

Submission to Yoorrook Justice Commission**From:** Joanna Cruickshank**Dated:** November 2024**Submission:****What do you know about the colonisation of Victoria and its impacts on First Peoples?**

I know that colonisation had a devastating impact that continues today through colonial structures and systems. Colonisers, including my own ancestors, violently invaded these lands and dispossessed Aboriginal people through massacres, segregation and assimilation. I know that the invasion of these lands was the most rapid and violent in the history of the British Empire, and was accomplished through sheep and cattle as well as human beings. I know that unlike in other colonies of the British Empire, no treaty was signed (other than the fraudulent 'Batman Treaty') and the sovereignty of First Peoples was denied at every turn. I know that Aboriginal people were not only prevented from practicing the law and culture that arises from this land, but also deprived of the basic rights available under colonial and Australian law. I know that the so-called Protection system was a form of paternalistic violence that sought to permanently infantilise First Peoples. I know that children were stolen from their families and brainwashed to hate themselves, creating lasting generational trauma. I know that racist ideologies were developed to justify all of this. These forms of violence continue today through the 'justice system', the 'health' and 'education' system as well. I know that Country is sick because of the greedy, ignorant, rapacious ways that white invaders have lived here and that First Peoples live with trauma and discrimination under occupation. Climate change, species loss, pollution are all the result of colonisation and colonial ways of living. I know that invasion is an ongoing structure, not a past event. I also know that First Peoples have always resisted occupation in a thousand different ways that are creative, resilient and powerful, so that sovereign First Peoples are still here and always will be. I know that there is a profound history of leadership by elders and also of the rekindling of language and culture by recent generations.

What has been your experience learning about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system? Do you feel it was comprehensive?

I did not grow up in Victoria (or Australia) but I am a university lecturer in history at a Victorian university. Mature-age students tell me that they learned nothing about First Nations history and culture in Victoria's education system. Those who are coming through now as school leavers have more exposure to First Nations history and culture but it is still very limited. Particularly, there is no commitment to explaining the connection between past injustice and present systems. Dispossession and violence are often seen as things that happened in the past, with no recognition of how colonial systems continue to do harm in the present and how the whole Australian system of property-ownership, policing, education etc. relies on the dispossession of First Peoples. For example, students now are all very aware of the Stolen Generations, but they see this as something that happened in the past and not something that continues in increasing ways in the present.

What changes would you like to see in Victoria to promote better understanding and respect for First People?

I think that until First Peoples are given real power to make decisions for themselves and also to exercise their sovereign rights in relation to Country, educating non-Indigenous people about the past

and the present will always have limited impact. For this reason, I think Treaty is crucial, not as a symbolic gesture, but as a genuine shift in the balance of power in the system. This will also give non-Indigenous people a legitimate grounds on which they can belong in this place, as long as they are in right relations with Country and the people who speak as Country.

In what ways do you think non-First Nations Victorians can contribute to the process of truth-telling and treaty?

- We need to educate ourselves - First Peoples have done a vast amount of work in truth-telling, we need to listen to this. Specifically, - we need to understand what we need to do and know to be trustworthy and competent treaty partners. - We can lobby and vote to support Treaty, particularly given the political shift against truth-telling and treaty in other states - We can talk to our friends, family and neighbours about the truth of our history and point them to Indigenous sources to understand this. - We can identify how we personally have benefited from colonisation and identify ways we can seek to make amends/reparations personally and collectively. In particular. we can give land back and/or pay the rent and convince the non-governmental organisations we are part of (churches, businesses, charities etc.) to do the same

In what ways could First Peoples history and culture be promoted in Victoria?

'- through naming and commemoration practices that make First Peoples' history and sovereignty visible - eg. renaming Melbourne as Naarm or officially introducing a dual name (Naarm Melbourne) - teaching First Peoples' languages in schools and using these languages in official documents etc (obviously resources will need to be given towards language reclamation etc.) - resourcing schools and teachers to teach Indigenous history and culture/local histories of colonisation and Indigenous resistance/resilience - anti-racism education that explains that racism is a system designed to suppress Indigenous sovereignty and exploit Indigenous bodies and places for profit, not simply personal prejudice/discrimination - through research projects that centre First Peoples' voices and are guided by First Peoples' protocols and leadership. I have been part of a project like this that tells the history of Coranderrk and was undertaken in partnership with Wurundjeri leaders and First Peoples organisations and scholars - outcomes included the play, Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country, several books, resources for school teachers and a website: <http://www.minutesofevidence.com.au>

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