

## Preface

This book had its distant genesis in the editors' discovery nearly a decade ago that we shared intellectual interests in early European encounters with indigenous people in the Pacific Islands (Douglas) and in Papua New Guinea and the Indonesian provinces of Papua and West Papua, then Irian Jaya (Ballard). Significantly, we found that we also shared a then somewhat inchoate sense of the need to go beyond empirical, utilitarian readings of representations of such encounters to take serious account of the ideas and discourses which informed them. The idea of race inevitably loomed large in any such investigation but our approach to its history was deeply inflected by our own experience and present orientations. One of us, an enthusiastic demonstrator for antiracist and anticolonial causes in the 1960s and 70s, could hardly utter the word except in verbalized quotation marks. The other, an experienced fieldworker, was disturbed by the hydra-headed tenacity of the euphemized racial attitudes he consistently encountered: amongst Australian ex-colonizers and postcolonial Indonesian neo-colonizers and in indigenous strategies of identity and resistance. Gripped by the triple imperative to throw past light on ambiguous present usages, to dereify the concept of race, and to keep encounters and local agency at the forefront of analysis, we organized a pair of exploratory workshops on racial science in Oceania. They were held in 2000 and 2001 at The Australian National University with generous funding from the Humanities Research Centre and the Division of Pacific and Asian History, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. Most of the contributors to this collection gave work-in-progress papers at one or both workshops.

At that time, however, the editors' primary research commitments were to other projects. Then illness (in Douglas's case) and children (in Ballard's case) supervened to keep our work on race on the back burner until 2006 when the award of an Australian Research Council Discovery grant enabled us to launch a team project on 'European Naturalists and the Constitution of Human Difference in Oceania: Crosscultural Encounters and the Science of Race, 1768-1888'. This book is the first major outcome of that project. The hiatus between its conception and completion was primarily a result of the editors' realization that a thorough historical understanding of the complex intersections of racial ideas and regional praxis requires more than a general grasp of imperial and colonial discourses on 'the savage'; that we needed to immerse ourselves in contemporary theoretical writings as well as in the accounts of European voyagers and fieldworkers. The ultimate shape of the volume, then, testifies to the lengthy, detailed programs of research we have undertaken on the natural history of man, the history of anthropology and ethnology, and the science of race, in addition to our ongoing work on specifically Oceanic materials.

The collection investigates the reciprocal significance of Oceania for the science of race, and of racial thinking for Oceania, during the two centuries after 1750, giving 'Oceania' a broad definition that encompasses the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, and the Malay Archipelago. We aim to denaturalize the modernist scientific concept of race by means of a dual historical strategy: tracking the emergence of the concept in western Europe at the end of the eighteenth century, its subsequent normalization, and its practical deployment in Oceanic contexts; and exposing the tensions, inconsistencies, and instability of rival discourses. Under the broad rubrics of dereifying race and decentring Europe, these essays make several distinctive and innovative contributions. First, they locate the formulation of particular racial theories and the science of race generally at the intersections of metropolitan biology or anthropology and encounters in the field — a relatively recent strategy in the history of science. We neither dematerialize ideas as purely abstract and discursive nor reduce them to social relations and politics, but ground them personally and circumstantially in embodied human interactions.

Second, the essays demonstrate the heuristic significance of Oceanian people in providing examples, proofs, and disproofs for varied strands of the eighteenth-century science of man and for the subsequent science of race and its opponents. Great diversity in human appearance and manners was reported by Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, British, and French travellers in Oceania from the early sixteenth century. With the inception of scientific voyaging by France and Britain in the 1760s, the region's inhabitants offered Enlightenment philosophers and natural historians a kaleidoscope of 'nations', 'races', or 'tribes' to think on, debate about, and contrast themselves with. Ethnocentric Europeans positioned indigenous Oceanian groups differentially along a presumed universal human developmental trajectory from primitive to civilized; and they compared or identified the people described in voyage texts with other non-Christians or non-whites, including the enslaved and increasingly despised 'Negro' or the patronized but sometimes idealized 'Indian'. Yet, most such thinkers took original human unity for granted, attributed current physical diversity to the direct but reversible impact of climate and milieu on a single migrating species, and assumed a common human potential to progress towards the civilized state or for salvation.

From the end of the eighteenth century, however, almost all naturalists and anthropologists challenged purely instrumental environmentalist explanations for diversity on physiological or anatomical grounds while an increasing number used the refutation to deny the venerable monogenist premises of common human origin or present specific unity. As the concept of a race acquired its modernist scientific meaning of a discrete, biologically determined major grouping with innate physical and mental characters, polygenists reconfigured human races as distinct species. Oceanic materials influenced and were invoked by both sides of debates for and against human unity as Enlightenment holism gave way to

taxonomy and 'primitive savages' were globally redefined as 'inferior races'. In the process, the polemic against climatic determination of human variation drew particular sustenance from a signature feature of the settlement of Oceania: the occurrence of great physical diversity, often contiguously, within common climatic zones. From about 1800, certain Oceanian people, notably Aboriginal Tasmanians and Australians, were consistently positioned closest to 'the brutes' as allegedly the most inferior of all human races or species, uncivilizable, and doomed to imminent extinction.

After 1860, the hoary conflict between monogenists and polygenists was partially resolved or superseded with the application of evolutionist theory to man. Evolutionism yoked very long-run adaptation to milieus with heredity to explain human speciation and seemed to confirm the thesis of inevitable disappearance of Darwin's less 'favoured races in the struggle for life'. Darwinism's empirical debt to Oceania is patent in the biographies of Darwin himself and of Wallace and Huxley, each of whom undertook formative fieldwork in the region and later pronounced authoritatively on the certainty of racial extinctions. With respect to extinctions, as with the related, equally emotive theme of interracial coitus, the science of race anticipated, imbibed, informed, and at times violated popular, especially colonial attitudes which resonated with longstanding scientific disputes about hybrids as the key signifiers of specific boundaries and as racially regenerative or transgressive. Such intersections of science and public opinion were invincibly racialized: even celebrations of 'hybrid vigour' usually took for granted the attenuation or disappearance of the 'lower' indigenous element; while in Australia in the 1930s, hybridity was arguably promoted as a eugenicist vehicle for racial extinction of Aborigines, since the official policy of assimilation envisaged 'breeding out the colour' of the expanding half-caste population — ironically, in the teeth of much popular disapproval of miscegenation on racist grounds.

The third important innovation in this collection is to bring British humanitarian perspectives squarely into the frame of a history of race and raciology. In the late eighteenth century, copious reports from the Pacific Islands of the moral 'degradation' of fellow human beings far removed from 'true' religion profoundly shocked Evangelicals and served as a major impulse for the great Protestant overseas missionary enterprise of the next century. Two chapters in the volume specifically address humanitarian opposition to scientific arguments in favour of unbridgeable racial difference, polygeny, or the incapacity of certain races for salvation, especially with respect to familiar Oceanian people with whom missionaries lived and worked. Yet these chapters and the collection generally also chart humanitarian complicity in the naturalization of the idea of race, the congealing of racial discriminations, and the legitimization of social evolutionism during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The question of the perfectibility or aptness for civilization of different races in Oceania was

a key point of cleavage between Enlightenment and nineteenth-century positions and between humanitarians and racial scientists. But widespread hardening of racial attitudes in Europe and its colonies, increasing pessimism about the civilizability of certain races, and the generalization of particular instances of demographic decline into a universal scientific law eventually led many humanitarians to concur regretfully in the prospect of racial extinction, especially in Australia and some Pacific Islands. Debilitating repercussions of the discourse of extinction still impinge on many indigenous communities across a region where, in a particularly bitter irony, the threat of overpopulation has now widely supplanted that of depopulation.

Editors and contributors all acknowledge the moral perils of writing on an issue as fraught as race and the necessity to navigate scrupulously between the opposed temptations of excessive outrage or of desensitization to the revolting language of much raciological discourse. One possible strategy is to ignore or bury racially obnoxious representations. However, to do so empowers racist ideas and reasoning by leaving them unchallenged. An alternative strategy — evidently the one we have chosen — is to locate such language historically and epistemologically and subject it to rigorous critique. This approach denaturalizes racialism by revealing the historical contingency of its concepts, semantics, and discourses while it also discredits such discourses by exposing their absurdity and illogicality. Our approach has several pragmatic corollaries. We use 'racial' as a relatively neutral term connoting 'race' in its modernist biological sense. 'Racialist' is our preferred term to label derogatory attitudes expressed towards persons or groups on the basis of supposedly collective physical characters. The grossly overdetermined term 'racist' is generally avoided except with reference to certain modern contexts. Related to these choices and also for aesthetic reasons, we use inverted commas minimally: they are included on first mention of a specialized English term in its contemporary sense and are then omitted, except for direct quotations; but they are consistently implied in the case of now problematic terms — notably 'race' but also (racial) 'type', 'half-caste', 'hybrid', 'nature', 'civilization', 'savage', 'primitive', 'Negro', 'Lapp', 'Hottentot', 'Papuan', 'Pygmy', 'native', 'pagan', 'heathen', 'black', 'white', 'man' (in the inclusive sense of humanity), 'the West', etc.

Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are our own. The personal names of French authors follow the international standard recommended by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.