

# BURIED VOICES: CHANGING TONES

**AN EXAMINATION OF MEDIA COVERAGE OF INDIGENOUS ISSUES IN ONTARIO**  
MEDIA MONITORING REPORT: 2013–2016



# FOREWORD

When JHR released its first *Buried Voices* study back in 2013, Indigenous people across Canada were making headlines.

The Idle No More movement was less than a year old and, in the spirit of fighting for treaty rights, First Nations were protesting against resource development — the anti-fracking protest in Elsipogtog First Nation drew the most attention.

Calls for a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women were gathering steam, prompting the RCMP late in the year to quietly investigate the numbers (their findings, released the following year, showed the number was actually double what was widely believed at the time).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was in the midst of gathering statements from residential school survivors.

When it hosted a national event in Vancouver that year, 70,000 people took part in a reconciliation walk.

Meanwhile, survivors of the infamous St. Anne's residential school were in court fighting the government to release records.

In September 2013, JHR released its inaugural *Buried Voices* study, which examined media coverage of Indigenous issues in Ontario between 2010 and 2013. The result? Indigenous people were vastly underrepresented in the media compared to other

stories. Seven times less, in fact, than what should proportionally reflect the population.

In examining the tone, the negative outweighed the positive: a three-year average of 33 per cent negative compared to 23 per cent positive. Most of the negative stemmed from editorials on Idle No More.

The report established a baseline for JHR's work ahead. That year, we launched our Northern Initiative, a pilot project that trained community members in six northern Ontario First Nation communities on basic journalism practices.

The success of the pilot led to the launch of our three-year Indigenous Reporters Program in 2015. Including the pilot project, JHR has now operated in 13 First Nation communities in northern Ontario.

After leading workshops in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, more than 800 non-Indigenous journalists and journalism students have been trained on best practices for reporting on Indigenous people. And more than 40 Indigenous people have received journalism scholarships or newsroom internships.

Three years have passed since the first report. What has changed?

Well, Indigenous people continue to play a major role in resource development — the LNP Project Pipeline and even the U.S.-based North Dakota protests are recent examples.

The federal government finally called a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women.

After recording close to 7,000 statements from residential school survivors and their kin, the TRC released its final report last year. Three of its Calls to Action made specific mention to media playing a key role in reconciliation.

Meanwhile, our latest report shows that while there is little improvement in representation of Indigenous people in Ontario media, there is a major shift of tone. In a complete reversal, the three-year average was 30 per cent positive in tone, compared to 11 per cent negative.

The media landscape when it comes to Indigenous people is finally changing.

The switch from Aboriginal to Indigenous — a change promoted by Indigenous people themselves — reflects a change in the landscape: from the federal government changing the departmental title from Aboriginal Affairs to Indigenous Affairs, to CBC Aboriginal recently relabelling its brand to CBC Indigenous.

But, as noted by most of the experts in this report, there is still a lot of work to do.

The TRC final report cited our first *BuriedVoices* study. It also stated that reconciliation is not an Indigenous issue — it is a Canadian one.

JHR, Canada's leading media development organization, is working towards building reconciliation through our

three-year Indigenous Reporters Program. Though the program, based primarily in Ontario, is slated to conclude at the end of 2017, JHR is working on plans expand the programming nation-wide in the coming years.

We would like to thank the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which not only funded this study, but has funded the remote reserve training work of our Indigenous Reporters Program. Further, our work could not be done without the additional support of the J.W. McConnell Foundation, the Donner Canadian Foundation, the RBC Foundation and UNESCO, APTN, Wawatay Native Communications Society, Global News, CBC Indigenous, The Tyee, The Toronto Star, Ryerson University, Trent University, Loyalist College — among so many others.

We would also like to thank Miles Kenyon for leading the study, and the Indigenous journalists and advocates who have provided their expert analysis of the data.

And of course, our work could not be done without the communities themselves, our trainers, and the trainees who are telling their stories.

Together, we are all working towards building reconciliation.

And with the momentum of this program, we are further along than we were three years ago — if still a long way to go.

— **LENNY CARPENTER**

*Indigenous Reporters Program Manager*

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# INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, Journalists for Human Rights has been embarking on a journey to challenge Canadian journalists to tell better Indigenous stories. Ambitious in nature and far-reaching in scope, the Indigenous Reporters Program is aimed at increasing the quality and quantity of Indigenous stories and voices in Canadian media. Through scholarships, paid internships, curriculum design, community-based training and workshops for non-Indigenous journalists, the focus of the program is set on challenging the heretofore accepted standard of delivering subpar Indigenous stories to an assumed disinterested audience.

The needs assessment which influenced the design of the program involved hundreds of interviews with Indigenous peoples, journalists and academics, all of whom were asked for their views on the challenges with how Indigenous stories were presented in Canadian media. Two clear criticisms emerged: Indigenous stories

are underrepresented in media and, when they are reported on, tend to be problem-based. In order to quantify these results, JHR conducted *Buried Voices*, a media monitoring study that tracked Indigenous stories across Ontario over a three-year span. The results directly supported what we heard from communities: coverage of Indigenous stories in the province peaked at 0.46 per cent and there was an increase of stories with negative tone throughout the three years surveyed.

Since 2013, JHR has awarded 19 scholarships to emerging Indigenous journalism students, facilitated 20 paid internships to young Indigenous journalists and trained close to 800 non-Indigenous journalists and journalism students in Ontario, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. In order to help evaluate changes made to the media's treatment of Indigenous stories, an updated version of *Buried Voices* was undertaken, reviewing the three years following the first report's coverage, namely 2013–2016.

# ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Since 2002, Journalists for Human Rights, Canada's leading media development agency, has trained over 12,000 journalists in 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East and North Africa to report ethically and effectively on human rights issues. JHR's support has helped local journalists

create change in their communities by exposing injustices and calling governments to account. Stories produced by JHR-trained journalists have resulted in corrupt ministers being sacked, water wells built in dry communities and doctors being brought into doctor-less hospitals.

# REVIEW OF INITIAL FINDINGS

In order to properly contextualize the findings of this study, it's necessary to review the results of the first *Buried Voices* study.

Generally, the study showed a steady increase in the number of Indigenous stories written by Ontario journalists, but still fell short of what could be considered fair representation in the media. As Duncan McCue, a CBC journalist and member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation, wrote when he analyzed

the report: “Simply put, if Aboriginal peoples represent approximately 2% of the population of Ontario, it is shameful that Aboriginal issues still only occupy less than 0.5% of online and print media in Ontario.”

The study also showed a steady increase in the percentage of stories that were associated with negative tone, with much of those negative stories coming from the Idle No More movement which peaked during the final year of analysis.

YEAR	TOTAL STORIES IN ONTARIO	INDIGENOUS STORIES	PERCENTAGE OF WHOLE	INDIGENOUS STORIES WITH NEGATIVE TONE
2010–2011	707,464	1,084	0.15%	28%
2011–2012	708,282	1,610	0.23%	33%
2012–2013	727,827	3,338	0.46%	39%

# CURRENT FINDINGS: ISSUE COVERAGE

The study investigated 319 print and online news outlets in Ontario for all mentions of keywords that would indicate Indigenous story coverage, including: Indigenous, Aboriginal, First Nation(s), Northern Ontario Reserves, Metis and Inuit. The investigation was broken down into three periods:

- June 1, 2013 – May 31, 2014
- June 1, 2014 – May 31, 2015
- June 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

In addition to tracking the actual number of Indigenous stories in each period, tonality of each story was analyzed to determine how journalists are portraying these issues. Further, prominent themes or “spikes” were identified to provide qualitative evidence of the types of stories being told.

While JHR set up the parameters of the study, the examination itself was conducted by Infomart, Canada’s leading media monitoring agency.

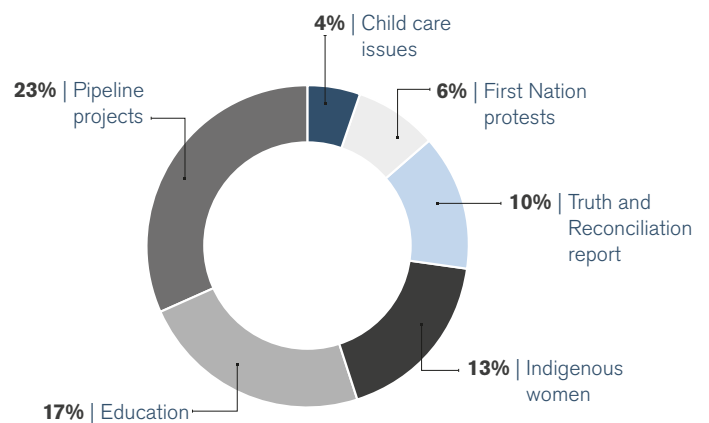
## PERIOD 1

June 1, 2013 – May 31, 2014

During this period, 2,657 Indigenous stories were identified out of a total 1,077,093. This suggests that 0.3 per cent of stories had to do broadly with Indigenous peoples, topics, politics or issues, averaging to approximately 10 stories per day.

Topics that received the most coverage included:

- Pipeline projects (23%)
- Education (17%)
- Indigenous women (13%)
- Truth and Reconciliation report (10%)
- First Nation protests (6%)
- Child care issues (4%)



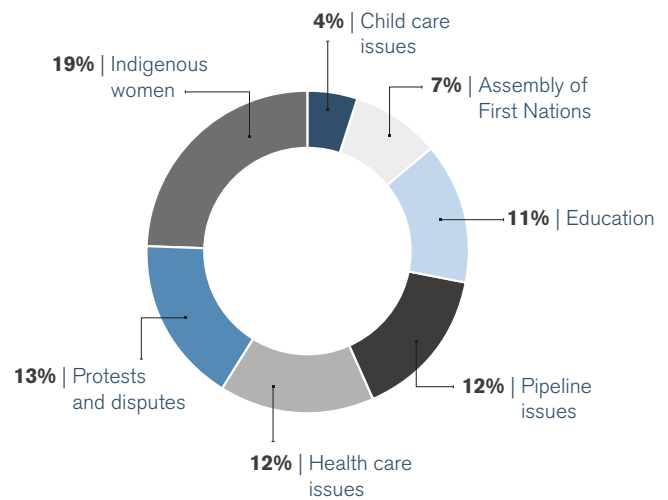
## PERIOD 2

June 1, 2014 – May 31, 2015

During this period, 4,302 Indigenous stories were identified out of a total 1,073,222. This suggests that 0.4 per cent of stories had to do broadly with Indigenous peoples, topics, politics or issues, averaging to approximately 11.8 stories per day.

Topics that received the most coverage included:

- Indigenous women (19%)
- Protests and disputes (13%)
- Health care issues (12%)
- Pipeline issues (12%)
- Education (11%)
- Assembly of First Nations (7%)
- Child care issues (4%)



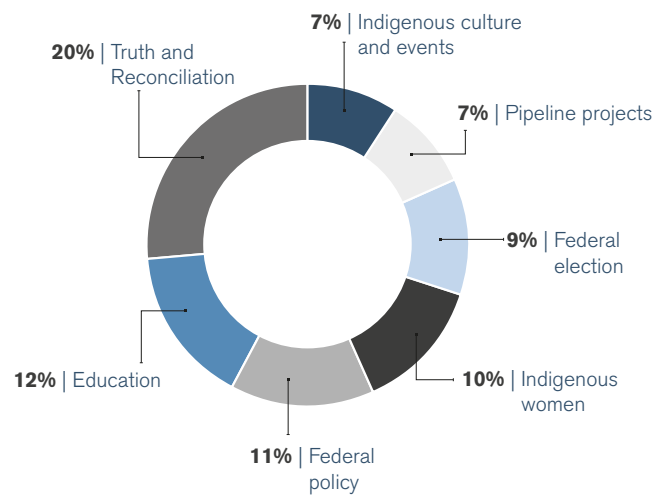
## PERIOD 3

June 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

During this period, 7,477 Indigenous stories were identified out of a total 1,449,422. This suggests that 0.5 per cent of stories had to do broadly with Indigenous peoples, topics, politics or issues, averaging to approximately 24.9 stories per day.

Topics that received the most coverage included:

- Truth and Reconciliation (20%)
- Education (12%)
- Federal policy (11%)
- Indigenous women (10%)
- Federal election (9%)
- Pipeline projects (7%)
- Indigenous culture and events (7%)





# CURRENT FINDINGS: TONE

**T**one was determined manually and was based on statistical samples. Tone analysis is based on the inherent positivity or negativity of an event, topic or issue.

## POSITIVE

An item leaves the reader more likely to support, recommend, and/or work or do business with the organization. In other words, refers to all coverage portraying the company and/or its spokespeople in a favourable manner.

## NEUTRAL

An item that contains no sentiment-bearing information at all, just reports the facts. Also, when an

item contains both positive and negative sentiment-bearing information in roughly equal proportions.

## NEGATIVE

An item leaves the reader less likely to support, and/or do business with the organization. This includes coverage that is critical of the company and does not include a reaction from its spokespeople or authoritative voice. Also, it includes factual reporting of negative news even when the item does not indicate bias (i.e. editorial commentary, praise or criticism).

## PERIOD 1

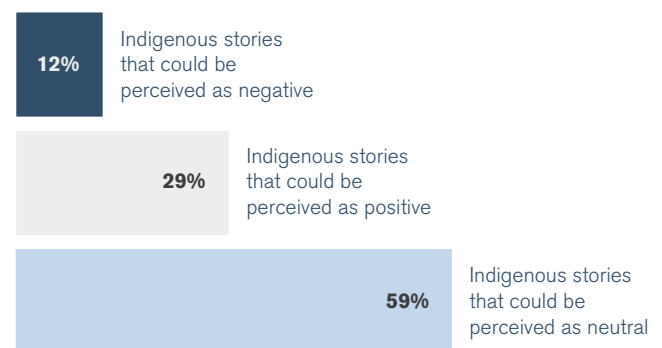
June 1, 2013 – May 31, 2014

**D**uring the period of June 2013 – May 2014, 12 per cent of Indigenous stories could be perceived as negative, 29 per cent as positive and 59 per cent as neutral.

Stories that generated positive coverage included: support for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, defence of Indigenous communities against pipeline developments, advancement of Indigenous education in Ontario and cultural events.

Stories that generated negative coverage included: criticism of First Nation governance, exorbitant salaries of First Nations Chiefs, conflict of interest of

Metis associations leadership and conflict within the Assembly of First Nations following Shawn A-in-chut Atleo's resignation.



## PERIOD 2

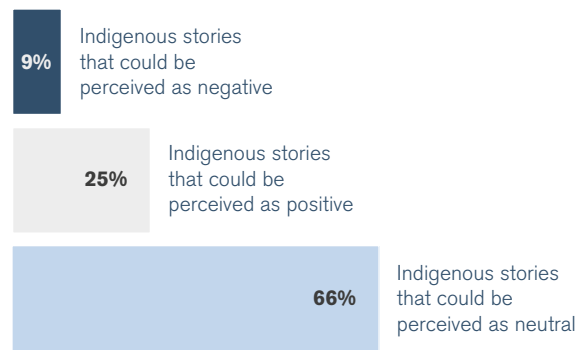
June 1, 2014 – May 31, 2015

**D**uring the period of June 2014 – May 2015, 9 per cent of Indigenous stories could be perceived as negative, 25 per cent as positive and 66 per cent as neutral.

Stories that generated positive coverage included: support for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, support for First Nation views in the case of a leukemia patient refusing chemotherapy, advocacy for Indigenous children and their right to proper education, promotion of Indigenous arts and culture and the new chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

Stories that generated negative coverage included: exorbitant salaries of First Nation Chiefs, conflict within the Assembly of First Nations, accusations that

community consultations were deliberate attempts to delay Northern Gateway approval and mentions of failures from First Nation communities in B.C. to pursue effective land claim settlements.



## PERIOD 3

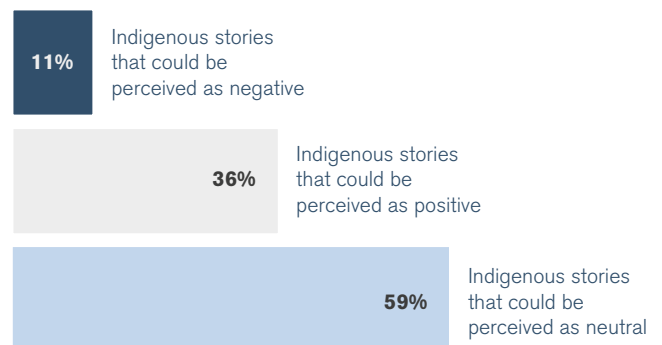
June 1, 2015 – March 31, 2016

**D**uring the period of June 2015 – March 2016, 11 per cent of Indigenous stories could be perceived as negative, 36 per cent as positive and 59 per cent as neutral.

Stories that generated positive coverage included: supportive views of First Nations in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, support for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, advocacy for First Nations rights in light of federal election, praise of advancements in education of First Nation communities and advocacy for rights of Indigenous children.

Stories that generated negative coverage included: criticism of Assembly of First Nations in light of federal election, investigation surrounding election results at

Lac des Milles First Nation, Privy Council office report on Aboriginal Affairs budget that showed more than \$1 billion spending shortfalls, exorbitant salaries of First Nations Chiefs and political conflicts between Algonquin First Nations communities in Ontario and Quebec.





## EXPERT ANALYSIS: JORGE BARRERA

This latest report from Journalists for Human Rights on the level of coverage for Indigenous issues again shows the stories of Canada’s first peoples are failing to break through the surface.

The report analyzed the level of coverage from 2013 to 2016, breaking it down into three periods. Each of the selected periods again revealed stories about Indigenous peoples and issues make up barely a fraction of overall Canadian news coverage. With percentages of 0.3 per cent, 0.4 per cent and 0.5 per cent respectively, the results show Canadian newsrooms are still not taking the issues facing the roughly one million Indigenous people in the country seriously enough.

It’s hard to understand how these types of stories are still failing to find traction in the newsroom. It’s not that readers and viewers show little interest. Indigenous stories consistently trigger such heated reactions from Canadians — including anger, sadness and outright racism — that many news organizations have chosen to no longer allow public comments on the online version of these pieces.

The Idle No More protests, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women have captured the national consciousness in deep and resounding ways over the past four years, and yet newsrooms have failed to rejig their coverage to meet this shift.

Perhaps the root of the problem lies with how editors and reporters view news from the Indigenous world. The problem, in my opinion, is that coverage of the Indigenous world in Canada is only moved by “issues”

and these issues fall into the usual categories of the depth of the poverty, the government management of this poverty, the death of the vulnerable — suicides and murdered and missing Indigenous — along with protests.

Perhaps if newsrooms chose to scrap this approach, this defining of the beat as Indigenous affairs, and instead covered it as place and allowed place to drive the issues, coverage would and should increase.

Covering Indigenous “issues” is not the same as covering the justice beat, the health beat or the immigration beat. It is more like covering a city, a region or a province. Within the Indigenous beat are the issues of justice, health, crime, residential schools, environment, politics and the arts, to name a few.

Indian Country is like an archipelago of over 600 different First Nation islands against the sea of Canada. Imagine this archipelago like those old layered, transparent Encyclopedia maps that depicted things like the shifting of the continents over the span of millennia. Each sheet a thousand years.

On the first map of the Indigenous archipelago are the First Nations scattered across the face of Canada. Flip the transparent page and then you see their overlapping treaty and traditional territories across provincial boundaries.

Both maps can guide the coverage.

On the first map are the stories of any community including the internal politics, the success of its citizens, the crime, the infrastructure and water stories.



I've never understood why newsrooms in this country don't naturally gravitate to covering the Indigenous archipelago. From a pure story point of view, there are few domestic topics that have the same level of drama, history and consequence."

If newsrooms shifted their approach to covering this surface map of the archipelago, coverage would immediately increase and improve. For example, instead of waiting for the local band chief to hold a press conference calling for a state of emergency as a result of a rash of youth suicides, news organizations would see the story unfold allowing for a deeper, more textured telling of the unfolding tragedy because there would already be a base understanding of place as a result of consistent monitoring.

The second maps the political story in terms of the relationship between the state and Indigenous nations. This is the big, broad-strokes story because this is the story of Canada's economic future. The Canadian economy is dependent on exploiting resources and all these resources are on Indigenous territory.

The main macro story in the country is an economy battered by the drop in oil prices which has kneecapped B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. The economic turbulence increased pressure on the need for the federal government to build pipelines, but the fate of these pipelines rests almost exclusively on the consent of First Nations whose territories would be impacted by the myriad of proposed projects.

The recent pipeline battle in Standing Rock South Dakota across the border is likely a harbinger of what's to come in Canada.

Yet, at its root, this issue is a political one that demands the same type of constitutional-type crisis energy the federal government expended on Quebec throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Yet, barely any of the coverage on the energy file, which has spiked over the last two years, ever acknowledges this reality. Instead, the First Nation aspect is relegated to margins and the story is one of governments and regulatory approval processes.

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Jorge Barrera has been a journalist for over a decade. Throughout his career, Barrera has reported from places like Ottawa, Iqaluit, Haiti and Venezuela. He currently works at the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network. Before joining APTN, Barrera worked for Canwest News Service and Sun Media. He was the 2012 J-Source newsperson of the year.



## EXPERT ANALYSIS: CINDY BLACKSTOCK

In 1907, Dr. Peter Henderson Bryce, the Chief Medical Health Officer of Indian Affairs, leaked his probe finding 24 per cent of children in residential schools were dying each year due to tuberculosis and the Government of Canada was not taking the action needed to save the children's lives.

It appeared on the front page of the Evening Citizen (now the Ottawa Citizen) in November of 1907 and was carried by other newspapers across Canada but the story quickly vanished as editors and journalists turned to other stories and the children continued to die.

One hundred years later, in 2007, then National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Phil Fontaine and I filed a human rights complaint against the federal government alleging that Canada's longstanding inequitable funding of child welfare was unnecessarily separating another generation of First Nations children from their families and cultures. I cannot imagine a stronger indictment of a Canadian government than alleging racial discrimination against 163,000 children and yet the coverage was sparse and short-lived.

Over the next nine years, Canada was found to have broken the law three times and spent millions trying to derail the case on legal technicalities. The law breaking was covered sparsely.

On Jan. 26, 2016, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found Canada is racially discriminating

against 163,000 First Nations children widening the disadvantage of residential schools and ordered it to stop. The media coverage of the decision was quite good for a couple of days but it was quickly replaced by a story that Canadian media found more compelling — heckling in Parliament.

“ The lives of 163,000 First Nations children depend on media educating the public so that the discrimination stops.”

In the nine months since the tribunal's original order, two compliance orders have been issued against the Canadian Government for failing to comply and First Nations children continued to be separated from their families due to state-based discrimination. The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada is so concerned at Canada's obfuscation of the legal orders it is considering an application to Federal Court to find the Canadian Government in contempt. It seems very clear that the federal government seems unwilling to change unless the public demands it and

“ It feels like we are screaming into silence.”

the public can't demand it unless the media lets them know what is happening.

I frankly cannot imagine a more pressing story than the federal government racially discriminating against 163,000 children and refusing to comply with legal orders to stop it but Canadian media have chosen to place much more media attention and space to stories such as moving expenses and the energy sector. It feels like we are screaming into silence.

I am grateful to the Aboriginal and mainstream journalists who have followed this story but their

actions should awaken Canadian media to its systemic failure to research and report on government-based racism in Canada. The actions of a few should not reinforce the professional slumber of the many. The lives of 163,000 First Nations children depend on media educating the public so that the discrimination stops.

Cindy Blackstock, Ph.D., is a member of the Gitksan First Nation. Cindy has over 25 years of experience in child welfare and Indigenous child rights. She currently serves as the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and is a Professor at the School of Social Work at McGill University.





## EXPERT ANALYSIS: DUNCAN MCCUE

In 2013, Journalists for Human Rights released its first analysis of Indigenous issues covered in Ontario online and print media. I was asked to provide analysis of the data, and concluded it was shameful that Indigenous issues occupied less than 0.5 per cent of media space when Indigenous peoples represent approximately 2 per cent of the population of Ontario.

What's changed since then? A lot.

But it's not the under-representation of Indigenous peoples in traditional mainstream media coverage. Between 2013–2016, Indigenous coverage showed a small but insignificant increase, peaking at 0.5 per cent of content in 2016. That statistic remains shamefully low. Yet again, this data demonstrates that Ontario media outlets are failing to increase Indigenous content, despite knowing full well that Indigenous under-representation in the media is a longstanding problem.

What we are seeing is a shift in tone over the past three years. There's been a steady drop in “negative” news coverage since the first data collection, and a corresponding increase in “neutral” coverage.

“Negative” coverage tends to arise during periods of conflict and tension between Indigenous groups and the rest of Canada, and it's worth noting, there were no significant conflicts during this period. While issues such as pipeline projects and protests continue to top news agendas when it comes to Indigenous issues, it shows promise that news outlets are displaying more care about penning “negative” editorials and opinion columns.

Why has there been a drop in “negative” tone? I attribute this change to one factor: the steady rise of social media. Indigenous peoples have skilfully embraced social media as a means to broadcast their own stories to the world. Indigenous voices are also responding rapidly to mainstream media coverage, holding newsrooms to account by offering critique when journalism is done poorly and rewarding news outlets that take Indigenous issues seriously by sharing widely stories that matter. Newsrooms are starting to take notice, because they cannot afford to lose audience-share in a rapidly splintering news environment.

Indigenous social media voices are also beginning to influence the mainstream news agenda. We see evidence of this in the data for 2014–15, when missing and murdered Indigenous women became the most covered Indigenous issue. Not because the issue itself was new — Indigenous women and girls have been going missing for decades with little notice by mainstream media outlets. What changed is that Indigenous activists and community members now have the means to broadcast stories that matter to them, and that has the ability to influence political agendas, which in turn forces the mainstream media to listen.

The biggest change, however, during the period of 2013–16 is not reflected in this data collected by Journalists for Human Rights — but I'm confident it will be in years to come.

First, we are seeing mainstream media outlets beginning to recognize the importance of increasing Indigenous voices in their newsrooms and their news



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coverage. These include efforts by CBC to create a new digital platform for Indigenous stories at CBC Indigenous, the creation of Indigenous staff positions at multiple news outlets across the country such as the *Globe and Mail* and CHEK-TV news in B.C., and the creation of Indigenous internships such as the CJF Aboriginal Journalism Fellowship. These steps promise to encourage young Indigenous people to pursue journalism, and that can only bode well for the quantity and tone of Indigenous news coverage.

Second, when Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) into Indian Residential Schools delivered its final report in 2015, the TRC zeroed in on the role of the press in Canada, citing contemporary media coverage of Indigenous issues as persistently fraught with misinformation and stereotypes.

"To ensure that the colonial press truly becomes a thing of the past in twenty-first-century Canada, the media must engage in its own acts of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples," wrote the TRC. In particular, Call

to Action #86 insisted journalism schools must do their part, by increasing the amount of Indigenous culture, history and politics in their curriculum.

Journalism schools across Ontario (and Canada) have responded to that Call to Action. Ryerson and Carleton University's journalism schools have launched new courses focussing on Indigenous issues, while other journalism schools have pledged to increase the amount of Indigenous content in the curriculum. These nascent efforts are encouraging, indeed, when it comes to arming journalists of the future with the skills they need to cover Indigenous communities properly.

As much as this round of data yet again shows a shameful neglect by Ontario media outlets when it comes to Indigenous coverage, I'm confident the data of the future will improve — because slowly but surely, mainstream media outlets are beginning to get the message: the status quo is unacceptable.

Award-winning journalist Duncan McCue is the host of CBC Radio One Cross Country Checkup. McCue was a reporter for CBC News in Vancouver for over 15 years. Now based in Toronto, his news and current affairs pieces continue to be featured on CBC's flagship news show, *The National*. McCue has spent years teaching journalism at the UBC Graduate School of Journalism and was recognized by the Canadian Ethnic Media Association with an Innovation Award for developing curriculum on Indigenous issues. He's also an author: his book *The Shoe Boy: A Trapline Memoir* recounts a season he spent in a hunting camp with a Cree family in northern Quebec as a teenager. McCue was previously the recipient of a Knight Fellowship, where he created an online guide for journalists called Reporting in Indigenous Communities ([www.riic.ca](http://www.riic.ca)). Before becoming a journalist, McCue studied English at the University of King's College, then Law at UBC. McCue is Anishinaabe and a member of the Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation in southern Ontario.



## EXPERT ANALYSIS: TANYA TALAGA

While it is heartening to see an increased presence of indigenous stories on the Ontario media landscape, moving from 0.3 per cent in 2013 to 0.5 per cent in 2016, the numbers are still dismal.

Ontario, Canada's largest province, has been late to the mainstream media awakening of the importance of reporting on Indigenous issues.

The headquarters of the largest media outlets in Canada are found in the Toronto area and traditionally, this region has not embraced or highlighted the importance of telling Indigenous stories. Toronto is a melting pot of cultures and Indigenous stories have often been lost in this mix.

Toronto is located on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of New Credit, the Haudenosaunee and the Huron-Wendat. Yet Toronto has always been a city obsessed with itself and how it is the centre of Canada's universe. Concentrated media ownership has reflected that and it filters down to coverage.

Ontario is also home to a large number of Indigenous people, some reports say as high as 300,000, yet the larger news outlets (except for the publicly-funded CBC) have often relegated coverage of First Nations issues to strictly political news stories, written by political reporters. A background in politics is immensely useful when trying to navigate what goes on behind the scenes in Ottawa, but it can often lead to a focus of adversarial reporting — who gets what, who said what and what gets done and what doesn't. That tone can be reflected in coverage.

Take, for example, that in June 2013 to May 2014, the number one Indigenous topic that received the most coverage was pipeline projects at 23 per cent. And from June 2014 to May 2015, protests and disputes were the second most covered issue at 13 per cent. (The first topic that received the most coverage in this time period was Indigenous women and that could be due to the release of the first RCMP report into MMIW deaths in May 2014 and Stephen Harper's government refusing to hold an inquiry.)

In privately-owned news organizations, the old saying is true, "If it bleeds, it leads." News coverage on something horrific often leads the day because that is what sells papers or gets viewers. Precious news resources in shrinking newsrooms are targeted to those events or issues.

Focus on Indigenous issues is improving but it is still spotty. Only recently has the Globe and Mail designated a full-time reporter to Indigenous affairs. Canadian Press, the nation's wire service, also has a reporter — based in Ottawa — focused on Indigenous issues. Ontario-based CTV — one of the largest private broadcasters — does not have a reporter or unit solely focused on these issues.

The CBC is a publicly funded broadcaster with more resources and a wider grasp with a mandate to cover Canada. It could be argued they have both a responsibility to help lead the way and they are. The broadcaster's creation of an Indigenous unit of reporters focused on a variety of issues is nudging the rest of us along.

“ Privately held mainstream media outlets are only now playing catch up because they finally realize Indigenous issues matter to Canadians.”

Privately held mainstream media outlets are only now playing catch up because they finally realize Indigenous issues matter to Canadians. The Canadian public — regardless of cultural background — are interested in nation building and they want to hear from Indigenous people. This may be seen in the June 2015 to March 2016 JHR numbers that show Truth and Reconciliation received the most coverage at 20 per cent.

Acceptance to TRC values could show further movement towards an inclusion of Indigenous voices in a variety of stories and topics. Hiring editors and writers of Indigenous backgrounds is essential for this change to happen. Only then will we truly move beyond “hard news” Indigenous stories and begin to see Indigenous points of view in sports pieces, lifestyle stories and entertainment articles.

For too long, there has been an old-school sentiment among some news editors to dissuade reporters from covering Indigenous stories because they feel it is a story that has been told before. It isn't new.

But Canadians are demanding we change that. Also helping is the fact that Indigenous youth are the fastest growing demographic in Canada and they are active social media users. (Statistics Canada says in 2006, 28 per cent of the urban Indigenous population were under 15 compared to 17 per cent of the non-Indigenous population.) Their growing appetite of more coverage about what concerns them and how they see the world will continue to influence media.

The last round of figures in the JHR analysis shows a slight upswing to 7,477 indigenous stories identified out of a total 1,449,422 Ontario stories from June 2015 to March 2016. The year before it was a dismal 4,302 identified stories out of 1,073,222.

Are we truly seeing a reflection of change in these numbers? Perhaps the next round of JHR numbers will tell us.

Tanya Talaga has been a journalist at the Toronto Star for 20 years. She focuses on foreign affairs and Indigenous issues. In 2015, Talaga was part of a team of reporters who won the Project of the Year National Newspaper Award for their series *Gone* on murdered and missing indigenous women and girls. The project was also jointly nominated, along with the CBC and the Globe and Mail, for a Michener Award in public service journalism. Talaga is of mixed ancestry. Her grandmother is a member of Fort William First Nation and her mom was raised outside of Thunder Bay. Talaga's first book, *Seven*, on the seven Indigenous students who died while at school in Thunder Bay, will be published by House of Anansi in 2017.



## EXPERT ANALYSIS: CONNIE WALKER

It is encouraging to read a report that confirms what some Indigenous journalists have been hypothesizing in recent years — that there has been a significant increase in the amount of coverage of Indigenous issues in Ontario.

In the six years that JHR has been compiling this in-depth research into the coverage of Indigenous issues in Ontario newsrooms, the amount of articles focussed on Indigenous issues has increased nearly seven times. According to the report, in 2010–2011, there were 1,084 Indigenous stories in Ontario. In 2015–2016 there were 7,477 stories.

We all know how dismal the state of reporting on these issues has been for decades, therefore it is heartening to read that coverage of Indigenous issues is slowly becoming a priority in newsrooms.

As a journalist working in one of those newsrooms, I think we can attribute the increase to the rise of digital journalism. Finally, editors have concrete proof — in the form of metrics — that there is indeed an audience for these stories and they are important to Canadians.

Now that mainstream media organizations have a spotlight on Indigenous news, the coverage that reflects the diversity within Indigenous communities and provides a better reflection of our realities is more important than ever.

According to the report, issues like Truth and Reconciliation and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women have captured Canadians' attention. It is incredibly important to continue to deepen that

understanding and move beyond the typical superficial coverage of crisis or conflict-based reporting on Indigenous issues. In order to empower audiences to have informed dialogue about these complex issues, newsrooms need to continue to push these stories.

“ The experiences and perspectives of Indigenous journalists are integral to newsrooms in pursuit of the truth about life for Indigenous people living in Canada.”

Along with the increased coverage, there has also been a considerable decrease in the percentage of negative stories. In 2012–2013, 39 per cent of the stories about Indigenous issues had a “negative tone,” while in 2014–2015 that statistic was 9 per cent. Hopefully, the overall increase in coverage has also allowed for a shift from the usual crisis/conflict based reporting to provide a more nuanced approach to Indigenous stories.

We can only hope these findings result in a recognition of the importance of having Indigenous journalists



We can attribute the increase to the rise of digital journalism. Finally, editors have concrete proof – in the form of metrics – that there is indeed an audience for these stories and they are important to Canadians.”

help tell those stories. I would be interested in any research about number of Indigenous journalists in newsrooms in Ontario and how that could impact the types of coverage. The experiences and perspectives of Indigenous journalists are integral to newsrooms in pursuit of the truth about life for Indigenous people living in Canada.

As encouraging as this overall trend is, it is important to recognize that there is still more work to be done.

The report found Indigenous stories made up only 0.5 per cent of the total stories in 2015–2016. Our stories continue to be underrepresented and often misrepresented which is problematic for many reasons. In order to combat harmful stereotypes and misconceptions, we need to be accurately depicting Indigenous experiences in the media.

However, if JHR’s research is any indications, we can expect to continue to see an increase in coverage of Indigenous stories in Ontario.

Connie Walker is the lead reporter for CBC Indigenous, a position she has held since 2013. She grew up on Okanese First Nation and attended the University of Regina. While a student at the First Nations University of Canada (then SFIC), she received a Joan Donaldson scholarship to intern at CBC. She also worked for the youth consumer show Street Cents while a student. Following her graduation, Walker took a permanent position with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. She served as host of Living Saskatchewan, and served as a reporter and producer for CBC News: Sunday and flagship news show, The National. In the fall of 2009 Walker became a correspondent for Connect with Mark Kelley. Okanese, a personal documentary Walker produced, about the community in which she grew up, earned an honourable mention at the Columbus International Film & Video Festival. In 2013, Walker helped produce the acclaimed 8th Fire documentary on contemporary issues for First Nations people.



# CONCLUSIONS

## 1. WE CAN SEE, AND DOCUMENT, SLOW CHANGE

As this present report demonstrates, we are slowly seeing emerging trends in the Canadian media landscape. Firstly, we are seeing a steady increase in Indigenous story production, from an average of 10 stories per day in the first year to an average of 24.9 in the last. While the total number of stories produced increased overall in the three years observed, Indigenous stories still only represent about 0.5 per cent of all print and online news stories in Ontario, falling well below what might be considered an equitable share of the media market. However, from the first year of the first study to the last year of this one, we can note a near sevenfold increase in the number of Indigenous stories being produced, a clear sign that journalists are taking note of the inherent importance of these pieces.

Secondly, we have noted a significant shift in how Indigenous stories are presented in terms of tone. During the first *Buried Voices* study, stories with negative tone associated with them peaked in the final year at 39 per cent. However, in the final year of the present study, we observe that number drastically drop to 11 per cent. This suggests that the tone used to cover Indigenous stories has changed. The reasons for this: that Indigenous coverage is being pushed from editorial columns — where subjectivity, opinion and bias are more likely to appear — to news pages — where traditional journalistic standards of objectivity are more likely to reign.

## 2. INDIGENOUS STORIES ARE CANADIAN STORIES, FOR CANADIAN AUDIENCES

As Jorge Barrera points out in his analysis of this report, Indigenous stories have far-reaching impact across the country. “Indigenous stories consistently trigger

such heated reactions from Canadians — including anger, sadness and outright racism — that many news organizations have chosen to no longer allow public comments on the online version of these pieces,” he writes. This means that Indigenous stories are not simply niche stories for a small audience. Indeed, these stories touch on issues of national reconciliation, child welfare and basic human rights: issues that find landing in all sectors of the Canadian demographic, which is one possible explanation of why Ontario outlets are increasing production of Indigenous stories.

## 3. DIVERSITY IN NEWSROOMS IS KEY TO DIVERSITY IN NEWS COVERAGE

A multitude of viewpoints leads to a multitude of ideas. As we slowly move towards more diversification in newsrooms, we are starting to see Indigenous journalists push for stories that have been kept underrepresented for far too long. As Duncan McCue points out, the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women is not a new one — in fact, it’s been identified as a problem for decades — but has now been pushed into the national spotlight. Without knowledge of what’s happening in Indigenous communities and the conversations held around kitchen tables, it becomes increasingly difficult to gain the necessary access to report on these national stories. This means that it’s integral for newsrooms to continue to seek out a multitude of Indigenous viewpoints — acknowledging that no one single ‘Indigenous voice’ exists — to include as many points of view as possible, including those of non-Status and Two-Spirit individuals.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The inaugural *Buried Voices* recommended the inclusion of Indigenous curriculum in journalism school offerings, fostering stronger relationships

between Indigenous communities and journalists, the creation of more spaces for Indigenous reporters in newsrooms and broadening the scope of Indigenous news coverage. All of these recommendations still hold true and continue to be worthwhile goals to move towards. However, in light of the results and analyses of this updated report, the following might be added to the list of recommended actions:

### 1. INVESTIGATION INTO THE CULTURAL MAKE-UP OF CANADIAN NEWSROOMS TO SEE WHERE POTENTIAL GAPS IN POINTS OF VIEW MAY EXIST

As diversification of newsrooms is key to generating novel and newsworthy stories, it is becoming increasingly clear that Indigenous voices have not been adequately represented in newsrooms. A 2006 study by John Miller showed that only 3.4 per cent of newsgathering staff in Canada were non-white minorities. Thankfully, we are seeing change in this area, from the internships that JHR offers to emerging Indigenous journalists to independent opportunities created by the Globe and Mail, CHEK-TV and the Canadian Journalism Foundation. As Connie Walker points out, “The experiences and perspectives of Indigenous journalists are integral to newsrooms in pursuit of the truth about life for Indigenous people living in Canada.”

But it still remains unclear: have recent efforts to include more Indigenous voices in newsrooms been drops in a bucket or tide-turning waves? An updated nation-wide study should be executed to fully investigate the cultural make-up of newsrooms to evaluate how viewpoints are represented and where more diversification might be necessary.

### 2. FULFIL THE TRC'S RECOMMENDATIONS

The Truth and Reconciliation report on the full extent of Residential Schools captivated a nation. For days,

it made headlines, representing 20 per cent of all Indigenous stories documented in the last year of this study. The TRC also released 94 recommendations, calling on all sectors of Canadian society to take part in the reconciliation process. As the report identifies: “Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one.” Of those recommendations, three were directly aimed at media, and they advocated for continued support for the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, increased funding for CBC and a push for journalism schools to offer specific courses on how to cover Indigenous stories and peoples.

These recommendations align directly with the challenges and opportunities identified in this report and the fulfillment of them has the potential to greatly increase the quality and quantity of Indigenous stories and voices in Canadian media, thereby creating a stronger and more diverse media strata in the country.

### 3. A SHIFT AWAY FROM 'ISSUE-REPORTING' TOWARDS A MORE HOLISTIC APPROACH

As Cindy Blackstock illustrates in her analysis, the case of institutional racism that has affected the lives of 163,000 First Nations children should not be a flash-in-the-pan story. However, she noted that coverage of the story was “sparse and short-lived”, making it seem like she and other child welfare advocates were “screaming into silence”.

This is a clear example of media taking groundbreaking stories that stem from Indigenous communities and slotting them as niche issues, thereby stunting their ability to grow into stories that spread across beats and editorial sections. As Jorge Barrera points out: “Covering Indigenous ‘issues’ is not the same as covering the justice beat, the health beat or the immigration beat. It is more like covering a city, a region or a province.”

This suggests that newsrooms would do well to make a shift away from covering Indigenous stories as issues and move towards a more holistic approach that captures the breadth and depth of Indigenous experiences in Canada. Such a move would prove to be beneficial empowering readers to develop deeper understanding of centuries-long stories.

Such a profound change is unlikely to happen in earnest without true diversification of the newsroom. As Tanya Talaga says: “Hiring editors and writers of Indigenous backgrounds is essential for this change to happen. Only then will we truly move beyond ‘hard news’ Indigenous stories and begin to see Indigenous points of view in sports pieces, lifestyle stories and entertainment articles.”

Summing up, we will use the words of TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson, who has emphasized the following throughout: “The ongoing challenge is to be very clear about what you mean by ‘Indigenous stories,’” she says. “I, for example, have always strongly insisted that the TRC is a Canadian story — and meaningful reconciliation can only happen if a wider swath of Canadian society begins to get its head wrapped around that.”

– **MEEGWETCH, THANK YOU, MERCI.**

*Miles Kenyon, Lenny Carpenter, Hannah Clifford, Rachel Pulfer and the team at Journalists for Human Rights*

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