

RACISM IN THE MEDIA

The media fills multiple roles in society, including providing information from various news sources and organizations, as an entertainment source and as a means to educate. In all three areas, media are expected to meet the basic principles of fairness, balance and accuracy.

Radio New Zealand's MediaWatch service looks critically at how those principles are applied (or not) in New Zealand television, radio, newspapers and magazines as well as the 'new' electronic media. On 4th March, it [posted a critique](#) of an opinion piece published in the *Northland Age* on Tuesday 2nd March and on the *New Zealand Herald* website, from whence it was withdrawn two days later after it was widely condemned as racist and criticised for its many historical errors and omissions.

The MediaWatch article notes that "The managing editor of publisher NZME, Shayne Currie, said that "the article was 'unacceptable' ... and commentary from the former cabinet minister and historian will no longer appear on our platforms."

The offending *Northland Age* article – "headlined '[Racism on a grand scale](#)' and printed under the banner 'New Zealand as we know it'" – followed on from its author's comments on the February 17th edition of a [podcast](#) (also published by NZME) in which, during a discussion about the new history syllabus, as well as debate over local councils and Māori wards, we hear him say, "The benefits Māori got from the colonists were overwhelming ... Māori were very lucky they got the Brits."

It isn't the first time that racist trope has been used about Māori. Nor, as the MediaWatch article notes, was the March 2nd column "the first time NZME's Northland papers have published stories condemned as racist."

The article then recalls an incident in May 2017 when "the Whangārei-based *Northern Advocate* published a front page story headlined "[Pre Māori Northlanders?](#)"



I remember that story which, as noted in the MediaWatch article "was based on theories about European settlers arriving in this country long before Māori – thoroughly debunked by experts over the years – along with sketches of what these supposed settlers from Wales might have looked like 3,000 years ago."

At the time I laughed in disbelief that the *Northern Advocate* had published this drivel without fact checking it, and had posted sketches of what looked a lot like the Prince Charming character from the Shrek movies.

But, the story had a very unfunny side, coming as it did from a well-known 'amateur historian' whose overtly racist theories and activities had previously been uncritically publicised in other mainstream media, including [New Zealand Geographic](#) and [Dive New Zealand Magazine](#).

Incredibly, a year later, TVNZ ran a [two part documentary](#), featuring a number of pseudoscientific claims from the same man, along with those of other amateur 'experts'. TVNZ also ran the series in the 'documentary and factual' section of its on demand service until it [quietly disappeared](#).

Four months ago, the Stuff media platform made an [unprecedented apology](#) for 160 years of Māori coverage which "ranged from blinkered to racist." Since then, their reporting on Māori issues has raised the bar of accuracy, fairness and balance. Sadly, there are still numerous examples of unchecked errors, imbalance and unfairness being spouted on their competitors' platforms.

While it's good that NZME recognised the racism in the 2nd March piece, removed it from its *New Zealand Herald* platform and banned its author from all its platforms (including the *Northland Age*), racism in the media will continue to flourish until the owners and editors of each platform proactively stand against it, rather than retrospectively remove evidence of it.