

The International  
**JOURNAL**  
*of* **DIVERSITY**  
*in* ORGANISATIONS,  
COMMUNITIES  
& NATIONS

Volume 8, Number 3

Ipperwash and the Media: Case Study of How an  
Aboriginal Confrontation was Covered

John Miller

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DIVERSITY IN ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND NATIONS

<http://www.Diversity-Journal.com>

First published in 2008 in Melbourne, Australia by Common Ground Publishing Pty Ltd  
[www.CommonGroundPublishing.com](http://www.CommonGroundPublishing.com).

© 2008 (individual papers), the author(s)

© 2008 (selection and editorial matter) Common Ground

Authors are responsible for the accuracy of citations, quotations, diagrams, tables and maps.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair use for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act (Australia), no part of this work may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact [cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com](mailto:cg-support@commongroundpublishing.com).

ISSN: 1447-9532

Publisher Site: <http://www.Diversity-Journal.com>

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF DIVERSITY IN ORGANISATIONS, COMMUNITIES AND NATIONS is a peer refereed journal. Full papers submitted for publication are refereed by Associate Editors through anonymous referee processes.

Typeset in Common Ground Markup Language using CGCreator multichannel typesetting system  
<http://www.CommonGroundSoftware.com>.

# Ipperwash and the Media: Case Study of How an Aboriginal Confrontation was Covered

John Miller, Ryerson University, Ontario, CANADA

*Abstract: A confrontation with police at Ipperwash Provincial Park in 1995 resulted in Canada's first death of a First Nations protester in more than 100 years of land claims disputes. No media were present when police marched on a small band of protesters occupying the park, but nearly 400 newspaper articles appeared in the month after the shooting of Dudley George. These included 275 news articles, 64 opinion articles (editorials and columns) and 55 letters to the editor. These were analyzed to determine how they conformed to journalistic standards of verification and accuracy: Which sources were relied on; how were the stories framed; whose version of events was given prominence; was the opinion based on fact or stereotypes? This analysis found significant problems with the coverage. It also developed a new "framing" model for stories involving aboriginal-police confrontation.*

Keywords: Aboriginal, First Nations, Media, Confrontations, Canada, Journalism, Conflict Reporting

**J**UST BEFORE MIDNIGHT on September 6, 1995, a tactical squad of Ontario Provincial Police marched on a small band of Chippewa First Nations protesters who had been quietly occupying a provincial park near the shores of Lake Huron for three days. They were residents of the nearby Kettle and Stony Point Reserve, and they said they were there to reclaim a burial ground. The occupation, an offshoot of a year-long seizure of a nearby military base in an unresolved land dispute, had been almost completely peaceful. The protesters even waited until Ipperwash Provincial Park was closed for the season and free of campers, and the superintendent handed over the keys to the washroom before he left.

What happened next would occupy Ontario authorities for the next 12 years, until a provincial judicial inquiry eventually established how a First Nations protester, Anthony Dudley George, ended up being shot dead. George, 38, was the first aboriginal to die in a land claims protest in Canada in 100 years, and that suddenly made Ipperwash an important national news story.

No reporters were present when the 30 OPP officers moved in, clad in body armour, banging their riot shields and flanked by snipers carrying semiautomatic weapons with sophisticated night-vision sights. The only three reporters covering the protest that day had left around suppertime.

This was remarked upon three days later in a column published by the *London Free Press*. Gordon Sanderson was writing as the paper's "readers' advocate," a job that is now almost extinct at Canadian newspapers but one that essentially tried to explain

the role and performance of journalism to its audience.

Gently chiding his colleagues for the "nine-to-five routine of most reporters these days," he concluded about Ipperwash: "With the benefit of hindsight, it is apparent the media would have served the public better had they kept a closer watch on the deteriorating situation."

By then, two conflicting views of what happened had emerged. Police said the protesters were armed and fired first. First Nations sources said there were no guns in the park that night, and the police attacked them. The absence of reporters, Sanderson noted, meant that "the public was left with widely conflicting accounts of what happened, without independent verification by a media witness."

He was articulating one of the core values of journalism – that reporters have a responsibility to serve as independent verifiers of facts, so they can provide people with reliable, impartial information upon which to base their decisions as citizens in a democracy. Rather hopefully, Sanderson added: "Now that everyone has been galvanized into action, an accurate account of what happened will perhaps emerge, pieced together from various sources."

A qualitative study of the newspaper coverage of Ipperwash affords us with a unique opportunity to examine, in retrospect, how accurately the story was reported at the time and what methods journalists used – or did not use – to convey what happened when the OPP marched into the provincial park and fatally shot Dudley George, who we now know was unarmed.



## Literature Review

The literature is sparse about how the news media cover aboriginal confrontations with police in Canada. It is a neglected area of research for two reasons: Armed and unarmed clashes over unsettled land claims have escalated since Oka in 1990 and show no signs of abating; and the few studies that have been done show that media coverage, particularly coverage by newspapers, is a key factor in both the public's perception of First Nations people and their struggles (Skea 1993) and the response to aboriginal protests by government, police and the military (Ramos 2006). Some scholars who have looked at coverage of individual aboriginal protests – and you can literally count such studies on one hand in Canada over the last 20 years – point to a critical lack of material in the literature that can tell us how accurately such incidents are reported (Nesbitt-Larking 2001).

Media are important because they articulate and popularize what is acceptable behaviour in society (Henry and Tator 2000a) – or, as other scholars have put it, what “Canadianness” is (Bullock and Jafri 2000) and who can be considered threats to it (Bannerji 1986). Instead of being disinterested observers, as they often claim, the news media filter or reconstruct reality in ways that make them actual participants in the events (Henry and Tator 2000a, Kalant 2004). In the sources they rely on and the way they frame stories, they tend to favour the political and economic status quo because their power is closely tied to it (Porter 1965). As shown in the general literature about minorities, media can play a decisive role in promulgating racist ideology and in maintaining white dominance (Harding 2006).

Often, the way aboriginal people get “framed” and described in the media reinforces the idea that they are a threat to dominant interests (Harding 2006, Fleras 2003, Henry and Tator 2000b). The media do this by labeling and publicizing certain extreme actions, ignoring background context, amplifying the danger by linking one event to others elsewhere in the country, and providing scapegoats onto whom public fears and fantasies are projected (Fleras 2003). This can lead to “moral panics,” defined as threats that foster a generalized fear about the decay and collapse of civilized society (Fleras 2003). Some scholars (Hunt 1997, Jones 1997) say that there is sociological value in studying how media hype can contribute to a public discourse of panic that can influence how society's institutions react.

Because of the widespread reach of mainstream media, and often the remoteness of aboriginal protest sites, the public and politicians often have no choice but to rely on media accounts to form their opinions and to make public policy about aboriginal people. Just the presence of media attention has been listed

as one of four factors that increase aboriginal protest in Canada (Ramos 2006). At the same time, powerful interests such as governments often try to manipulate events to achieve favourable media coverage (Kalant 2004), as the federal government did in Oka by providing news releases and spokespeople to build the case for bringing in the army (Winter 1992).

When they are not being ignored by mainstream media, aboriginal people are generally “framed” as problem people (Fleras 2001, Perigoe and Lazar 1992) constituting a threat to the national interest (by demands for self-government), a threat to Canada's social order (attacks on lobster fishers at Burnt Church, N.B.), a cost drain (land claims settlements), lawless thugs (Oka, Ipperwash) or acting as unscrupulous manipulators (cigarette smuggling activities on some reserves). Within these frames, crude stereotyping takes place:

“Time and again aboriginal people come across as ‘troublesome constituents’ whose demands for self-determination and the right to inherent self-government are contrary to Canada's liberal-democratic tradition. Aboriginal activism tends to be framed as a departure from established norms regardless of the context or urgency, while protesters are frequently labeled as dangerous or irrational.” (Fleras 2001)

The effects of this “moral panic” in media portrayal of aboriginal people can be long-standing and perverse. The framing of aboriginal people as threats in the media has remained unchanged over the last 150 years in Canada, according to Harding (2006), who looked at four cases of coverage from 1863 to 1992. None of his cases, unfortunately, involved land claims confrontations with police. Nevertheless, he found that repeated stereotypical coverage has led society to conclude that the solution to the “aboriginal situation” is simply to treat them like other Canadians. According to this view, the very root of the problem is the years of “special” treatment aboriginal people have received. Harding points out that this is an inaccurate conclusion, since treaties and Supreme Court judgments have conferred special rights on First Nations people.

This view is backed up by discourse analysis (Henry and Tator 2000b) that has identified often inaccurate racist discourses that many visible minorities are subjected to in the Canadian print media, including moral panic, blaming the victim, and white victimization.

Accuracy is an important function of the mass media. Stereotypes are frequently not accurate or real, but they are real in their social consequences (Pheloung 2000). They help keep aboriginal people in their “place,” and justify tougher measures of social control (Churchill 1999). Less powerful groups

in society like aboriginal people consistently complain about how they are depicted in the media, and feel they are subject to negative portrayal, stereotyping and scapegoating (Frideres 1988, Khaki and Prasad 1988). Cultural studies tell us that if vital information is distorted or left out, our ability to understand diversity is damaged. Media images – like a masked man holding a warrior flag – serve as our “windows” through which we see who deserves to claim Canadianness (Bullock and Jafri 2000).

Providing context is also important to ensure accurate portrayals of First Nations peoples. Ignoring the longstanding history of their mistreatment by the Canadian government in stories involving conflicts with authority often produces stereotypical and damaging narratives (Fleras 2003). By selectively choosing how to contextualize an event, the media can advance the ideas of the dominant sector of society in ways that reinforce, over time, prevailing discourses (Fleras and Elliott 2003, Henry and Tator 2002). Alternative perspectives are either dismissed or marginalized.

Oka, in 1990, was probably the best-known aboriginal land claim confrontation in Canadian history. It made national headlines for 77 days, as about 30 armed aboriginals in Kanesatake, Quebec, stood off 3,000 members of the armed forces and 1,500 provincial police. One police officer was killed in an ill-advised attempt to rush the barricades. Politicians, including Quebec Premier Robert Bourassa, framed it as an issue of law and order, not a land claim. Press and TV coverage frequently portrayed the Mohawk protesters as lawbreakers, justifying the \$200 million expense of bringing in the army. Oka also left the public with an indelible media stereotype of protesting Indians – the Mohawk Warrior, armed, masked, militant and a terrorist (Valaskakis 2005).

Academic studies of media coverage of Oka (Nesbitt-Larking 2001, Grenier 1992, Skea 1993, Winter 1992) found that the context of the dispute often was left out: Armed and masked warriors were portrayed as unruly thugs, instead of residents who were frustrated by decades of unsatisfied land claims negotiations and who objected to the expansion of a golf course onto their land.

Who the media talk to, and don't talk to, often influences coverage. A study of the 1995 standoff at Gustafsen Lake, B.C., showed that by their over-reliance on police sources, journalists collaborated to criminalize and discredit the First Nations protesters who seized a ranch in an intense dispute over the constitutional status of aboriginal title in British Columbia (Lambertus 2004). Police fired 70,000 rounds into the camp, and the media framed it not as a land dispute but as armed terrorism and criminality. Similarly, in his analysis of newspaper coverage of Oka, Skea found non-natives were used as

sources much more often than natives, and as a result 58 percent of the stories adopted anti-native themes. Media reliance on what politicians, police and military officials said at Oka obscured the context of the dispute and caused widespread distribution of inaccurate information, like who fired the first shot (York and Pindera 1991).

We know that newspaper coverage of land claim confrontations is growing. One study (Wilkes and Ricard 2007) posited that after Oka, protests have become a more compelling “story” to the media because of the expectation of violence.

Aside from the lack of research of media performance in such confrontations, there are limitations with methodology. Many consider only quantitative data (Wilkes and Ricard 2007, Grenier 1992, Ramos 2006), not qualitative data such as the choice of sources, accuracy of key facts, and story frames (Skea is a notable exception). Previous models of how the media frame aboriginal stories in general (Fleras and Elliott 2003, Harding 2006, Fairclough 1989, Perigo and Lazar 2002) are not entirely useful for analyzing coverage of confrontations. This suggests the need for qualitative analysis, including a “framing model” that identifies the kinds of themes media adopt when covering aboriginal-police confrontations.

Ipperwash occurred at the same time as Gustafsen Lake, but media coverage of it has not yet been analyzed by scholars. What makes it an interesting case study is that the true facts about what happened have been established in court (the 1997 conviction of Acting Sgt. Kenneth Deane, who shot Dudley George), in an investigative book (Edwards 2001) and at a provincial judicial inquiry (Linden 2007). It is now accepted that the First Nations protesters were not armed and that a burial ground did exist in the provincial park. So we have reference points to analyze whether the media reported the 1995 confrontation accurately, fairly and in context.

## Methodology

The challenge was to choose a time period short enough to allow for a detailed analysis of news and opinion articles, and long enough to span enough key events before and after the shooting of Dudley George to discern a trend. We chose July 31, 1995, as the starting point because events that weekend ended the peaceful co-existence between the First Nations people occupying Camp Ipperwash and the Canadian Armed Forces. Their land had been seized under the War Measures Act in 1942 and turned into a military training camp. A promise to return it after the war was never honoured. The occupiers were reported to have crashed a bus into a drill hall and

the military withdrew. Ipperwash became a more significant story then.

The end point was established as Oct. 16, 1995, roughly the same length of time (a month) after the occupation of Ipperwash Provincial Park and the shooting of George. That date was chosen because it marked the release of a study by the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point verifying that burial grounds exist on the park land – in other words, that they may have had a legitimate “colour of right” claim to be there, contrary to earlier statements by the Ontario government that there were no burial grounds. Significantly, the press release put out by the Chippewas announcing that fact was not reported in any newspaper chosen for this study.

This qualitative study, of the key period between July and October of 1995, measures how the story was “framed” by the media, which sources were used, and how the newspapers treated the key issue of whether the protesters were armed.

All newspaper articles mentioning Ipperwash were selected for the two-month period from three online databases available at Ryerson University. In addition, copies of stories were obtained from two key regional newspapers which did not appear on the databases. The London Free Press, through editor Paul Berton, kindly furnished all the Ipperwash articles from its archives. Articles published by the Sarnia Observer were culled from submissions made to the provincial inquiry. This was done by Aboriginal Legal Services of Toronto, which commissioned this study and presented the findings to the inquiry. I am indebted to researcher Cybele Sack for assembling the 691 versions of stories that were published and coding key information. The articles appeared in 19 Canadian daily newspapers, Maclean’s magazine, and four wire services:

1. From Canadian Newsstand: Financial Post, Calgary Herald, Edmonton Journal, Kingston Whig-Standard, Montreal Gazette, Ottawa Citizen, Toronto Star, Vancouver Province, Vancouver Sun, Victoria Times-Colonist, Windsor Star, Hamilton Spectator, Kitchener Record, Halifax Daily News.
2. From Factiva: Globe and Mail, Winnipeg Free Press.
3. From Lexis-Nexis: Toronto Sun, Maclean’s magazine, wire services (Canadian Press, United Press International, Agence France-Presse, Associated Press).
4. By special arrangement: London Free Press, Sarnia Observer.

All stories were catalogued chronologically, whether there was a byline, what page it appeared on, where it was written from (placeline), the identity of the lead source and all other sources, and if a story

mentioned guns in the park, whose version was given priority. Stories were labeled as news reportage, opinion columns or editorials, and letters to the editor. When the identical news story or opinion column appeared in more than one newspaper on the same day, it was marked as a duplicate. This accounts for the two numerical counts: 496 different articles, and 691 total appearances. Unless otherwise indicated, the content analyses that follow look at the 496 original articles, not the duplicates.

The print coverage of Ipperwash was examined to see how it conformed to accepted standards of journalism, including a first obligation to the truth, acting as an independent monitor of authority, practicing the discipline of verification, and keeping the news comprehensive and proportional (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2001).

### A Framing Model

Ipperwash was a news story capable of being “framed” several ways. It was a dispute over land that the federal government promised to return to First Nations people. It was a falling-out between rival bands. It was a police incident, and a dispute about who fired the first shots. How reporters chose to “frame” the news had the result, over time, of shaping public opinion in the period leading up to the shooting, and the period immediately afterwards. Discerning these “frames” by reading their stories 10 years later is a subjective exercise, so the criteria need explanation. They draw heavily from the literature on media “framing” previously cited (Fleras 1995, Henry and Tator 2000):

**Frame One: First Nations people as trouble-makers.** These stories fit Fleras’ model of minorities being framed as social problems. They tended to treat the occupation as a police incident, with the occupiers cast as those who were doing something illegal or who needed to be controlled. These stories did not mention that the occupation stemmed from frustration caused by a 53-year-old land claim. They generally quoted the police and local residents as commenting on the motives and actions of the occupiers in the base or park. When stories took a wider perspective, First Nations people tended to be portrayed as creating problems for society by making demands upsetting to the social, political or economic order. They fit Henry and Tator’s discourses of white victimization and moral panic.

**Frame Two: First Nations people with a legitimate dispute.** These stories always made reference, even if briefly, to the land claim issue, and the fact that it had been either unresolved for 53 years (in the case of the military

base) or in dispute (in the case of the burial grounds in the park). First Nations people were usually described as interested in a peaceful resolution of the dispute. In other words, they were treated as citizens protesting an injustice, rather than being stereotyped into any of the frames identified by Fleras or Henry and Tator.

**Frame Three: First Nations people in dispute among themselves.** These stories mentioned that the Stoney Pointers (as the occupiers of the park preferred to be called) were a “splinter group” or “rebels” because they openly disagreed with the recognized band at Kettle and Stony Point. As such, their actions were seen to be illegitimate, illegal, or at least question-

able. In some cases, these stories talked about how younger people on reserves across Canada were becoming more militant and rebelling against the teachings of their elders, and this was linked to Ipperwash. These stories implied that First Nations people were culturally deficient, unruly “others,” and generally fit Fleras’ frame of them as stereotypes operating outside the mainstream. This frame also draws from Henry and Tator’s discourses of equal opportunity and blaming the victim. First Nations people, this frame implies, are not worthy of receiving any “special treatment.”

This table shows how the stories written before and after the shooting fit into these general frames:

Frames	Before Shooting	After Shooting
Troublemakers	41%	48%
Dispute with government (legal)	25%	31%
Dispute among themselves (illegal)	33%	21%

As the story developed, the Stoney Pointers were increasingly portrayed as aggressors, obstructionists, or criminals; in other words: troublemakers. The story was covered as a police incident instead of a land dispute. These “frames” grew to nearly half the stories written after the shooting.

The percentage of stories that talked about First Nations people engaged in a peaceful resolution of the dispute also increased after the shooting, mainly because the news focused on the negotiations to end the dispute among the federal government, police and outside leaders including Assembly of First Nations chief Ovide Mercredi.

The percentage of stories that focused on the internal dispute between the Stoney Pointers and the Kettle Point band declined after the shooting, mainly because Chief Tom Bressette changed his hard-line stance and tried to embrace the cause of the occupiers after the shooting of Dudley George.

These changing patterns have significance because more than 70 percent of stories written about Ipperwash in the study period fit frames that suggested the occupiers were engaged in activities that were questionable or illegal, rather than being caused by 53 years of frustration over broken government promises to return the Stoney Point lands. The position of the Ontario government led by Mike Harris, which said it would not negotiate with the occupiers until they halted their “illegal” actions, was consistent with the way the press was framing the story. As we shall see, the heavy reliance on government politicians as sources after the shooting made this inevitable.

## Discussion of other Findings

In the month leading up to the shooting, newspapers carried 68 news stories, 28 opinion stories, and 6 letters to the editor mentioning the Ipperwash occupation. In the month after the shooting, they carried considerably more: 275 news stories, 64 opinion articles, and 55 letters to the editor. Total number of original articles: 496, plus one correction. In several cases, news stories (mainly from the Canadian Press wire service) and columns were published by more than one newspaper the same day. Counting duplicates, there were a total of 691 published articles.

Up until the shooting, the story did not get prominent play in those newspapers. Only 9 percent of all stories published between July 31 and September 6 appeared on front page. That changed when George was shot and killed. One hundred and forty-four versions of stories were published in newspapers in the three days following the shooting (September 7-9), and 15 percent of those appeared on page one. It became a bigger story, and more news organizations sent staff reporters to Ipperwash.

Despite these resources, no reporter managed to piece together a comprehensive eyewitness account of what happened during the fateful night of September 6. Who shot first? Why did police storm the occupiers, and at night? Who ordered them to? In this respect, the most basic function of journalism – to convey accurate facts in context – was not exercised.

Reporters relied heavily on interviews with “official” sources – police, outside First Nations leaders and politicians – after the shooting. A “lead source” is the first person quoted in any news story. Such a person often makes comments that relate to the angle or “frame” of the story. Their statements are given

prominence owing to the fact that they generally appear in the first few paragraphs and are often placed there to corroborate or explain the reporter’s interpretation of events (the angle). The following chart compares who the lead sources were before and after the shooting.

Lead Source	Before Shooting	After Shooting
Outside natives	14	111
Stoney Pointers	13	30
OPP	4	25
Military	11	0
Political/gov’t	8	31
Campers/locals	4	16
Others	6	18

As we can see, Stoney Pointers became much rarer sources for their own story after the shooting. They are outnumbered as lead sources by the total number of outsiders, 201-30.

Politicians appeared as often as Stoney Pointers as lead sources after the shooting, even though Ipperwash was hardly a partisan political story at the time. Only once was an opposition politician cited as a lead source; invariably it was a Conservative provincial politician (Premier Harris, a member of his cabinet, or the local MPP) or federal Indian Affairs Minister Ron Irwin, calling the occupation illegal and urging the Stoney Pointers to vacate the park. There was almost no critical questioning of those holding political power. Nor was the question of an inquiry into the shooting pursued, even though that was called for within days of September 6 by Mercredi, the Chiefs of Ontario, and the Law Union of Ontario.

It was the same story when all sources were counted. Before September 6, Stoney Pointers constituted 19 percent of people quoted, but after George was shot that percentage dropped to 10.6. Politicians and government officials constituted 20 percent of all sources after the shooting, and OPP officers another 13 percent.

This imbalance in sourcing had the result of marginalizing the people at the centre of the dispute. With their story not being told, opinion writers far from the scene were free to speculate on the meaning of the occupation and the violence that occurred. Motives were imputed to the Stoney Pointers without any opportunity for them to respond or correct the public record. For example, Ipperwash was used as one more sign that young people on reserves across the country were becoming increasingly armed and militant. In actual fact, the Stoney Pointers occupying Ipperwash were neither armed nor particularly young.

Dudley George was 38, and there were several elders among the 20 or so occupiers.

The discipline of verification that is supposed to be at the core of good journalism was relaxed to a worrisome degree.

Very little ongoing news coverage was told from the perspective of those occupying the park. Not one reporter managed to get inside the barricades, unlike at Oka. Kettle and Stony Point band chief Bressette was most often quoted as the authority for what the occupiers were up to. There were many reasons for journalists to be more skeptical, especially since Bressette was negotiating for the return of Camp Ipperwash to his band and may have had reasons to discredit the occupation. He was the source who first said the base occupiers were believed to have guns and were being whipped up by outside agitators – allegations which showed up frequently in subsequent news stories, although there was never any evidence to confirm them.

Canadian newspapers were quick to pass judgment. Editorials and opinion columns, some written within two days of the shooting, were often based on inaccurate or incomplete information and were generally unsympathetic to the Stoney Pointers. One of the most extreme examples was *Toronto Sun* columnist Matthew Fisher writing from Singapore, of all places, on September 17:

“One of the best things about being 12 time zones away from Canada is that I no longer have to cover obscure and occasionally bloody Indian standoffs such as those at Camp Ipperwash ... No longer do I have to travel hundreds of miles down bad roads with scores of other journalists to dusty mosquito-infested villages for a media opportunity with a bunch of un-

kempt and menacing thugs who are eager for their moment of fame.”

Even worse were several “analysis” articles that ran in papers on September 8 and 9. These articles tried to set the violence at Ipperwash in some wider perspective – and invariably that perspective was one of increasingly militant First Nations people taking the law into their own hands. One such story by Jack Aubry of the *Ottawa Citizen* on September 8 began: “The much-predicted Indian revolution in Canada has begun.” It went on to add, without citing any evidence or source, that “the shock waves from an Indian man being killed by police will be felt from coast to coast. It appears likely that highways will

be blocked and government offices will be occupied in the next weeks. Maybe even some rail lines will be shut down and the odd hydro transmission tower taken down by explosives.” None of this, of course, happened.

Only three of the 92 opinion articles written during the two months were by journalists who actually went to Ipperwash and did their own reporting. The strongest finding of this research is the extent to which opinion-makers in the press ignored or manipulated the facts and resorted to crude stereotypes of First Nations people. Aside from letters to the editor, which were more supportive, the tone of opinion was decidedly against the Stoney Pointers:

Type of Opinion	Pro	Anti	Even Handed
Editorials	27%	40%	33%
Columns	39%	44%	17%
Letters to editor	52.5%	43.5%	4%
Even handed opinion generally made note of the government’s responsibility to settle land claims			

The second wave of opinion/analysis, published a week or more after the shooting, led us further away from the facts as they were known at that time, almost as if the wrong co-ordinates had been punched into the sophisticated media guidance system. These articles fit some of the “frames” associated with racist dialogue – a Canada-wide Indian revolution about to begin (moral panic), a lack of tolerance for First Nations people who break the law (blame the victim), and mainstream Canadian society under assault (white victimization).

Here is columnist Catherine Ford, writing in the *Calgary Herald* on September 22: “Canada’s first nations would like us to see them as the strong and spiritual inheritors of a brave nation. That’s tough when, as a visible minority, many of the natives we see are face down in flower beds or holding up the corners of seedy hotels.”

Here is Claire Hoy in the *Vancouver Province* on September 12: “A thug by any other name is still a thug.” Although he acknowledged the facts of what happened at Ipperwash were still in dispute, “there is no doubt who I believe, and it isn’t the militant warriors who think they have the right to take up arms against the state.”

Stories that fit common stereotypes – First Nations people as troublemakers, as unruly and violent, or benefiting from double standards of justice – tended to get picked up or reprinted in other newspapers;

those that challenged common stereotypes – First Nations people without guns, or with a legitimate land grievance – generally did not.

The events at Ipperwash were frequently linked to other First Nations disputes like Gustafsen Lake, where the occupiers had guns and used them. Before the shooting, 31 percent of the published articles made that connection. Only 4 percent said there was no connection. This tendency increased after the shooting. Forty-two percent of the news, commentary and letters to the editor made direct connections between Ipperwash and Oka or Gustafsen Lake. Less than 1 percent said there was no connection. This tended to help create a “moral panic” that First Nations people were on the brink of a co-ordinated and potentially bloody nation-wide revolution. Linking Ipperwash to Oka and Gustafsen Lake may be relevant and justified, if the reference is to rising frustration with land claims, but it is quite inaccurate to compare the gun-toting warriors at Oka and Gustafsen Lake with the unarmed Stoney Pointers.

The Stoney Pointers’ claim that they had no guns at Ipperwash was almost always discounted, either by stories that incorrectly reported they had them, or because their denial was most often mentioned after the OPP’s account – that the occupiers attacked and fired first. That served, over time, to discredit them.

	<b>Before Shooting</b>	<b>After Shooting</b>
Had guns	9	42
No guns	5	16
In dispute, with OPP side first	2	62
In dispute, with Native side first	1	7
These are the number of stories that mentioned guns		

The result of this reporting meant that the police version was given prominence over the occupiers' version in 65 percent of the stories written before the shooting, and 82 percent after it. Is it any wonder commentators tended to have a field day discussing Ipperwash in the context of what they felt was increasing First Nations violence and lawlessness across Canada?

## Conclusion

The evidence is very clear: When it came to telling the story of the unarmed victims of Ipperwash, who quickly came under attack from the provincial government, the police and editorial writers for their supposedly violent and lawless tendencies, most reporters and editors looked the other way. They failed to follow many of the principles of responsible journalism, such as maintaining a first obligation to the truth, acting as independent monitors of authority, practicing the discipline of verification, and keeping the news comprehensive and proportional.

## References

- Bannerji, Himani, *The Dark Side of the Moon*, (Canadian Scholars Press: Toronto), 2000.
- Bullock, K.H. and G.J. Jafri, "Media (mis)representations: Muslim women in the Canadian nation," *Canadian Woman Studies* 20(2), p. 35-40, 2000.
- Churchill, Ward, *Fantasies of the Master Race: Literature, Cinema and the Colonization of North American Indians*, (Arbeiter Ring: Winnipeg), 1999.
- Edwards, Peter, *One Dead Indian: The Premier, the Police and the Ipperwash Crisis* (Stoddart: Toronto) 2001.
- Fleras, Augie and Jean Leonard Elliott, *Unequal Relations: An Introduction to Race and Ethnic Dynamics in Canada* (Prentice Hall: Toronto), 2003.
- Fleras, Augie, "Please Adjust Your Set: Media and Minorities in a Multicultural Society," in *Communications in Canadian Society*, 4<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Benjamin Singer, 406-431. (Nelson: Scarborough), 1995.
- \_\_\_\_\_, "Couched in Compromise: Media-minority relations in a multicultural society," p. 308-322, in McKie, Craig and Benjamin Singer (eds), *Communication in Canadian Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (Thomson: Toronto), 2001.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Mass Media Communication in Canada*, (Nelson: Scarborough), 2003.
- Frideres, J.S., *Native Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts* (3<sup>rd</sup>), (Prentice Hall: Scarborough), 1988.
- Grenier, Marc, "The Centrality of Conflict in Native-Peoples Coverage by the Montreal Gazette: War-zoning the Oka Incident," in Grenier, Marc (ed.) *Critical Studies of Canadian Mass Media* (Butterworths: Toronto) 1992, p.273-299.
- Harding, Robert, "Historical representations of aboriginal people in the Canadian news media," *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 17 (No. 2), 2006, p. 205-235.
- Henry, Frances and Carol Tator, *The Colour of Democracy: Racism in Canadian Society*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harcourt Brace: Toronto), 2000a.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Racist Discourse in Canada's English Print Media*, (The Canadian Race Relations Foundation: Toronto) March, 2000b.
- \_\_\_\_\_, *Discourses of Domination: Racial bias in the Canadian English-Language Press*, (U of T Press: Toronto), 2002.
- Hunt, Arnold, "Moral panic and moral language in the media," *British Journal of Sociology*, 48(4), 1997, p. 629-648.
- Jones, Paul, "Moral Panic: The legacy of Stan Cohen and Stuart Hall," *Media International Australia*, 85, 1997, p. 6-11.

Columnists and editorial writers would have served society better by following those same journalistic principles instead of resorting to stereotypes and acting on assumptions. One of the few who exercised this care was Tom Walkom of the *Toronto Star*, who on September 9 examined the unanswered questions: "What isn't yet clear is why the OPP responded in such force ... What is clear, however, is that a fairly manageable case of vandalism connected to a political occupation of a park (which was closed for the season anyway) turned into a three-hour, white-hot confrontation that left one dead and two seriously injured." Walkom called for an inquiry – one of the few columnists to do so – and pointed a finger at the government of Mike Harris.

Editors, who are responsible for making sure everything they publish follows the highest journalistic principles, failed to apply those principles scrupulously enough to the coverage and commentary on Ipperwash, no doubt contributing to the 10-year delay in calling a judicial inquiry.

- Kalant, Amelia, *National Identity and the Conflict at Oka*, (Routledge: New York), 2004.
- Khaki, A. and K. Prasad, *Depictions and Perceptions: Native Indians and Visible Minorities in the Media* (Page Master Services: Vancouver), 1988.
- Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect* (Crown Publishers: New York), 2001.
- Lambertus, Sandra, *Wartime Images, Peacetime Wounds: The Media and the Gustafsen Lake Standoff*, (U of T Press: Toronto), 2004.
- Lavery, Daniel and Brad Morse, "The incident at Oka: Canadian aboriginal issues move to the front burner," *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, Vol. 2(48), 1991, p. 6-9.
- Linden, Mr. Justice Sidney B., *Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry* (Ministry of the Attorney-General, Ontario: Toronto), 2007.
- Nesbitt-Larking, Paul, *Politics, Society and the Media: Canadian Perspectives*, (Broadview Press: Peterborough), 2001.
- Perigo, Ross and Barry Lazar, "Visible minorities and native Canadians in national television news programs," in Grenier, Marc (ed.) *Critical Studies of Canadian Mass Media* (Butterworths: Toronto) 1992, p.259-272.
- Pheloung, Grant, "Fear and Loathing Everywhere," *Revolution*, Aug./Sept. 2000, p. 14-17.
- Porter, J., *The Vertical Mosaic: An Analysis of Social Class and Power in Canada*, (U of T Press: Toronto), 1965.
- Ramos, Howard, What Causes Canadian Aboriginal Protest? Examining Resources, Opportunities and Identity, 1951-2000, *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 31, (2006), pp. 211-234.
- Skea, Warren, The Canadian Newspaper Industry's Portrayal of the Oka Crisis, *Native Studies Review*, 9(1), (1993), pp. 15-31.
- Valaskakis, Gail Guthrie, *Indian Country: Essays on Contemporary Native Culture* (Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Kitchener) 2005.
- Wilkes, Rima and Danielle Ricard, "How does newspaper coverage of collective action vary? Protest by indigenous people in Canada," *The Social Science Journal*, 44(2), p. 231-251.
- Winter, James, *Common Cents: Media Portrayal of the Gulf War and Other Events* (Black Rose: Montreal), 1992.
- York, Geoffrey and Loreen Pindera, *People of the Pines* (Little, Brown & Co.: Toronto) 1991.

## About the Author

*Prof. John Miller*

Professor of journalism at Ryerson University and author of *Yesterday's News*, a critique about daily newspaper journalism. He is one of Canada's leading researchers on media and minorities, having published a 10-year census of daily newsrooms (1994-2004) and several content analyses. His research helped him develop a course that has been mandatory for Ryerson journalism students for eight years, *Covering Diversity*. It won for Ryerson the prestigious Award of Excellence from the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. Miller is a former newspaper executive with the *Toronto Star*, Canada's largest daily paper.



#### EDITORS

**Mary Kalantzis**, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.  
**Paul James**, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.

#### EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

**Ien Ang**, University of Western Sydney, Australia.  
**Joanna van Antwerpen**, Research and Statistics, City of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.  
**Samuel Aroni**, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.  
**Duane Champagne**, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.  
**Guosheng Y. Chen**, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.  
**Jock Collins**, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.  
**Bill Cope**, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA.  
**Heather Marion D'Cruz**, Deakin University, Geelong, Australia.  
**James Early**, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, USA.  
**Denise Egéa-Kuehne**, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, USA.  
**Amareswar Galla**, The University of Queensland and Pacific Asia Observatory for Cultural Diversity in Human Development.  
**Grethe van Geffen**, Seba Cultuurmanagement, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.  
**Barry Gills**, University of Newcastle, UK.  
**Jackie Huggins**, University of Queensland, Australia.  
**Andrew Jakubowicz**, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia.  
**Ha Jingxiong**, Central University of Nationalities, Beijing, China.  
**Jack Levin**, Northeastern University, Boston, Massachusetts, USA.  
**Peter McLaren**, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.  
**Joe Melcher**, Xavier University of Louisiana, New Orleans, USA.  
**Greg Meyjes**, Solidaris Intercultural Services L.L.C, Falls Church, VA, USA.  
**Walter Mignolo**, Duke University, USA.  
**Brendan O'Leary**, University of Pennsylvania, USA.  
**Aihwa Ong**, University of California, Berkeley, USA.  
**Peter Phipps**, RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia.  
**Ronald Prins**, Bos en Lommer Neighbourhood Council, Amsterdam-West, The Netherlands.  
**Peter Sellars**, Theatre, Opera and Film Director.  
**Michael Shapiro**, University of Hawai'i, USA.  
**David S. Silverman**, Valley City State University, North Dakota, USA.  
**Martijn F.E. Stegge**, Diversity Platform, City of Amsterdam, The Netherlands.  
**Geoff Stokes**, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.  
**Terry Threadgold**, Cardiff University, Wales, UK.  
**Mililani Trask**, Indigenous Expert to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues for the Economic Council of the UN Assembly, Hawai'i, USA.  
**Marij Urlings**, School of Health Inholland University, Amsterdam-Diemen, The Netherlands.  
**Rob Walker**, Keele University, UK.  
**Ning Wang**, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China.  
**Owens Wiwa**, African Environmental and Human Development Agency, Toronto, Canada.

Please visit the Journal website at <http://www.Diversity-Journal.com>  
for further information about the Journal or to subscribe.

## THE UNIVERSITY PRESS JOURNALS

### **International Journal of the Arts in Society**

Creates a space for dialogue on innovative theories and practices in the arts, and their inter-relationships with society.  
ISSN: 1833-1866  
<http://www.Arts-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of the Book**

Explores the past, present and future of books, publishing, libraries, information, literacy and learning in the information society. ISSN: 1447-9567  
<http://www.Book-Journal.com>

### **Design Principles and Practices: An International Journal**

Examines the meaning and purpose of 'design' while also speaking in grounded ways about the task of design and the use of designed artefacts and processes. ISSN: 1833-1874  
<http://www.Design-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Diversity in Organisations, Communities and Nations**

Provides a forum for discussion and builds a body of knowledge on the forms and dynamics of difference and diversity.  
ISSN: 1447-9583  
<http://www.Diversity-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Environmental, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability**

Draws from the various fields and perspectives through which we can address fundamental questions of sustainability.  
ISSN: 1832-2077  
<http://www.Sustainability-Journal.com>

### **Global Studies Journal**

Maps and interprets new trends and patterns in globalization. ISSN 1835-4432  
<http://www.GlobalStudiesJournal.com>

### **International Journal of the Humanities**

Discusses the role of the humanities in contemplating the future and the human, in an era otherwise dominated by scientific, technical and economic rationalisms. ISSN: 1447-9559  
<http://www.Humanities-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of the Inclusive Museum**

Addresses the key question: How can the institution of the museum become more inclusive? ISSN 1835-2014  
<http://www.Museum-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Interdisciplinary Social Sciences**

Discusses disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge creation within and across the various social sciences and between the social, natural and applied sciences.  
ISSN: 1833-1882  
<http://www.Socialsciences-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management**

Creates a space for discussion of the nature and future of organisations, in all their forms and manifestations.  
ISSN: 1447-9575  
<http://www.Management-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Learning**

Sets out to foster inquiry, invite dialogue and build a body of knowledge on the nature and future of learning.  
ISSN: 1447-9540  
<http://www.Learning-Journal.com>

### **International Journal of Technology, Knowledge and Society**

Focuses on a range of critically important themes in the various fields that address the complex and subtle relationships between technology, knowledge and society. ISSN: 1832-3669  
<http://www.Technology-Journal.com>

### **Journal of the World Universities Forum**

Explores the meaning and purpose of the academy in times of striking social transformation.  
ISSN 1835-2030  
<http://www.Universities-Journal.com>

**FOR SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT**  
[subscriptions@commonground.com.au](mailto:subscriptions@commonground.com.au)