

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

I had the enormous honour to work for a time as an historian at the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and later to work with Auntie Fay Muir on a book which explored both the impact of colonisation on the Kulin people, and their concerted resistance to the invasion. The work challenged my deep ignorance about what happened to the First People of Naarm and has been life-changing. It is a history of extraordinary courage, determination and survival on one hand, and gross abuse and inhumanity on the other. There were always allies and there was always the belief in white supremacy that drove British imperialism. Survival and revival has been dear-bought and speaks to the extraordinary depth of culture and connection to Country and Kin.

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 my schooling in the 1960s and we learned almost nothing about First Peoples' culture, language and history. Social Darwinism still dominated institutional and everyday thinking in those days. (And arguably still does across the nation)

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

I think the Treaty process will be very important as has been the Yoorrook Commission. The testimony and records of the Commission should be made mandatory study for Late secondary students. Q5. In what ways do you think non-First Nations Victorians can contribute to the process of truth-telling and treaty? Listening. And I suppose speaking truths about our own continuing prejudices and ignorances. But first, listening.

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

School curriculum at all levels. The Deaths in Custody and Bringing Them Home reports should also be studied. Opening up the juvenile prison system: letting the overrepresented kids in that system and their families tell us about their lives across generations. The continuing over representation of Indigenous children in juvenile justice and non-kin foster care is criminal.

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