

# Court's gong is a distraction. The real crusade is to make the unacceptable acceptable

Court's controversy – why offering someone with a known record of bigotry one of Australia's highest honours is a calculated move to normalise repugnant opinions.



Lobbing Australia's highest honour at Margaret Court was a fiendishly clever thing to do. The outrage was anticipated and desired; that's why the news was, unusually, leaked days early. Playing progressive Australia off a break, the reactionaries who run the country urged us to look over there, and we did. ;Meanwhile, the broader scheme moves ahead.

The game here is not the endless culture warring annually provoked at this time of year by some freshly appalling act of insensitivity — that is meat and bones for the Coalition parties and Murdoch press, and it keeps the “left” distracted.

The real game was unsubtly re-introduced when Tony Abbott was our prime minister, brutally stumbling along the path the infinitely smarter John Howard had laid. Central to the campaign to turn Australia backwards once more was the violent assault on the *Racial Discrimination Act*. There is a straight line of sight between Attorney-General George Brandis' famous statement — [that we all have the right to be bigots](#), you know — and the official celebration of [Court's overt faith-based bigotry](#).

Court, on the record, holds extreme opinions on the right to existence of LGBTIQ people. She was [a fan of apartheid](#). If her values are mainstream, then contemporary Australia is indistinguishable from Puritan New England.

Elevating her to the status that Companionship of the Order of Australia conveys sends a clear message: that the holding of bigoted views, provided they are asserted as connected to religious belief, has been normalised in Australia, or rather re-normalised, as a protected attribute. That is to say, it is a human right.

Anti-discrimination laws are all about protected attributes, such as gender, disability, age or LGBTIQ status. The push to add religious belief to the list is temporarily quieted, but will be renewed, and it is directly linked to the normalisation process. The idea is to assert that religious belief is a human right, requiring legal protection from discrimination. Its peculiarity is that it includes attitudes towards others and the right to act on those attitudes, such as denying that a gay man has the same rights as a straight one, or asserting that he is the devil's servant.

Insisting that Court's attitudes, which are repugnant to most Australians, must not disqualify her from any of the fruits that polite society offers its achievers says that her bigotry is not just forgivable or tolerable but acceptable. This is identical to the "both sides" logic that is bringing white supremacists back within the boundaries of social acceptance.

The hypocrisy of it all is nauseating, coming from the side of politics and media that routinely silences discordant voices with every weapon at its disposal. However, getting angry at that also just plays into their hands.

Little by little, outrage by outrage, we are being conditioned to tolerate once more ideas, beliefs and values that were discarded decades ago as the detritus of a less evolved age.

It is intolerable. Tony Abbott just joined the Institute of Public Affairs with responsibility for defending mainstream Australian values. Outrageous and ridiculous? Yes. But also part of the game.

If we want to win the game, we have to understand the rules by which it is being played. This is not a culture war. It's a crusade.

*Should Margaret Court's attitudes and beliefs disqualify her from receiving honours? Let us know your thoughts by writing to [letters@crikey.com.au](mailto:letters@crikey.com.au). Please include your full name to be considered for publication in Crikey's Your Say column.*

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Michael Bradley is a freelance writer and managing partner at Sydney firm Marque Lawyers, which was created in 2008 with the singular ambition of completely changing the way law is practised.

