

# Dreaming of a better future for First Nations peoples

[Sherry Balcombe](#)

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When I heard the news of the killing of George Floyd I was really sad, but not the least surprised. Now I am actually hopeful that something will be done to stop the ingrained racism in this country. Most Australians choose not to see it.



I see Aboriginal deaths all the time in *The Koori Mail* and the *National Indigenous Times* as well as the news on Facebook. We as a community share the information in the hope that the wider community will see what we see and demand that things change.

The racism in this country is a disgrace and unless you've experienced it then you just don't understand what it is like to be Aboriginal.

I remember when I went to Aotearoa New Zealand I was shocked at how respected and acknowledged the Maori people were, truly shocked and ashamed that my people are treated so badly here.

My people have been fighting oppression for far too long. If you are angry about the treatment of Black people in the USA then you should be angry, very angry, about the treatment of Aboriginal people in your own country.

In the 1950s my father, Valentine Moloney, was a guest of the communist countries where he promoted Aboriginal human rights. His comments on returning were 'I am no longer an Aborigine. I am now a Communist. It is the first time in my life (early 30's) that I have been treated with dignity and all my fellow Aboriginal Brothers and Sisters deserve the same'.

'I long to see a new Australia that prides itself on the treatment of First Nations Peoples, that reveres the cultural heritage of this land; where every child who goes to school learns about the First Nations people as the Guardians and protectors of Mother Earth.'

Are we treated with dignity? Are we treated with respect?

We have to be tougher, more vigilant, second thinking about everything, always on time or we are judged. This is a fact. I have faced racism throughout my life from early primary school. My children have all faced racism head on, in schools and workplace just because they identify and are proud. They have called out racism as I have done and I am proud that they have.

For me the judging is not for being Black, but for not being Black enough! I am constantly questioned on the percentage of my Aboriginality. I can be judged as being not 'really Aboriginal'! We as Aboriginal people must be more diligent, more punctual, more professional... because we are not judged like everyone else. There is a double standard in this country.

There was a push from media and government for the protest march to stop. The media used scare tactics, warnings that it was going to be a violent protest. I think is like trying to incite violence.

When is a good time? In three months? Years from now when this is all over? When everyone has forgotten about George Floyd and gone back to their 'normal lives'?

We have waited so long for Justice and now is the time to stand up with our Brothers and Sisters in Australia and from around the world and say racism is not acceptable, racism is ugly, every person should be treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their skin colour.

There have been more than 430 Aboriginal Deaths in custody since 1991. There have been no convictions. There was an inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody 30 years ago. We wait for the recommendations to be implemented. We are the most incarcerated race of people on this planet.

The voices of those who are mistreated in the criminal system are rarely heard. The voiceless are too scared to complain against police or too powerless to fight back.

These are just my thoughts and reflections.

I long to see a new Australia that prides itself on the treatment of First Nations Peoples, that reveres the cultural heritage of this land; where every child who goes to school learns about the First Nations people as the Guardians and protectors of Mother Earth.

I am longing for our next generations to learn how we lived off the land and respected and cared for it like our Mother. How we had over 500 Aboriginal Nations in every inch of this Great South Land and how we survived two ice ages and megafauna to be the longest continuous race on the face of this planet earth.

I watched in shock and disbelief as Americans rioted across their country. Such was their horror that they drew a line in the sand and said 'no more'.

We know what it is like to face racism every day, to fear for our children just because of the colour of our skin. Here in Australia the murmuring was getting louder they were starting to rumble, about Black deaths in custody. We were groaning and people's hearts were hurting because we know how black people feel.

We protest, we march here, but no one hears us. Our message is always ignored or brushed under the carpet. Now we fear that people will say 'Yes it's sad but what can we do? It is in America, it's not here'.

Guess what it is here, it has always been here and it is not going anywhere, not unless we stand up to it.

'It will be a better place for my grandchildren. They will not be judged by their skin colour, they will be a gift to their country and they will walk in two worlds and they will share their culture with the world. They will do it with dignity. That is what this is about it is about, having dignity, being proud of your race and not being discriminated against because you are Aboriginal.'

I had no intention of going to the march. We have been isolating since February and I am scared of the coronavirus but my children insisted. They made posters and they showed their passion how could I not go? How could I not stand up for my family, for my grandchildren, and denounce the blatant racism in this country it is now or never!

We wore gloves, we had face masks. What will be will be. This is about solidarity. This is about dignity. This is about being human and being hurt by bigotry and racism.

We were told that we have disrespected Australia by doing this but what about Us?

When is a good time? When will it be okay two months two years' time? So as we drove up Victoria Parade toward the Exhibition Gardens I was overcome with emotion and I cried.

Do you know how many times I have joined the NAIDOC march and been heckled from the footpaths? How many times we have marched for our rights and been ignored? Hundreds.

And now the streets were packed there were thousands of people there to march in solidarity with us. It was so incredibly heartening. Australia is growing. The only time I have felt this atmosphere was in Sydney in the 1988 march on Australia Day. But this time was different very different it was predominately young people under the age of 30. They get it, they do see it.

I have much hope for the future; not for my generation it is too late for us. But the next generation will hopefully stamp out this systemic racism that is so much part of Australia's fabric. They will change things for the better and this world.

It will be a better place for my grandchildren. They will not be judged by their skin colour, they will be a gift to their country and they will walk in two worlds and they will share their culture with the world. They will do it with dignity. That is what this is about it is about, having dignity, being proud of your race and not being discriminated against because you are Aboriginal.

As Martin Luther King Jr said 'I have a dream'. Will you join me on this journey? Will you teach your children about the oldest longest continuous culture on this planet? Will you teach them that we must take responsibility for this land as the Creator God intended?

Will you teach them that our culture is so rich that it has endured incredible obstacles: genocide, stolen generations, black deaths in custody and more? Will you help to make the dream a reality?

Educate yourself. Knowledge is power. Join us on the journey of Truth telling about this country Australia.



I am Sherry Balcombe the Coordinator of the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry Victoria. I am an Olkola/Djabaguy woman from far North Queensland but born in Melbourne. As an Aboriginal woman, I am part of, and dedicated to, our communities here in Victoria, working towards ensuring a positive present and a vibrant future for all our community members. I have worked at Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency in Foster Care and family group homes for 6 years. I have been employed at the Aboriginal Catholic Ministry since 2003 and I have been the Coordinator here since 2015. I was born on Wurundjeri land and grew up on Bunurong Land where I still reside. I am a mother to 4 children and a grandmother to 3 beautiful grandsons. I was on the selection committee for the Victorian Aboriginal Honour Role. I felt very honoured to be a part of something so big and significant like acknowledging, remembering and honouring our Elders and ancestors for the wonderful contributions that they made for our community so that we can enjoy the benefits today.

Main image: Australians rally BLM protest (Getty images/ Quinn Rooney)