

Goodes above the pack



Mainstream Australia rejects the toxic attacks on Adam Goodes

PATRICIA KARVELAS



An angry minority is hunting Adam Goodes in his post-football career. This hatred for the AFL legend drips with racism. The irrefutable goal seems to be to destroy his career as punishment for standing up for himself and against racism. At the heart of this struggle is a crisis of Australian identity and an argument over whether racism is real, or imagined by indigenous people who supposedly play "victim".

The haters can no longer hide behind their lie that their booing and ongoing attacks on Goodes are a reaction to the way he plays footy. It was never about staging for free kicks. The anger has mostly always been about the strong stance Goodes has taken on racism and his fearless language on the historic and contemporary role of indigenous Australians.

David Jones this week unveiled Goodes as one of six brand ambassadors for the department store, featuring him in its It's In You advertising campaign. The outpouring of visceral anger on social media in response to the decision has exposed the racial divisions that still exist in Australia. Goodes has again been maligned for being "ungrateful" when he was Australian of the Year, again attacked for playing the "race card".


This glimpse of our ugly underbelly poses a renewed challenge for our nation to unlearn racism. If we ignore this challenge, if we repress it, pretend it isn't real, our long-term efforts to achieve reconciliation will remain elusive.

Goodes, by holding up a mirror to us all, has become the lightning rod for a desperately needed conversation. The online bullying he endured this week is to our collective shame, and our project must be to confront and eliminate it for the sake of young indigenous Australians who are watching. These attempts at intimidation send the message that if you stand up, if you dare to challenge the status quo, you will be stalked.

I waded through many of the comments on the David Jones Facebook page on Monday. In some of them the racism wasn't subtle or passive. It was hostile, hateful, and vindictive. One read: "You don't see any Aboriginal people shopping at David Jones, it's too expensive lol." Others were even worse. An image of a "race

UGLY FACES OF RACISM

Some of the comments that flooded the David Jones Facebook page after the department store announced Adam Goodes would feature in its It's In You campaign

Dave Lawler Don't think I've ever seen an Abo in David Jones before let alone one in a monkey suit #Tim Nelson #Bobby Lang 

Like Reply 4 · 5 hours ago · Edited

James Taylor You don't see many aboriginals shopping at David Jones, it's too expensive lol

Like Reply 3 · 16 hours ago

Rodney Austin He hates everything white why doesn't he wear his aborigine outfit and then throw a spear down the walkway. He is a wanker

Like Reply 7 · 11 hours ago

Eddie King Get real the lot of you. The man's a tosser in every sense. Watch him aggressively pointing out a dissenting spectator who happens to be a thirteen year old girl, see him hurl his imaginary culture (¼ black, ¾ white scotch etc shaken and stirred), and listen to him whine and whinge as Australian of the year, no less, and then tell me he's not a crock.

Like Reply 53 minutes ago

Helen Holland What a disgrace David Jones, only the AFL footballers support this choice. He made such a fuss over a little girls comments, what a man!!

Rhonda Anthony OMG i cannot believe this. What happens when he gets booed on the catwalk, will he run off crying! I am sure it will happen.

Like Reply 5 · 17 hrs

Todd Pantland DJ's new reward card



card" was there; also a comment about a "monkey suit". It was toxic, and it affects us all.

"Didn't really like David Jones as a store or chain but can be sure I will never set foot or spend a cent in there now," one comment said.

"David Jones where all the sooks go," said another.

Others just wrote "boo", a reference to the repeated booing that haunted the last part of Goodes's stellar football career.

What struck me most was the mob mentality, the "pile on": it felt like the haters, who were in many cases using their own names and Facebook profiles (several have since disappeared) took great pleasure in slandering Goodes. It was a blood sport.

It was a stark reminder that Aboriginal Australians who step out and have a voice will be subject to the same kind of attacks to keep them in their place.

When Goodes declined the in-

itation for a prestigious lap of honour to mark his retirement at the AFL grand final this year, it demonstrated how relentless the hatred has been. He left without any of the pomp and ceremony delivered to others, and which he richly deserved.

A short time later, he requested that he should not be considered for the Madden medal, which recognises the contribution of departing players to the sport and community.

This followed a period earlier in the year when he took time out from football after he was booed by fans in Perth in round 17.

Goodes's exit from elite football was marked by a great sense of sadness. There was a strong feeling that the bullies had won.

His re-entry into public life this week as a David Jones brand ambassador was a statement that he was not beaten or destroyed and that he would continue to feature



DJs' new ambassador Adam Goodes, main picture, and with Michael O'Loughlin, above, after his final Swans game

in public life; that he would not surrender.

It is not surprising David Jones sought Goodes out. His contribution to indigenous affairs and racial tolerance is impressive. He doesn't merely talk the talk — he has made reconciliation central to his life.

In 2004, he was invited to join the National Indigenous Council, an advisory body to the Howard government. Since that time, Goodes has become a hero to indigenous Australians.

In 2009, he set up the Goodes-O'Loughlin Foundation with indigenous friend and teammate Michael O'Loughlin. The GO Foundation's vision is to create a brighter future for indigenous children through funding scholarships and assisting with a smooth transition to quality schools. GO partners with the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation and aims to fund scholarships for 10 to 15 young indigenous people this year.

Goodes and O'Loughlin provide direct mentoring for the recipients and use GO Foundation connections in the corporate world to provide pathways to jobs.

Goodes is marketing gold for David Jones because he sends a powerful message about resilience, strength, longevity and achievement. Despite the racists and stalkers seeking to paint him as a divisive and tarnished character, he is anything but that. David Jones has made a strategic marketing decision to stand with Adam because he stands out as a leader and a winner.

The fact the department store faced a social media campaign of racism and denigrating commentary about Goodes sends an important warning to us all.

Marcia Langton, a prominent indigenous academic at the University of Melbourne, tells Inquirer it is important to "call out the racism" rather than ignore it in an effort to starve individuals of oxygen.

"On balance, you can't ignore

it," she says. "We all need to confront it and to call it out."

But she says it is important to focus on the bigger picture — and remember that the racist slander is not typical of mainstream Australia and that such sentiment has been decreasing.

"More Australians than ever have now met an indigenous person, have experience with Aboriginal people, and that contact has been changing racist sentiments," she says.

'They hate Adam because he is so successful and he won't stay silent'

MARCIA LANGTON
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE

"These racists booing Adam or getting on social media to attack David Jones are not representative of where most of Australia now stands on these issues. They feel angry that their ideas about Aboriginal people are no longer acceptable. They hate Adam because he is so successful and he won't stay silent. He challenges racism, and it is confronting to a small minority who do not want to see black people empowered unless it's on their terms."

Langton says the ascent of Pauline Hanson had been accompanied by increased racism in Australia, and she fears that emerging hard-Right groups could be inflaming race tensions.

She is right about the sentiments of mainstream Australia. Racists, bullies and morons no doubt used social media to denigrate Goodes, but there are now Australians drowning the David Jones Facebook page with praise.

Virginia Choy writes: "Great work David Jones for using Adam and Jessica as your ambassadors. We're finally seeing more diversity in mainstream marketing campaigns. You'll remain my first stop department store!"

And there are hundreds more posts just like Choy's, applauding the decision and promising to vote with their wallets.

Warren Mundine, chairman of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council, says this "whole episode has been a disgrace. The booing and continued racial attacks against Adam Goodes are directed at him for standing up against racial abuse."

"The good news is it is only a small bunch of trolls who need to pull their heads in and have a good look at themselves and their disgraceful behaviour," Mundine tells Inquirer. "The support from the large majority of Australians for Adam makes me proud to be an Australian."

The Australian Indigenous Education Foundation's chief executive Andrew Penfold says Goodes is an important role model because he is a man of integrity. "He came from very humble beginnings, with a loving mother who encouraged and supported him," Penfold tells Inquirer. "He took a difficult decision at an early age to move away from home, away from all of his friends and family, to seek success in his chosen field in a city that was foreign to him."

"Through his sheer hard work, tenacity and determination, he achieved the pinnacle of success in his field. Yet the success has never changed him or his values. He remains a man with a deep sense of values and convictions, and a man who is humble and authentic in everything he does. He has never allowed his success to breed arrogance or hubris. He's a man who always puts the good of the group ahead of the individual."

"Adam gives indigenous kids a sense of hope and aspiration of what greatness looks like and therefore provides something for them to aspire to."

"But it's not just indigenous kids, these are the values that represent the Australian character: hard work, determination, tenacity, being humble, inspiring hope in others through example rather than words. Putting the collective good ahead of the individual. Being a good bloke."

To cast Australia as fundamentally racist is to misunderstand where the mainstream stands on these issues today. Australia has a racist past — it is undeniable and can't be changed. There can be no doubt that some of that historical racism persists: we have seen it on the football field and we are now seeing it in the toxic social media world that allows it a megaphone like never before.

But we are bigger than this, and we are seeing a grassroots response from ordinary Australians who are standing up against racism and side by side with indigenous Australians like never before.

This is the Australian story we need to tell.

Patricia Karvelas is the presenter of Radio National's Drive program from 6pm to 7.30pm.