

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From: Aletha Penrith, Tunerong, Yorta Yorta, Thaua****Dated:** 1 April 2024**Submission:**

I am a part of a unique group who are both native and descended from African American slaves. I need to make clear that I am a part of a group who have been whitewashed and ethnically cleansed.

As a woman who is both African - American, the descendant of slaves and Tunnerong, I am a minority within a minority.

My father practiced, as was incorporated into the tribal group during the time of my great grandmother's passage to Australia from Louisiana, Vodun and Native practices. He was initiated in Western Australia into men's law, and was kept a slave, as were his grandmother's people, under the Aboriginal Assimilation Act and Protection Act. His grandmother, Janey Morey, was trafficked to Erambie Mission in Wiradjuri country NSW, in the mid - late 18th century. But he was born in my mother's father's lands, on Wallaga Lake. From here was kidnapped by the state government along with his younger brother, Richard Murray. On this land, an agreement was made between King Merrimen (my great grandfather's brother), and the State. He was recognized as a King. This trade was never honoured.

My mother's matrilineal lines' country is Tunnerong. Her ancestors are woven across the state of Victoria, and into Queensland. Her mother's brother was Burnam Burnam, activist, political strategist, author, warrior. Her name was Irene McRae. Their mother, Lilian McRae. Sister to Angeline Morgan whose family ties to Coranderk remain outstanding in our family history. I myself practice both Indigenous cultural practices and ceremony as well as that of my father's African American heritage, Vodun.

Indeed, many descendants of the transatlantic slave trade world-wide have settled and married into Indigenous peoples. And are considered unique. Victoria is not separate to this history. Being able to speak this in 2024 says knowing who I am and where I come from, the complex geopolitics of what I am, could not be, possible without my connection to country. It's bringing me courage. Honor. And self-respect.

It nourishes my spirit from the poison of the colony, and the corporate entities that enslaved my ancestors in a post-colonial world. It brings me serenity. And allows me to pay homage, to heal, to create. Here I hear my ancestors speak. I see their world. I hear their language.

We have become a caste system monitored, policed and controlled to limit our freedom. We have been denied our heritage, and trade rights and routes. We have been forced to be beggars in a colony. Corrupted for shackles. Forced to wear the white man's presence on our bodies. Our skin colour raped white to emulate and become the assimilated product.

Examples of good practices or programs include family history research project funding. Free access to university education at all levels to enhance research skills is needed. And more resources into creative arts, prioritizing artists who have tribal lands in Victoria regardless of their medium. There also needs to be funding for cultural camping.

We need policies to prevent institutionalization of Indigenous peoples. We need better resourced housing programs. We need to see taxes on flights over Indigenous lands and cheaper international flights to research and participate in cultural exchanges to mark our footprint on the global stage and educate publics about genocide here. We need preservation of waterways. And we need our land returned and compensated.

END OF SUBMISSION