Australia, Grant argued, 'Who would have thought the mere suggestion that Captain Cook did not in fact discover Australia would be so controversial?

It seems to have taken some people by surprise, the idea that people were here for more than 60,000 years before the Endeavour dropped anchor.'

Though not seeking to have the statue removed, Grant believes the inscription is damagingly misleading and should be changed. He has written, '“Captain Cook is part of our story but he didn't discover Australia. That has been a very damaging lie for Aboriginal people.'

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

In an opinion piece published in *The Monthly* on August 25, 2017, Sean Kelly argued, 'In fact – and this is obvious when you think about it for longer than ten seconds – all that Grant is arguing for, really, is accuracy. You don't have to care about politics. You don't even have to care about the lives of Indigenous people. (Though I think you should care about both.) You just have to care about facts, and the precise use of language. The fact that Indigenous people were already living in Australia when Cook arrived is undisputed. So ... why are we pretending something happened when we know it didn't?'

<https://www.themonthly.com.au/today/sean-kelly/2017/25/2017/1503644404/dishonest-debate-about-dishonest-history>

2. Commemorating Captain Cook perpetuates the myths of terra nullius and white superiority. Opponents of continuing publicly to endorse the claim that Captain Cook discovered Australia argue that the false assertion is underpinned by a number of prejudiced historical myths.

Grant suggests that the claim that Captain Cook discovered Australia rests on two related beliefs - that Indigenous settlement was not valid, either legally or morally, and that only white settlement has value. Grant summarised this position, stating, 'How in Australia do we maintain the ceremonial fig leaf of welcomes to country while a statue stands in the centre of our largest city proclaiming to the world that no one here mattered until a white person "discovered" the land?' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

Grant had expanded on this position some days before in his comments on *The Link* and the published transcript on the ABC's Internet site. Grant stated, 'This statue[of Captain Cook, described as the discoverer of Australia) speaks to emptiness, it speaks to our invisibility; it says that nothing truly mattered, nothing truly counted until a white sailor first walked on these shores.

The statue speaks still to terra nullius and the violent rupture of Aboriginal society and a legacy of pain and suffering that endures today.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-18/america-tears-down-its-racist-history-we-ignore-ours-stan-grant/8821662>

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-18/america-tears-down-its-racist-history-we-ignore-ours-stan-grant/8821662>

Grant is suggesting that the only way in which it is possible to credit Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia is to discount the legal claim to the country of its original Indigenous occupants. To claim Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia, he argues, negates the very existence of its Indigenous occupants. This is what Grant seems to mean by Indigenous 'invisibility', that is, that Indigenous people were deemed effectively not to be inhabitants of the newly 'discovered' land. It is this belief that is given legal expression in 'terra nullius'. The Mabo Native Title Internet site explains 'terra nullius' as a term used in International law to describe territory that nobody owns 'so that the first nation to discover it is entitled to take it over'. http://www.mabonativetitle.com/tn_01.shtml

Grant explains the ramifications of the 'terra nullius' myth. He states, 'When a nation is founded on a doctrine of terra nullius — literally empty land — then it becomes too easy to ignore the people of that emptiness.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

Relatedly, Grant argues, describing Captain Cook as the discoverer of Australia grows out of a belief in white superiority. The land was only truly discovered when it was discovered by a representative of white, British authority.

Grant states, 'The inscription that Cook "Discovered this territory 1770" maintains a damaging myth, a belief in the superiority of white Christendom that devastated Indigenous peoples everywhere... The idea of terra nullius was the law of whiteness, that anyone who did not worship Jesus Christ was less than human.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/stan-grant:-damaging-myth-captain-cook-discovered-australia/8833536>

3. The claim that Captain Cook discovered Australia gives ongoing offence to Indigenous Australians

Opponents of Captain Cook being publicly commemorated as the discoverer of either Australia or of Australia's east coast claim that this is offensive to Indigenous Australians. Even those who would retain the plaque acknowledging Cook have indicated that they can appreciate the offensiveness of the attribution.

Gary Sturgess, chairman of Public Service Delivery at the Australia and New Zealand School of Management has stated, 'We've had a very British interpretation up until now. For a lot of my life, we were assuming it was discovered by Cook. If that is offensive, I get that.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/please-endeavour-not-to-rewrite-history-james-cooks-critics-told/news-story/1c1f26cb085d16531b27915c8f496463>

The offence given to Indigenous Australians by the manner in which Australia's colonial history has typically been presented has been recognised in other contexts. In March 2016 the University of New South Wales established Indigenous guidelines for the manner in which certain aspects of Australian history should be discussed. Among these guidelines are recommendations that British colonisation should be referred to as an 'invasion' rather than 'settlement' and that Captain Cook should not be referred to as the discoverer of Australia. Indigenous historian Jackie Huggins has defended the guidelines stating, 'For far too long it's been very unfair on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in terms of denying and having our history not even talked about at all...' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-30/unsw-defends-indigenous-guidelines/7285020>

Professor David Dixon, the dean of the University of New South Wales's law school, has defended the guidelines for discussing certain aspects of Australian history. Professor Dixon has stated, 'The reason that we do this is to help our students because of a number of incidents in the past where non-Aboriginal students have quite unintentionally said things in class discussions which have caused offense to their Aboriginal peers.'

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-03-30/unsw-defends-indigenous-guidelines/7285020>

4. The claim that Captain Cook discovered Australia impedes reconciliation

It has been claimed that an inability to appreciate the indigenous perspective is a major impediment to establishing positive relations between black and white Australians.

In the paper, 'Reconciliation between Black and White Australia: the Role of Social Memory', authors David Mellor (Associate Dean in the Faculty of Health at Deakin University) and Di Bretherton (founding director of the International Conflict Resolution Centre at the University of Melbourne) have described reconciliation as a process that aims 'to improve relations between white and black Australians at the community level through increasing understanding of Indigenous history and culture from the time of white settlement to the present.' <https://tinyurl.com/y9pom48j>

The social theorists stress the importance of perspective and the barriers that failing to appreciate the Indigenous point of view create. They outline the conflicting views of Australian colonisation that Indigenous and white Australians typically have. 'From the white

Australian perspective, the subsequent colonisation is represented as a process of taming a new and inhospitable land, bringing agriculture, technological development and culture. From the Aboriginal perspective, colonisation began a process of dispossession, attempted genocide and cultural genocide that continued up to and throughout the twentieth century.' <https://tinyurl.com/y9pom48j>

The authors argue that reconciliation has three stages: coming to terms with the past; taking responsibility in the present and finally working together to make a better future. It is in this area of coming to terms with the past that the role of 'social memory' is argued to be vital. The authors claim that social memory is a collective view of self heavily influenced by one's perspective on one's history and social position. They further argue that, unless white Australia appreciates and respects the Indigenous worldview and 'social memory', collaborative problem-solving will not be possible. <https://tinyurl.com/y9pom48j>

Stan Grant argues that reconciliation is not possible until there is a shared sense of the past. He has quoted the High Court's Mabo ruling, 'The nation as a whole must remain diminished unless and until there is an acknowledgment of and a retreat from those past injustices.' and then stated, 'Statues, plaques, inscriptions — these are symbols. They are important because they tell us who we have been, they illustrate our story. Still so much remains undone; histories untold. Our rightful place remains unsettled.' <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-25/stan-grant-captain-cook-indigenous-culture-statues-history/8843172>

Frank Bongiorno, Professor of history at the Australian National University, has argued that we must, as a nation be able to hold in our minds the two different perspectives on our nation's colonisation. 'It is a fundamental test of our pluralism, of our ability as a society to hold more than one idea in our collective heads at the same time. Being able to do that is arguably a precondition for living civilised and ethical lives in a settler society.' <http://insidestory.org.au/the-statue-wars/>

5. Captain Cook should be commemorated for his genuine achievements

Those who dispute Captain Cook's claim to be regarded as the discoverer of Australia do not dispute his historical importance or his personal stature. Stan Grant, the ABC's Indigenous affairs editor has called for the inscription on Cook's statue in Hyde Park to be altered; however, he has not called for the statue to be removed. In a subsequent article published on the ABC's Internet site, on August 25, 2017, Grant gives his view on Cook as navigator and explorer. Grant states, 'Here is a man far from his home, commanding a ship on a voyage to lands whispered of and imagined.

Through his words I see him; not a figure cast in bronze — a statue — but the man James Cook; a man of doubt and fear and perseverance and undoubted courage. He had navigated the waters of the eastern coast of our continent, his maps recorded his journey...As an Indigenous person, my admiration for his feats is mixed with the reality that he looked upon my ancestors, in his words, as "some of the most rude and uncivilised upon the Earth".' Despite his reservations about Cook, Grant sees him as a man of exceptional ability and courage and one worthy of commemoration. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-25/stan-grant-captain-cook-indigenous-culture-statues-history/8843172>

Grant explicitly stated, 'Captain Cook's statue stands in the centre of our biggest city. There are Indigenous people who for good reason would prefer to see it removed.

Personally I accept that it remains; Cook is part of the story of this nation.

But surely we need no longer maintain the fiction that he "discovered" this country.'

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-18/america-tears-down-its-racist-history-we-ignore-ours-stan-grant/8821662>

On September 2, 2017, The Australian began a series of articles, drawing heavily on Captain Cook's journals, designed to commemorate the 250 year anniversary of Cook's departure

from Great Britain on a journey in which he would finally reach Australia, navigate its eastern coastline and claim the territory for England.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/captain-james-cook-rediscovered>

In the article published on September 4, 2017, Trent Dalton describes Cook's voyage as one which 'transformed our knowledge of mathematics, navigation, geology, geography, botany, psychology, nutrition, astronomy, medicine, cartography and languages.'

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/an-endeavour-for-the-age-captain-james-cooks-epic-voyage/news-story/6d5162f7fe5f6948b05af3ea2e9261e4>

Among those who would have Captain Cook honoured within Australia are many who would argue that the navigator and explorer was a man of sufficient stature to be commemorated without it being claimed that he discovered Australia.

Further implications

The debate surrounding the inscription marking the statue of Captain Cook in Hyde Park, Sydney, has served to expose a significant divergence of opinion within Australia. This relates to how Australia's history ought to be viewed. It has also revealed significant prejudice in popular attitudes toward Indigenous Australians.

Grant's comment that Captain Cook was self-evidently not the discoverer of Australia drew a great deal of hostility from both professional commentators and readers posting their views in online news publications.

The comments ranged from personal abuse of Grant to abuse of Indigenous Australians. The following are drawn from 662 reader comments posted online in response to a news report by Remy Varga titled 'Stan Grant slams "disgraceful" statue vandals' published in The Australian on August 27, 2017. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/indigenous/stan-grant-slams-disgraceful-statue-vandals/news-story/28736f38468612fbf277a4094d32bcf1>

Many of those commenting directed personal, sometimes racist, abuse at Grant, generally disputing his right to make the comments he had and implying ingratitude for the life he enjoys within white Australia: These included, 'In the light of all this, I have just read Grant's online biography. He definitely would not be here without white blood'; 'It's like you're on some kind of never-ending book promotion tour, saying anything to get a line in the papers'; 'Lose the tan, Stan. And you might regain some respect'; 'If it wasn't for Captain Cook, Stan would not be here...nor would he have his well-paid job'; 'Australian taxpayers should not have to pay your wages any longer. I demand the ABC sack him'.

There were also many comments denigrating Indigenous culture, history and the abilities and educational attainment of contemporary Indigenous Australians. These included: 'The signs could not have been sprayed by indigenous people, the spelling is too accurate'; 'I'm sure Australians wouldn't mind erecting statues of great Aboriginal historic figures, problem is we don't know who they are because you guys haven't managed to figure out how to write in 40,000 years'; 'Yeah, but at least they worked out that rivers were dug by a goanna spirit. Maybe they could make a statue of that'; 'After 40,000 years of intensive research and development, they invented a hollow log that makes fart noises'.

Without maintaining that these views represent those of a majority of Australians, they do indicate a disturbing undercurrent of racial prejudice and disregard of indigenous views. There is a determined belief on the part of many of these posters that the past should be forgotten. By this, they appear to mean that the dispossession of Indigenous Australians by an act of conquest is no longer relevant in contemporary Australia. 'I don't care if we were "invaded" or not and neither should anyone else in 2017.' 'For any to harbour such angst after more than two centuries...is simply...puerile.' 'Time for you and your race to move on Stan.'

Those who suggest that Indigenous dispossession remains significant are characterised as 'freeloaders' exploiting national guilt: 'Stan happily riding the "guilt" gravy train!!...we're sick of the lot of you'; 'Much easier to just claim victimhood. Probably more profitable also'; 'Sad they do find it very difficult to help themselves, perhaps it is because of the "sit down" money they receive'; 'I want "Recognition" gone'.

Comments such as these appear to substantiate Grant's view that Indigenous Australians are not respectfully acknowledged by many in contemporary Australia. These comments suggest that for an Indigenous Australian to assert an Indigenous identity and express a sense of grievance over being substantially ignored in the popular view of the nation's history is to invite ridicule and abuse from many.

Related issues of constitutional recognition, an independent, Indigenous 'voice' in government, and the vexed question of what should be celebrated on Australia Day (and on what date) are likely to reveal the same underlying hostility as the current debate.

Though it may well be difficult and bring latent divisions to the surface, Grant's suggestion that we need to discuss our history from an Indigenous, as well as a colonialist's perspective, appears to be borne out by the negative response his suggestion has received.