

2016-25: Paul Olsen vs Chronicle-Journal

*For immediate release*

The National NewsMedia Council has dismissed a complaint from Paul Olsen about a May 4, 2016 article, “Too many little white lies”, in the Thunder Bay Chronicle-Journal.

The complainant objected to the article as being racist and an attack on white people. He alleged it represents a double standard in that a similar article or words about black people and ‘black lies’ would not be published. The complainant called the headline misleading, as he felt no lies were cited in the article. He also raised concerns that the story will promote further divisiveness in a city where race relations are strained.

The paper acknowledged that racism is a prominent concern in the community, and noted it has published many stories and commentaries exploring the issue from various perspectives. It said the views of the speaker are debatable, but it is important to put views in the public spotlight for scrutiny. The event described in the article had been the subject of advance notice and was well attended.

The article is a straight-forward report on a workshop held at a public library, led by a person with experience working in corrections and mental health. The article reports in quotes and in paraphrase that the workshop leader stated Canada has a past built on genocidal practices, and that Canada’s identity as polite and a peacekeeper is used as a tool to cover up an “ugly” true identity. The article also reports the speaker’s view on society’s responsibility for structures that created problems, and his workshop goal of challenging perspectives.

The paper said its role is to foster community deliberation on the topic, and provided letters to the editor that were prompted by the article, with writers both in support of and opposed to the speaker’s views.

In dismissing the complaint, the NewsMedia Council found the article covers an event of community interest, held at a public venue. It meets the paper’s goal of presenting perspectives on public issues, and meets journalistic standards of providing an interchange of information, opinion and interests.

The viewpoint presented may be perceived as discomforting, but there is no evidence the article is racist, defined in the Canadian Oxford Dictionary as “a belief in the superiority of a particular race, or antagonism towards other races, especially as a result of prejudice”.

The speaker’s statement that “Canada is built on genocide” may be controversial, but given that similar findings around the practices and impact of colonialism have been documented by authorities including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, it is not an error of fact.

The headline was not misleading, in that the article reported the speaker’s view that Canada’s positive identity is used to “cover up” a different identity.