

The members of the Collins expedition, however, did not recognise the behaviour of the aborigines as something that arose out of shyness, and because of such lack of understanding the natives were avoided rather than met in exchange of greetings. The dark-skinned people of the Bunurong tribe were just as curious about strangers as any other aboriginal tribe might have been. After all, it was their land; the members of the Collins expedition were without a doubt the intruders, and at least some attempt at parley might be owed to the aborigines as a matter of common courtesy.

Few early explorers gave recognition to any such rights where native people were concerned; in fact, only too often the natives were not regarded as people or human beings of any description. Many years were to pass and much damage was to be done in the way of lowering the self-respect of numerous otherwise proud tribal people before the advent of the anthropologist, whose growing numbers and their interest in humanity eventually eased the problems of many coloured races. Had Collins stopped for one minute to put himself in the place of those who watched him so closely, he may have understood things much better.

For the group of aborigines, watching so carefully between the trees and the tufts of grass above Sullivan's Cove, nothing could possibly have appeared so fearful. Here on the beach below was a mass of strange white people. In this comparatively small strip of beach were just on twice as many white as coloured men in the whole of the area bounded by the Yarra Yarra, the Dandenongs, the Bay, and Bass Strait beyond the tip of the Mornington Peninsula. If the natives included their wives and children in the count, the dark and the white numbers would have been about equal.

The Europeans' muskets, the terror of which they had already experienced at the careless hands of Murray's marines, if brought into action, would render their primitive spears hopelessly obsolete, and if the primitive men of Port Phillip felt that the end had come for the whole of the Bunurong tribe, they had very good grounds to believe so. Nothing could have been more confusing to this race, where no one man ruled, than to see Colonel Collins delivering his orders to all and sundry, or the frightened look on the face of some unfortunate errant white man as he was led to the yard and lashed with the strange cat-o-nine tails and brutally barred from defending himself. It was all so very strange to them.

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