

# Deported...At the sweet will of the government: The removal of Aborigines to reserves in Queensland 1897–1939

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Were the wretched remnants of an illtreated race to be treated as if they were worse than criminals? For that was what the Committee was asked to do. Were those poor creatures who had been all but exterminated either by bullet or disease by the European to be treated in that way and deported from place to place at the sweet will of the Government (B.D. Morehead, Legislative Council, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* 1901, vol. 87, p. 1144).

By removing the aboriginal against his will they were virtually denying his right to live at all. The Bill made them absolute slaves; they could do nothing without protectors, and the protectors could do just as they liked . . . To take them away from the bush and put them on distant reserves is everything that is stupid and bad (John Webber, Legislative Council, *Queensland Parliamentary Debates* 1901, vol. 87, p. 1144).

When introducing the Aborigines Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Bill to the Queensland Parliament in 1897, Home Secretary Tozer remarked that section 9 was 'one of the most important in the Bill'.<sup>1</sup> The clause gave the Minister authority to remove Aborigines to reserves and was included on the recommendation of Archibald Meston. Meston was the principal architect of the legislation and the removals clause. It was part of the package of 'stern measures' he believed were necessary for the effective protection of Aborigines.<sup>2</sup> Despite Tozer's assertion about the importance of section 9, it provoked little comment or debate. Yet 40 years later when new legislation was implemented, the removals program had become the cornerstone of the reserve system.

By 1939 almost 7,000 Aborigines had been removed under the Act. The development of major settlements in southern, central and northern Queensland was only pos-

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1. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1897, vol. 78, p. 1629. The clause limited the removal of Aborigines to a reserved in the district where they lived. The powers of the minister were progressively extended. This clause was later amended to allow the removal of Aborigines to any reserve in the state.

2. A. Meston to W.H. Ryder, 23 August 1897, QSA COL/140 97/10750.

sible with the forced removal of Aborigines from all parts of the state. But the removals program functioned more than merely being a means for populating reserves. The removals process was a critical aspect of controlling and dominating Aborigines on and off reserves. Indeed, every aspect of indigenous life was affected by the removals program.

### **The rationale and function of removals**

From the outset, proponents of the removals program argued that, however regrettable, forcibly removing Aborigines to reserves was necessary on humanitarian grounds. They insisted the motive for such action was the care and protection of the remnants of 'a dying race'. From 1908, the Chief Protector maintained a register of removals which contained details of names, origin, destination and, importantly, the reason for removal. An analysis of this information reveals that the removals program fulfilled a variety of objectives: removing the old and unemployable from station and fringe camps; controlling behaviour in fringe camps, on settlements and labour relations; as means of extending prison sentences and punishment over and beyond the legal system.

When the reserve system was being established, one of the principal aims of the removals process was to ensure the 'absolute isolation' of all Aborigines from whites. From the very beginning of the removals campaign, Meston made it clear that not all Aborigines were to be targeted, only certain individuals and groups. After four years of his crusade, Meston acknowledged that he was deporting to reserves 'only those who are not employed and those who are roaming about demoralised and are doing no good for themselves'.<sup>3</sup> Home Secretary Foxton supported this policy when he told Parliament in 1901: 'it is the old people and possibly the young ones, with a fair sprinkling of others of middle age, who ought to be moved to reserves.'<sup>4</sup> More than one-third of all persons deported fell into this category: that is, those who were of no economic value or posed a threat to the health and well-being of the local community. A significant feature of the removals process is that despite its widespread and comprehensive nature, only rarely did it result in the removal of all Aborigines from a district. For example, between 1913 and 1930, 21 persons were sent from the Clermont district, yet this action did not result in the district being completely 'cleaned up' as ten years later 26 Aborigines were still living permanently in the district.<sup>5</sup> When a group of 19 Aborigines were removed from Tongy station 160 kilometres south of Mitchell in 1929, 12 were adults described as 'old and indigent' and the remainder children. Employable adults were noticeably absent from those removed.<sup>6</sup>

The phrase 'old and indigent' was used frequently as the reason for removal and was code for: 'no longer employable or useful'. Aborigines who had spent their working lives on stations were sent to a settlement when they could no longer be gainfully employed. In 1936 Charlie Maranoa was sent from Tinnenburra station in south-western Queensland to Woorabinda because he was 'too old'. He lived, however, another 30

3. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 1145.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

5. Register of Removals, 1913-30, QSA A/64785; Protector of Aborigines, Clermont, QSA AUD/W41.

6. Register of Removals, 1929, QSA A/64785; R.A. Baker to J.W. Bleakley, 4 February 1931, QSA Transfer 1227/36 31/4586.

years after being removed.<sup>7</sup> The sick and disabled were also deported because they were not economically useful. 'Florrie' was deported from the Cairns district in 1913 because she was 'totally blind' and hence had 'no means of providing for herself' and Bundoo was deported from Duck Creek station in south west Queensland in the early 1900s when he became crippled.<sup>8</sup>

The sick were also removed if their particular illness was regarded as a threat to the health of the white community. The one disease which whites were most sensitive about was venereal disease. Any black suspected of this disease was quickly sent to a settlement ostensibly 'for treatment' but in reality to prevent contaminating the white population. Even when the type of illness an Aborigine might be suffering could not be identified, local residents sought to have that person removed to the settlement. On one occasion the residents of Taroom petitioned the Home Secretary to remove the 'half-caste Carbo' from their district because he was frequently going through the town and 'mixing with the members of our little community. We are afraid that whatever he is suffering from will spread amongst us'.<sup>9</sup>

Being infected by disease-carrying Aborigines was not the only type of contamination that concerned the white population. Equally disturbing, if not more so, was the threat to 'white blood'. Miscegenation was an issue that deeply concerned all those involved in Aboriginal administration from Meston onwards. J.W. Bleakley, while Chief Protector was particularly disturbed by the issue. In 1914 he stated:

The rescue and care of the young woman and children has now become a special feature of our work...in fact I might say is regarded as the most important portion of it.<sup>10</sup>

The reason for such a focus he added, was 'to keep the race clean'. Bleakley was referring to the 'Aboriginal race' but that was only part of the issue. The other and more critical agenda was to keep the white race pure. Clearly, a major purpose of the removals program was to isolate Aborigines and whites. Yet it was not to keep whites away from Aborigines, as was the intention expressed by Meston and others, but vice versa. The removals process were used to segregate the useless and the socially unacceptable, to places where they were out of sight and out of mind.

The second major role of the removals process was control. When the 1897 legislation was being framed, how effective the removals program would be in controlling the Aboriginal population was certainly not foreseen or contemplated. But after four decades, it became the single most important means of maintaining white hegemony and control over of the indigenous population throughout the state. The threat of removal served to exercise control in a number of contexts; in townships, on fringe and station camps, in labour relations and on settlements.

For Aboriginal groups and families who were allowed to live on station camps or on the fringes of country towns because of their economic value, their interaction with

7. McKellar 1984b.

8. Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785; A. Meston to Under Secretary, Home Department, 13 June 1903, QSA COL/144 03/1524.

9. Residents of Taroom to Home Secretary, 5 December 1900, QSA COL/143 00/18523.

10. Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1913, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1914, vol. 3, p. 1023.

whites was carefully regulated. Any unacceptable behaviour could result in deportation to a reserve. Threats to whites or their property were not tolerated. In 1910 Speechley was deported from Boulia because he was a 'reputed cattle killer and horse sweater'. The local Protector claimed he found 'the carcasses of ten cattle in the vicinity of his camp'.<sup>11</sup> In 1912, Bertie Brown was removed from the Maryborough district for 'going about armed and killing cattle'.<sup>12</sup> In the same year, two women were deported from the Springsure district because they had supposedly been 'harassing sheep with large mobs of dogs'.<sup>13</sup> Crimes of even the most petty nature could result in deportation.<sup>14</sup> More generally, Aborigines were required to act appropriately in the presence of whites. 'Prostitution', 'trading in prostitution', 'drunkenness', 'threatening women', 'going about half naked' were all actions that resulted in removal.<sup>15</sup> Billy Newman was expelled from the Winton district because, in the Protector's words: 'he was a menace to society by attempting to indecently assault women—a confessed nymphomaniac'[sic].<sup>16</sup> Drinking alcohol, and not necessarily being intoxicated, could lead to deportation. Evelyn Serico was only six years old when removed to the Barambah settlement from the Gympie district because her uncle was caught consuming alcohol. She recalls:

Aborigines were not supposed to have beer. Of course it was reported. A few weeks later the police from Yandina arrived with a buckboard. We had to pack up straight away and leave. They took us into Yandina. We stayed the night in jail and they put us on the train the next day for Murgon...It was such a little offence.<sup>17</sup>

Even simply being *suspected* of committing a crime could result in deportation as Donald Gunn, member for Carnarvon, explained in the Legislative Assembly:

It is idle to say that all these people were removed for their own protection; too often they are removed to get them out of the district. If someone loses a fowl or sheep, an aboriginal is blamed for the theft, and when the matter is reported, the first thing the police do is to deport the aboriginal from the district. The Aboriginal has no court to which he can appeal, and I have known a man to be put in irons and thus deported to the settlement.<sup>18</sup>

Local Aborigines became convenient scapegoats when public outrage demanded a solution to a crime. When a Cairns resident, Peter Lumberg, was brutally murdered in 1905, the police were unable to identify immediately any suspects. In an attempt to solve the crime quickly, the police detained two local Aborigines, Tommy Tommyhawk and Tommy Norrigie. Although no evidence linked the men to the crime, they were detained in custody by the Inspector of Police under his authority as Protector of Aborigines. The police employed various methods to extract a confession from the men,

11. Under Secretary, Home Department to W. Hamilton, 8 September 1911, QSA COL/G250 708.

12. Register of Removals, 1912, QSA A/64785.

13. Ibid.

14. Probably the most extreme case was the removal of a family from Mt Isa to Palm Island because the father had supposedly stolen a torch (Rosser 1985, p. 23).

15. Register of Removals, 1908 and 1909, QSA A/64785.

16. Ibid.

17. Serico 1984.

18. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1919–20, vol. 134, p. 2563.

including tying a chain around their legs and hanging them from a tree! Despite this treatment, neither confessed. Yet instead of being released, the Inspector of Police then ordered their removal to the Barambah settlement.<sup>19</sup> The authority became a potent weapon in the hands of a police officer when fulfilling the dual functions of protector and prosecutor.

The threat of removal also served to regulate behaviour within fringe camps. Fringe camps were tolerated as long as they did not disturb the moral, visual and aural sensibilities of townspeople. Persons constantly quarrelling or causing fights were deported to a reserve. Fringe camp life was never totally secure with no bounds as to the reasons a Protector could give for removing a fringe dweller he disliked. The high-point of such irrationality was probably reached in 1929 when the Protector at Coen ordered the removal of 'Ulsana' and 'Annie' because they were 'dangerously affected by the moon'.<sup>20</sup>

The removals process was crucial in maintaining a servile Aboriginal labour force in Queensland. Aborigines played a vital role in the development of the pastoral industry in Queensland and the threat of removal was used as a means of inculcating the right attitudes to time, the virtues of work, the importance of compliance and reliability.<sup>21</sup> Aboriginal employees were ever conscious of the possibility of deportation, as Ruby de Satge, who worked on cattle properties in north-west Queensland, observed:

Well, when people didn't want to work they would be sent off. That's punishment for them. If they did anything wrong they'd get into trouble for it. There was no innocence in those days. They weren't allowed to say anything or back answer.<sup>22</sup>

Aboriginal workers lacked security in employment and a multitude of reasons could be provided to remove those who did not perform. The standard phases used for deportation to a settlement included 'will not work, a source of nuisance', 'absconding from hired service', 'refusing to work', 'has no regular employment', 'tired of work'. The threat of removal was a most potent and valuable weapon in the employers' arsenal of worker control and was critical in maintaining and regulating Aboriginal labour over successive decades.

While the majority of removals were from fringe camps and towns to settlements and missions, a percentage of removals comprised individuals being deported to other settlements. Settlement superintendents possessed an array of measures for disciplining inmates, the most severe being deportation to another settlement. When the Superintendent of the Barambah settlement, B.J.T. Lipscombe, appeared before the South Australian Royal Commission on Aborigines in 1913, he was asked how he dealt with 'refractory natives'.

I deal with them here. I sometimes threaten them that if they do not behave properly I will send them to Mornington Island. That usually has the desired effect.

19. T. Mowbray, Report into certain alleged Police Irregularities in connection with the Peter Lumberg Murder Case, 4 June 1906, QSA HOM/J27 07/9489.

20. Register of Removals, 1929, QSA A/64785.

21. Dawn May estimates that on stations in the more remote areas of the state, blacks outnumbered Europeans on a ratio of five to one. May 1986, p. 410. See also her work on the earlier period, May 1983.

22. Rosser 1985, p. 24.

They do not want to be sent to Mornington Island because they have heard from the other blacks what sort of place it is.<sup>23</sup>

On the question of how he dealt with 'loafers', Lipscombe told the Commission:

I would report the matter to the head office in Brisbane. Most probably the head office would issue a summons on the husband and very likely he would be deported. We would keep the wife and children here.<sup>24</sup>

Although no one was sent from the Barambah settlement to Mornington Island because of the logistical difficulties, Lipscombe and other settlement superintendents did deport troublesome and recalcitrant inmates to the other government settlements. Inmates were moved to and from the main government settlements of Barambah, Woorabinda and to Palm Island, and also missions including Yarrabah. More inmates, however, were moved for disciplinary reasons to Palm Island which was known colloquially as 'Punishment Island'. Whenever an inmate was deported to another settlement, it was a salutary reminder to all the other inmates the consequences of flouting the settlement regimen. Indeed, the threat of deportation to a distant settlement was the principal means for preventing inmates absconding from reserves and settlements.

Given the extent inmates did abscond, however, it was not a very successful deterrent. Some inmates were habitual deserters. In 1930, Bob Fogarty was sent to Palm Island from Barambah because he was a 'constant absconder and a bad example to others'.<sup>25</sup> After his removal to Palm Island he managed to return to his former settlement. He again absconded from Barambah, only to be caught and sent to Palm Island for the second time!<sup>26</sup> Fogarty's exploits were matched, if not surpassed by Bernie Turner. He first absconded from Barambah in 1929, was caught and returned to the settlement. Two years later he was sent to Palm Island for 'insolence and disobeying the Superintendent's orders'. Within months he escaped and made his way back to Barambah. He was returned to Palm Island only to desert once more. The Superintendent at Palm Island then refused to take him for the third time, so Turner became an inmate of the Yarrabah mission.<sup>27</sup>

The scope of removals program was progressively expanded as new avenues were found for its use. Specifically, the authority to remove was used as additional means of disciplining and punishing Aborigines over and beyond the legal system. Settlements served as a *de facto* gaols. When Aboriginal prisoners were released from gaol, instead to returning to their home country, they were deported to a settlement on completion of their sentence. In 1912, when Ned Cullen had finished serving a six-month sentence for 'assaulting his gin', he was deported to a settlement because the Chief Protector did not think it was appropriate he should 'return to his tribe'.<sup>28</sup> The power of removal was a convenient means by which the courts could extend the sentence of an Aborigine beyond the statutory limit. When Dick Holman was found guilty of stealing in 1913, the

23. Minutes of evidence of Royal Commission on Aborigines, 1913, p. 81.

24. Minutes of evidence of Royal Commission on Aborigines, 1913, p. 79

25. Register of Removals, 1930, QSA A/64785.

26. Register of Removals, 1932, QSA A/64785.

27. Register of Removals, 1929, 1931, 1932, QSA A/64785.

28. Register of Removals, 1912, QSA A/64785.

Bench of Magistrates ordered that 'after the completion of his sentence, he be removed to a reserve'.<sup>29</sup>

The authority to remove was also used to punish when the courts failed to secure a conviction. During the debate on amendments to the *Aboriginals Protection Act* in 1901, the Home Secretary freely acknowledged using his authority in this manner. He related the case of one man who he did not doubt had committed murder but was not convicted because 'there was no legal evidence that he had committed the murder'. The Home Secretary ordered his removal to a reserve and defended the action by claiming it was in 'the best interests of the whole district' and the person himself.<sup>30</sup> The removals process ensured Aborigines found little justice in the legal system. They confronted a system that presumed their guilt, rather than their innocence. When appearing before the courts, their fate was almost invariably sealed. Conviction or no conviction, they were separated from their country and kin. The only difference was the length of sentence and type of institution where it was served.

Despite the seemingly unlimited scope to which the removals process could be used to punish and discipline, in 1934 the *Aboriginals Protection Act* was amended to further curtail the civil liberties of the state's indigenous inhabitants. The power of removal was extended to allow the Minister to detain any 'aboriginals or half-castes' who in his opinion were 'uncontrollable', in an institution such as a prison, for an indefinite period. Removal was no longer confined to a settlement or mission. The definition of an 'uncontrollable' person was broad: someone who either was convicted under certain sections of the *Criminal Code* or was a 'menace to the peace, order and proper control and management of an institution'.<sup>31</sup> Thus an Aborigine deemed 'uncontrollable' could be imprisoned without trial for the term of his natural life, simply at the behest of the Minister. When this section was being debated the only objection were raised by James Kenny, member for Cook, who commented that such powers broke 'every tenet of British justice'.<sup>32</sup> Such remarks were rather belated as Aborigines had been denied any semblance of justice since the removals program had been instigated in 1897. The 1934 amendment was another extension of the comprehensive powers already in use.

As well as prisons, the authority to remove was used to regulate the movement of Aborigines from other institutions such as orphanages, asylums for the insane and lazarets.<sup>33</sup> Aboriginal inmates in these institutions, having recovered mentally or physically or become too difficult to manage, were sent to a settlement.<sup>34</sup> Some inmates spent time in several institutions before eventually arriving at one of the government settlements. They were a place of last resort, a convenient dumping ground for unwanted or troublesome inmates from other institutions.

29. Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785.

30. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 594.

31. *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Acts Amendment Act 1934*, s 9.

32. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1934, vol. 164, p. 1690.

33. Seventy-three removals between 1908 and 1936 were in this category.

34. See for example the case of Jack Gilbert who was removed from Goodna asylum to the Barambah settlement because he had 'recovered mentally' (Register of Removals, 1930, QSA A/64785).

The removals process was critical in forging links between the Aboriginal settlements and missions and other institutions which constituted Queensland's 'carceral archipelago'.<sup>35</sup> Aboriginal settlements were part of a network of institutions which were dedicated to control and discipline: prisons, orphanages, asylums, lazarets. Within this carceral archipelago, the Aboriginal settlements had a clearly defined position on its outer rim. Usually when white inmates of institutions such as prisons and lunatic asylums were disciplined and normalised, they were sent back into society. On the rare occasions when Aboriginal inmates were regarded as normalised, however, they were transferred not back into the white society but further away into the outer part of the archipelago, to institutions even more removed, at least sociologically and psychologically.

### Resistance to removals

Just as Aborigines in the nineteenth century vigorously resisted attempts to expropriate their land and destroy their culture, so too did their twentieth century counterparts oppose moves to separate them from their land and families. Aborigines did not willingly acquiesce to the removals program as writers such as Bleakley have suggested, rather they resisted in a spirited and sustained manner.<sup>36</sup> One of the most common forms of resistance was simply to escape into the bush when the police came with a removal order. In 1908 Chief Protector Howard reported that he had ordered two boys on Womblebank station in north-west Queensland to be deported to Barambah but they had 'absconded into the bush and [could] not be found'.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, on Tinnenburra station in south-west Queensland, the McKellar family avoided deportation by fleeing, along with other families, shortly before the police arrived.<sup>38</sup> Others avoided removal by escaping across the border into New South Wales. Probably the largest group to move interstate were the Wangkumara people who originally lived in the far south-west of the state who moved across the border to Tibooburra district in the late 1910s.<sup>39</sup> In some respects, the move was fortunate for the Wangkumara. By moving as a group, they managed to retain their identity and language to a greater degree than if they had been dumped on a settlement.<sup>40</sup> Another group to escape deportation by moving across the border was a group from Hillview camp near Beaudesert. In 1926 the local Protector attempted to have them removed from the district because they were not 'fond of work'. But after obtaining approval for such action, he had to inform the Chief Protector that they were 'at present wandering in NSW'.<sup>41</sup> In 1935 Horace Hamilton, a resident in the Gayndah district, escaped to Tweed Heads when he became aware he was likely to be deported to a settlement.<sup>42</sup> Likewise, Ellen Hocking fled across the border when a

35. Foucault 1977, p. 297.

36. Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

37. Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1907, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1908, vol. 3, p. 935.

38. McKellar 1984b.

39. Ibid.

40. Although they were later moved to Brewarrina in the 1930s by the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, the Wangkumara language and some customs were kept alive by the some of the group. In 1985, a Wangkumara teaching program was devised and Wangkumara dictionary published. Huggonson 1990, p. 117.

41. Register of Removals, 1926, QSA A/64785.



number of the St George camp were being removed because they were 'indigent'.<sup>43</sup> Once interstate, escapees usually remained there as the effort required to locate and then capture them was beyond the resources of the department. The Chief Protector's attitude was that as such people were usually of 'a troublesome disposition', it was better to leave them.<sup>44</sup>

A more subtle form of resistance was adopted by Dave Wharton, who lived on the outskirts of Cunnamulla during the 1920s and 30s. As his daughter Hazel McKellar recounted:

There was never any attempt to round up the people as a group from the camp and send them away to the Mission. I think my father had a bit of political knowledge. He would have stood his ground if they had tried to send anyone away for no reason. He was around when they put the reserve there and there was this peg right alongside a cedar tree. It was a surveyor's peg and he said no one could ever shift him from there. He was right up to date on civil liberties.<sup>45</sup>

Wharton may not have been fully aware of the unlimited power the Minister possessed to remove the camp, but he was astute enough to dissuade local officials from taking any actions.

Even if removed to a settlement, resistance did not stop. Numerous attempts were made by deportees to return to their home country. Tommy Tommyhawk, who was wrongfully suspected of committing murder, was removed to the Barambah settlement twice and on both occasions managed to escape and return to his family in the Cairns district, a distance of more than 2,000 km.<sup>46</sup> A similar feat was achieved by four men who returned to Torrens Creek near Hughenden in June 1911 after being sent to Barambah in the previous year.<sup>47</sup> In 1913, two Coen residents successfully made their way home after being deported to Barambah.<sup>48</sup> These accomplishments were acknowledged even by Chief Protector Bleakley as 'remarkable feats of endurance'. He noted that to return home, these men had 'walked a good one thousand miles through unknown country, avoided populated places and subsisted on bush foods'.<sup>49</sup>

### The impact of removals

Despite spirited resistance, the removals program had a profound impact on Aboriginal cultural and social life.

The result of the removals program was quite different to that claimed by the proponents of the scheme. Rather than being for the 'care and protection' of the state's Aborigines, it contributed to the destruction of so much of their cultural and social life. As W.E.H. Stanner noted: 'every personal affiliation was lamed, every group structure

<sup>42</sup> Register of Removals, 1935, QSA A/64785.

<sup>43</sup> Register of Removals, 1915, QSA A/64785.

<sup>44</sup> Chief Protector of Aborigines to Commissioner of Police, 24 February 1922, QSA Transfer 1227/34 22/4782.

<sup>45</sup> McKellar 1984a, p. 81.

<sup>46</sup> Annual Report of Chief Protector of Aborigines for 1905, *Queensland Parliamentary Papers*, 1906, vol. 2, p. 930.

<sup>47</sup> Register of In-letters, Home Secretary's Office, 1911, QSA HOM/B39 Aborigines.

<sup>48</sup> Register of Removals, 1913, QSA A/64785.

<sup>49</sup> Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

was put out of kilter, no social network had a point of fixture left'.<sup>50</sup> The consequences of removals has in recent years been well documented and publicised, including most recently the report by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, *Bringing Them Home*, on the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families.<sup>51</sup> But was the removals program a tragic mistake, a well intentioned exercise where the consequences were only realised afterwards? Can Meston and his successors be excused on account of ignorance?

Although historical and anthropological research in the past thirty years has greatly increased the non-Aboriginal understanding of the centrality of land in the Aboriginal world view, the significance of land and attachment to 'country' was well recognised even when the removals policy was being first implemented at the turn of the century. The proponents of the removals policy, however, cannot be too quickly excused for their lack of understanding. Meston was well aware of the affiliation Aborigines had to the land but felt their plight was so desperate, it was no time for 'rose water and sentiment'.<sup>52</sup> When amendments to the *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act* were being debated in 1901, A.C. Gregory claimed that to remove Aborigines from their own homes, 'would have the effect of destroying life more rapidly than was done by the wild blacks themselves'.<sup>53</sup> Of course, Gregory as a member of the ruling elite may well have been more concerned that his colleagues in the pastoral industry had ready access to cheap labour.

Gregory's comments, and those of Morehead and Webber quoted at the beginning of this article, indicate that even in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Europeans were aware of the attachment Aborigines had to the land. In 1899 a Miles resident wrote to his local member of Parliament about the need to do something concerning the plight of the local blacks. He was not sure what could be done but was adamant that removal was not the solution. He commented:

The one thing you must make the Home Secretary understand is that the old blacks will not leave their old Yowrie. They say they will die here.<sup>54</sup>

A miner on the Cania goldfields near Warwick was similarly perturbed about the plight of the local Aboriginal population. The police had attempted to persuade them to go to a reserve but the miner believed, as he protested to his local MLA, that 'they want to die where they were born and have bred, and *would rather be shot than removed*'.<sup>55</sup> Even J.W. Bleakley, who served as Chief Protector for 29 years and instigated the removal of more Aborigines than any other Protector, was not oblivious to the effects of removal. In his volume, *The Aborigines of Australia*, Bleakley wrote:

It is inevitable that, to a people so clannish in their ideas, removal from their own country, with all its sacred associations, to another and entirely strange land, would be the cause of a good deal of hardship to them.<sup>56</sup>

50. Stanner 1968, p. 57.

51. Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997.

52. A. Meston to Home Secretary, 18 September 1900, QSA COL/145.

53. *Queensland Parliamentary Debates*, 1901, vol. 87, p. 1250.

54. W. Addison to Mr. Moore, 28 August 1899, QSA COL/143 99/12164.

55. E. Williams to W. Kent, 16 June 1902, QSA COL/143 02/9969.

56. Bleakley 1961, p. 195.

Clearly, the cultural and social significance of land was recognised by those who had even a rudimentary understanding of Aboriginal culture and society.

In exposing the impact of the removals program on Aboriginal society, it is evident that the declared reasons for removing Aboriginal people was a facade. As other commentators revealed, removals were used to discipline and isolate. But the rationale for the program was more comprehensive. It was used to control and dominate not only Aborigines on reserves, but on fringe camps, in towns and in the workforce. Aborigines lived with the constant fear that they could be removed, without warning, to a remote reserve. The trauma associated with removal was not confined to those who were removed but also affected those persons left behind. The sudden loss of a sibling, father, aunt, or grandparent created a sense of bewilderment and uncertainty in the camp, particularly when the reasons for removal were unknown. Few Aborigines remained unaffected by the removals program. If the sight of a trooper or policeman with a rifle evoked terror in the nineteenth century, in the twentieth century it was a policeman with a removal order. The removals program came to be one of the principal means for controlling and dominating the state's indigenous population. Despite recognising the importance of the removals policy in 1897, Home Secretary Tozer would not have envisaged the critical role it would play in the development of the reserve system. By 1939, when a new Act was passed, more than 7,000 Aborigines had been deported to reserves. Removals became the technique *par excellence* for maintaining and extending European hegemony.

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