

Transnational Racial Politics

12. Transcultural/transnational interaction and influences on Aboriginal Australia

John Maynard

The influence of Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist movement on the mobilisation for Aboriginal self-determination in the 1920s remains little known in the dominant Australian historical interpretation. Scholars in Australia have given scant regard to the interconnections between Aboriginal people and international relations, and have focused their examination of race relations on those between black and white. In particular, their studies of external influences on movements for Aboriginal self-determination have focused on white Christian and humanitarian influences. Given the reality of globalisation and tense international relations, it is timely to explore the historical, political, cultural and economic relationships between Aboriginal people and other oppressed groups throughout the twentieth century. This chapter outlines my own journey, exploring Aboriginal and international connections and the subsequent transcultural focus of my work.

A transnational/transcultural approach to the study of Australian history marks a shift in direction. Ann Curthoys recently pointed out Australian history has unfortunately 'become more isolated and inward looking' due to the limitations of the traditional framework of national history. Curthoys among others has called for a move towards 'transnational history' looking at networks of influence and interconnection that transcend the nation.¹ A transcultural approach adds another dimension to postcolonial critique in deconstructing the Eurocentric enclosures of the past – which not only created the Third World but also defined the cultures confined within for the West.² Analysing international black 'connection, flow, hybridity and syncretism' reveals and alters our understanding and offers a new direction.³

¹ Ann Curthoys 2003, 'Cultural History and the Nation', in Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), pp. 28-9.

² Benita Parry 1999, 'Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance, or Two Cheers for Nativism', in Frances Baker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iverson (eds) *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press), p. 172.

³ Elaine Baldwin et al. 2004, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited), p. 179.

We might consider the monumental work of Paul Gilroy, whose work has sought to examine transatlantic black movement and connections, and whose concept of the 'Black Atlantic' leads us to 'think outside the fixed and misleading boundary lines of nation states'.⁴ ⁵ The maritime migration of people and ideas was instrumental not only in the passing of goods but also, in Elaine Baldwin's words, of 'the political struggles that flowed back and forth across the ocean'.⁶ Gilroy's work, Baldwin suggests, considers 'the global spread of black people which has resulted from a series of forced and voluntary migrations' arguing that this 'binds together the black people of Africa, the Americas, the Caribbean and Europe in a long history of intercultural connection'.⁷

These developments in transcultural history importantly tie in with the perceptive Indigenous insight as put by Marcia Langton a decade ago, when she stressed the need of breaking out of traditional ties of white Anglo understanding:

Let's forget about this psychotic debate we keep having with white Australia and let's start talking to Asians and people from Eastern Europe and Africa and so on and South America and talk about something else for a change. Let's do some films about genocide. How about us and the Timorese get together ... How about us and the Cambodians get together, you know? That'd be so much more interesting and we could bring our experiences as human beings together you know, having been victims of human tragedies.⁸

My work is all about looking outside of the national box and examining these international connections of influence. I have, for example, been exploring similarities of experience between Gandhi and the Indian National Congress and early Aboriginal activism and found similar experiences of oppression and response.⁹

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 161.

⁵ Peter Linebaugh 1982, 'All the Atlantic Mountains Shook', *Labour/ Le Travailleur*, vol. 10, Fall, pp. 87-121; Marcus Rediker 1987, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker 2000, *The Many Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press).

⁶ Baldwin et al. 2004, *Introducing Cultural Studies*, p. 176.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 177.

⁸ Transcribed and quoted in Stephen Muecke 1998, 'Cultural Activism, Indigenous Australia, 1972-1994', in Kuan-Hsing Chen (ed.), *Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge), pp. 229-313, quoted passage on pp. 308-9.

⁹ John Maynard 2004, 'Be the change that you want to see': The awakening of cultural nationalism – Gandhi, Garvey and the AAPA, paper to conference on Gandhi, Non-Violence and Modernity 2-3 September at The Australian National University.

A transcultural approach extends the study of Aboriginal history beyond national borders and beyond studies of the British empire, and seeks to place Aboriginal history and culture in a global perspective. Two years ago in Boston at the 'Asians Through Time and Space' conference I heard Professor Ron Richardson, head of African American Studies at Boston University, describe the importance of recognising that 'all cultures are hybrid and have been influenced by their interactions with different cultures, sometimes through interactions at a distance'.¹⁰ Richardson spoke of 'transcultural studies', a method that 'views history as a global web of connections between cultures, rather than strictly focusing [in his case] on the black American experience ... [but] exploring how African-Americans have influenced and been influenced by other cultures and global trends.'¹¹ Such insights hold great significance in the scope and direction of my work, particularly examining African American historical influence and contact with Aboriginal people. My aim is to ensure that an Aboriginal presence in this global network of black connection and experience is not missed.

Aboriginal Australians and African worldwide politics

The move to a transcultural focus and understanding in my work was in the first instance more a matter of good fortune than any direct planning. In 1996 I was awarded the Aboriginal History Stanner Fellowship, and I have no hesitation in stating that this award was fundamental in everything I have achieved since. I was made a Visiting Fellow at the Australian National University with the history department and spent six months travelling around New South Wales researching my grandfather Fred Maynard's involvement with the rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA) in 1924. I spent a lot of time in archives, and conducting oral interviews with family members and other people who were connected in some way with the beginning of the AAPA. The finished product of my research was an article published in *Aboriginal History*.¹²

My family had in its possession an old family photograph depicting a group of black men, including my grandfather. It was thought to be a photo of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association conference in Sydney, but in the course of my research an uncle in western New South Wales challenged this. He was adamant that it was in fact a much earlier organisation and that the tall black man wearing a beige suit in the back of the photo was famous African/American boxing champion Jack Johnson. I was incredulous! I studied the photograph with a magnifying glass and as I collected images of Jack Johnson

¹⁰ *B.U. Bridge*, Boston University Community's Weekly Newspaper, 5 April 2002.

¹¹ *Boston Globe*, 10 February 2002.

¹² John Maynard 1997, 'Fred Maynard and the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA): One God, One Aim, One Destiny', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 21, pp. 1–13.

from various published sources concluded that he was in fact correct. But what did it all mean? My uncle added that the meeting depicted in the photograph had something to do with grandfather setting up a black shipping line! I was staggered to say the least and quite frankly a little perplexed. As I began to uncover more information, I found that he was largely correct, although he had confused Jack Johnson with later events. As I was to discover, my grandfather developed connections to Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which did in fact establish a Black Star Line shipping company in the 1920s in America.

At the time I could not expand the research any further, as I spent the next two years of my life just getting on and off planes and recording oral interviews in many Aboriginal community locations around the continent, in my role as a researcher with Aboriginal and Islander Health with the faculty of Medical Sciences at the University of Newcastle.¹³ It was not until late 1998 that I was once more able to venture back to the archives, and particularly newspaper sources, to look for links or connections between my grandfather and Jack Johnson. I was rewarded immensely for the hours upon hours I spent going through newspapers of 1907 and 1908, eventually finding a reference to a farewell to Jack Johnson held in Sydney in 1907.¹⁴ This was the event depicted in the photograph – a large gathering of black men, including not only my grandfather Fred Maynard, and Jack Johnson, but also Peter Felix, a West Indian boxer who fought Johnson during his visit. So, that initial interview with an old uncle about the APAA was responsible for leading me to a host of sources linking the early Aboriginal political movement and Black American influence and inspiration. In the end it led even further, to the uncovering of conclusive links between the AAPA in Australia and Garvey's massive international organisation in the United States.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed prominent interaction, influence and connections between Aboriginal Australia and the African American experience in the United States. The 'Freedom Ride' of 1965 led by Charles Perkins acknowledged the influence of the Martin Luther King civil rights movement in the United States.¹⁵ There were numerous other examples of international black connections with, and influences on, Aboriginal political activism in this period. In 1972 Paul Coe stated 'Black Power in Australia is a policy of self-assertion, self identity'.

It is our policy, at least as far as we in the city are concerned ... to endeavour to encourage Black Culture, the relearning, the reinstating of

¹³ Multimedia CD Rom 'Healing Our Way – Aboriginal Perspectives on Aboriginal Health' Project – Aboriginal and Islander Health – University of Newcastle.

¹⁴ *The Referee*, 13 March 1907.

¹⁵ Curthoys 2003, 'Cultural History and the Nation', pp. 2-3.

black culture wherever it is possible ... The Afro-American culture, as far as the majority of blacks in Sydney are concerned, is the answer to a lot of black problems because this is the international culture of the black people.¹⁶

In a similar vein Scott Robinson argued that the 'Black American experience was the most profound exogenous influence on Aboriginal political activism in the 1960s'.¹⁷

No less a voice than the incomparable Malcolm X perceptively commented on the obscured and oppressed position of Aboriginal Australians in 1965: 'The [A]boriginal Australian isn't even permitted to get into a position where he can make his voice heard in any way, shape or form. But I don't think that situation will last much longer.'¹⁸

What Malcolm X did not know was that an Aboriginal political voice had been active, constant and outspoken against prejudice and oppression for decades and that there had been a substantial and sustained international black influence in that process. As Malcolm X himself wrote:

Just as racism has become an international thing, the fight against it is also becoming international. Those who were the victims of it and were kept apart from each other are beginning to compare notes. They are beginning to find that it doesn't stem from their country alone. It is international. We intend to fight it internationally.¹⁹

Malcolm X was proposing in fact not something new but more of a tradition of united opposition by oppressed groups around the world, the history of which had been forgotten. Marcus Garvey, the leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, formed first in Jamaica, then (in 1916) in the United States, becoming what is recognised today as the biggest black political movement ever assembled in the United States, had expressed similar sentiments over forty years earlier:

Everywhere the black man is beginning to do his own thinking, to demand more participation in his own government, more economic justice, and better living conditions. The Universal Negro Improvement Association during the past five years has blazed the trail for him, and he is following the trail. We do not think he will turn back. He has

¹⁶ G. Pryor 1988, 'Aboriginal Australians', in Ray Willis et al. (eds) *Issues in Australian History* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire), p. 412.

¹⁷ Max Griffiths 1995, *Aboriginal Affairs: A Short History* (Sydney: Kangaroo Press), p. 114.

¹⁸ Malcolm X 2001, *The Final Speeches* (New York, NY: Pathfinder), p. 71.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

nothing to lose and everything to gain by pushing forward, whatever the obstacles he may encounter.²⁰

The UNIA founded by Garvey spread rapidly around the world in the late 1910s, and hundreds of branches of the organisation were formed. As George Frederickson writes: Garvey and his platform 'struck a response chord in the hearts and minds of black people from an astonishing variety of social and cultural backgrounds throughout the world.'²¹ A Federal Bureau of Investigation report on Garvey and his activities in 1919 reveals the unease over his far-reaching message. 'Garvey's office on 135th Str. is sort of a clearing house for all international radical agitators, including Mexicans, South Americans, Spaniards, in fact black and yellow from all parts of the globe who radiate around Garvey.'²² Garvey was able to achieve a worldwide network of information by sending out agents to spread his message. Important for my story is the fact that many of these agents were seamen.²³ Legendary Vietnamese freedom fighter Ho Chi Minh was just one who was influenced by Garvey and his doctrine.²⁴ As a young man Ho had been a seaman 'and he once spent a few months in New York. Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) movement interested him greatly and he regularly attended UNIA meetings.'²⁵

At the height of its power in the mid 1920s the UNIA had successfully established chapters in 41 countries, including a branch in Australia. As in many other places, the word had been spread to Australia by seamen, who encountered wharf labourers in Sydney, some of whom were Aboriginal young men later to become political leaders. In fact the connection between Aboriginal dockworkers and other cultures on Australian wharves had been ongoing for quite sometime.²⁶ As Tony Martin has written:

²⁰ *The Negro World*, 20 September 1924.

²¹ George Fredrickson 1995, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press), p. 152.

²² Robert Hill (ed.) 1983, *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers Vol. I* (Berkeley, CA: University of California), p. 495.

²³ Tony Martin 1983, *Marcus Garvey – Hero: A First Biography* (Dover, MA: Majority Press), p. 86.

²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 65.

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ See Maynard forthcoming 2005, "'In the Interests of Our People": The Influence of Garveyism on the Rise of Australian Aboriginal Political Activism', *Aboriginal History*; Maynard 2003, 'Vision, Voice and Influence: The Rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association', *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 121, pp. 91-105.

The Sydney, Australia UNIA branch was undoubtedly the furthest from Harlem. It illustrated how, in those days before even the widespread use of radio, Garvey and the UNIA were nevertheless able to draw communities from practically all over the world together into a single organization with a single aim.²⁷

In August 1920, the UNIA held the first of a number of highly successful international conventions and over 25 000 members gathered at Madison Square Garden in New York to hear Garvey speak. Members from UNIA branches across the globe 'attended from places as far apart as Australia, Africa and North America'.²⁸ This small note offers a tantalising scenario – who were the noted Australian delegates present at that convention? One is left to ponder the impact this experience would have had on these people on returning to Australia. Could they have been future members or office bearers of the AAPA? We do know that some members of the Sydney branch of the UNIA would later hold high-ranking positions in the AAPA.²⁹

This new knowledge of international connections between Aboriginal activists and Marcus Garvey's UNIA challenges established historical belief that Aboriginal activism originated in the 1930s as a result of the interaction of Aboriginal activists with white men and women imbued with strong British Christian, humanist and Marxist traditions. That there could have been international black interaction with and influence on Aboriginal political thought prior to World War II has been unthinkable in recent analyses that do not venture outside the confines of national history.

Aboriginal contacts with non-Europeans

The challenge posed by these findings to entrenched orthodoxy is not confined to the impact of African American political ideology during the 1920s and 1960s. The interaction and connection between Aboriginal people and other cultures has a very long history that needs to be explored in greater detail and recognised.

Western thought for a great part of the twentieth century was instrumental in establishing the misconception that Aboriginal culture was static and locked at the stone age of development. In recent decades this convenient myth has been overturned. Aboriginal culture was never static but evolving, adapting and changing through the exchange of goods and technology along well-established trade routes. These exchanges were not confined to the Australian continent. The most notable early visitors were the Macassans from the Dutch East Indies (present day Indonesia), who for hundreds of years visited northern Australia

²⁷ Martin 1983, *Marcus Garvey – Hero*, p. 99.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p. 42.

²⁹ See Maynard forthcoming 2005, 'In the Interests of Our People'.

for the trepang (sea slug), an expensive delicacy which they sent in vast quantities to China.³⁰ Aboriginal people gained work as crewmen on these boats, which raises the probability that some Aboriginal people may have ventured far from these shores many centuries ago, certainly as far as China. One can only imagine the impact made when these early Aboriginal sailors finally returned to their own communities. Other visitors who may have contributed subtle changes to Aboriginal life included the Dutch, Portuguese, French and Chinese.

The British invasion and occupation of the Australian continent in 1788 signalled the onset of large-scale interaction between Aboriginal peoples and other nationalities. From the outset Aboriginal people made contact with black convicts and sailors as well as Europeans. One important early connection was through one sailor of the First Fleet, who was probably a Native American Indian. When the devastation of disease impacted upon the local Aboriginal population of the Sydney region in the winter of 1789 the 'Native American' sailor took it upon himself to visit and attempt to comfort two seriously ill Aboriginal children. Some may ask why he took this direction. I think the answer is obvious he cared and had empathy and compassion for the Aboriginal experience that he was witness to, and it undoubtedly drew parallels to the experience of his own people in the United States. Sadly this Native American man contracted smallpox himself and was the only recorded casualty amongst the first fleet.³¹

The British for their part immediately began a process of taking Aboriginal people back to Britain (which reflected an ongoing process of European conquest and domination – to publicly display the vanquished), first as curiosities and later as examples of the fine efforts of Christian civilising. In December 1792 Bennelong and a young man Yemmurrawannie accompanied Governor Arthur Phillip to England (as well as four kangaroos and 'other peculiar animals'). Bennelong returned to Australia in 1795 with new governor John Hunter (Yemmurrawannie died of a respiratory infection in 1794 and was buried at Eltham in England). English King George III formally expressed his desire to the new governor that 'not another native should be brought home from New South Wales'.³² The King's wishes went unheeded and there were further Aboriginal

³⁰ Paul Kiem and Michael Smithson 2001, *Colonial and Contact History* (Melbourne: Longman), p. 190; D. J. Mulvaney 1989, *Encounters in Place: Outsiders and Aboriginal Australians 1606 – 1905* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press), p. 22.

³¹ David Collins, *An Account of the English Colony in New South Wales, with Remarks on the Dispositions, Customs, Manners, etc, of the Native Inhabitants of that Country*, vol. 1, edited by Brian Fletcher 1975, in association with the Royal Australian Historical Society (Sydney: A. H. and A. W. Reed), p. 54.

³² Isabel McBryde 1989, *Guests of the Governor* (Sydney: Friends of the First Government House Site), p. 29.

travellers, including the man Moowat'tin or Daniel who acted as a guide and specimen collector to the botanist Caley. Caley brought Moowat'tin to England to help with identifying his specimens but also asserted the advantages of this being a 'means of bringing them [the natives] over to our customs much sooner'. What started as a trickle in the late eighteenth century built to a steady flow throughout the nineteenth century of Aboriginal people journeying to other places around the globe. It was not an Aboriginal choice, in many instances. Roslyn Poignant's recent book *Professional Savages* highlights the sad story of a group of Northern Queensland Aborigines shipped to the United States to appear in dime museums, fairgrounds and circuses all over America and Europe.³³ These circus performers were followed in future decades by Aboriginal cricketers, boxers, footballers and horsemen.

Connections between Aboriginal people and other cultures on the docks of Australian harbours have been an important and previously neglected link to the outside world and warrant further studies. As an example of this dockland cultural connection, John Askew in 1852 recorded the natural inclination and gravitation of visiting Maori to the local Aboriginal people. Askew recorded his adventures and experiences as a steerage passenger in the Australian colony noting that eleven of the crew on the ship to New Zealand were Maori. Whilst berthed in Newcastle the Maori crew left the ship and walked the streets and docks of Newcastle. He noted not only his own but also the bewilderment of the local populace at the Maori appearance:

The Maories [*sic*] all came into the city that night, and their singular appearance attracted much attention. They were strapping young fellows. Some grotesquely tattooed; one or two had ear-rings of a peculiar kind of sharks teeth suspended by a piece of ribbon from their ears.³⁴

Askew records a cultural exchange between the Maori visitors and the local Aboriginal people within the town.

After strolling about the place for a considerable time, they mustered in front of James Hannel's, to look at a group of black fellows and gins, who were dancing a corrobory [*sic*] ... No sooner had they ended, than the Maories commenced their terrible war song. Squatting themselves down, with their legs crossed in the oriental fashion, they began by making a noise not unlike the snorting of an 'iron horse', heard half a mile off.

³³ Roslyn Poignant 2004, *Professional Savages: Captive Lives and Western Spectacle* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press), front cover.

³⁴ J. Askew 1857, *A Voyage to Australia and New Zealand* (London: Simkin, Marshall), pp. 292-3 (available in the Archives, Auchmuty Library, University of Newcastle).

This noise was accompanied by violent gestures, and the rapid motion of their hands through the air.

As they became more excited, their eyes rolled in a frenzy, and their heads turned from one side to the other. And at every turn they sent forth roars the most piercingly savage and demonical that I ever heard from human beings. When the song was finished, one of them went round with his cap and made a collection. After the collection was secured, they all started to their feet, gave a tremendous yell, ran down to the ship and divided the spoil.³⁵

Askew unknowingly has recorded a Maori performance of the Haka. Today acknowledged and celebrated around the world as the national performance of New Zealand, most notably through the pre-match ritual of the New Zealand All-Blacks. Disturbingly, Aboriginal cultural performance through corroboree has never attained either nationally or internationally the same due recognition.

Aboriginal Australians and international travel

It is also important to note that not all of the interaction between Aboriginal people and other cultures took place on these shores and that not all Aboriginal people who left Australia did so against their wishes. In fact analysing the reasons why some chose voluntarily to venture overseas may yield important insight on future Aboriginal directives.

One intriguing recent revelation is through the academic work of Terry Foenander in the United States. His search at the National Archives in Washington, DC, on details of the background of naval personnel who served in the Union Navy during the Civil War has revealed some interesting and bizarre finds. Foenander's research assistant 'located the names of at least six Union naval personnel whom, it would seem to this author, were original natives of Australia and New Zealand'.³⁶ Foenander's revelation raises the intriguing question 'did a small number of Australian Aborigines and New Zealand Maoris serve in the Union Navy during the Civil War?' Foenander is 'of the opinion that there would most certainly have been some who served as mariners, and some of these mariners would have been in the US at the start of the war, or later, enabling them to enlist in the services.'³⁷ If Foenander's find proves correct

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 292-3.

³⁶ T. Foenander 2000, *Australasian Natives in the Union Navy*, February 8, <http://home.ozconnect.net/tfoen/anz.html> accessed 8/28/2005.

³⁷ Foenander 2000, *Australasian Natives in the Union Navy*. A short description of these men follows without solving the mystery:

John Jackson, ordinary seaman, enlisted at Boston on February 25, 1862; born in Australia; aged 28 at enlistment; personal description shows eyes and hair as black and complexion

one is struck by the impact that these men would have made when and if they returned to Australia.

One Aboriginal international traveller we know something about was Anthony Martin Fernando, born in northern New South Wales in 1864.³⁸ Despite being removed at an early age from his family, Fernando refused to bow and initiated a lifetime struggle against colonial domination. He drew strength from his Aboriginal cultural identification. Frustration with the inequality of Aboriginal existence and the failure of British law to uphold Aboriginal objection was responsible for him gaining work as a boilerman on a ship to Europe. Whether Fernando left Australia with a plan already in place to take the message of Aboriginal inequality to an international audience is not clear. However, his experience in Europe instilled and invigorated his opposition to the treatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. Having survived the Great War he appears in 1921 attempting to gain an audience with the Pope. He was refused on the grounds that he did not possess internationally recognised papers of identification. He was not to be daunted and moved to Switzerland and attempted to garner the support of the Swiss government to an innovative directive on Aboriginal affairs. As Heather Goodall tells us, he outlined a proposal that was

somewhat similar to the native state concept which was to develop some years later in Australia. The latter idea was that a reserve be created in Arnhem Land which would eventually become self-governing and achieve statehood at some far-off time in the future. Fernando's proposal was more radical: he was suggesting an autonomous area in northern Australia where Aboriginal people's independence and their safety would

as negro (Rendezvous Reports, Volume 19, page 92). Barry Crompton of Melbourne, Australia provided further details from the Massachusetts rosters, indicating that Jackson enlisted at Hyannis, Massachusetts; served on the receiving ship USS Ohio; and is listed as deceased, March 24, 1862, aboard the Ohio.

Michael Kendy, ordinary seaman, enlisted June 10, 1864, for 3 years, at New Bedford, aged 21; born Australia; personal description shows black eyes, woolly hair and Negro complexion (Rendezvous Reports, Volume 34, page 405).

Albert McDermott, seaman, enlisted October 20, 1862, for 1 year, at New York, aged 23; born Australia; personal description shows black eyes, fuzzy hair and yellow complexion. (Muster rolls occasionally show African American servicemen with yellow complexions) (Rendezvous Reports Volume 32, page 466).

Antonio Miles, native of Australia, described as mulatto; previous occupation mariner, enlisted at age 23 in the Union Navy.

³⁸ Heather Goodall 1988, 'Aboriginal Calls for Justice', *Aboriginal Law Bulletin*, vol. 2, no. 3, p. 4.

be guaranteed by an international power under the control of the League of Nations.³⁹

Again Fernando was rebuffed; a man of lesser courage and strength must surely have buckled. He took to the streets of Milan and London carrying placards and handing out pamphlets highlighting the ill-treatment of Aboriginal people in Australia. He was gaoled in Italy by Mussolini 'as an enemy of an ally of fascist Italy'. He was interned without a trial for many months before eventual deportation to Britain. He instigated a one-man campaign against Australia 'picketing Australia House. He covered himself with toy skeletons and pointed to them as he called out to passers by: "This is what they are doing to my people in Australia".'⁴⁰ Severely embarrassed, the Australian authorities attempted to sweep him under the carpet. He was arrested on numerous occasions and they even instigated an attempt to have him put in a mental asylum, in what was, as Goodall states, 'a well-known tactic of political repression'. The doctors refused to certify him, one of them writing: 'he holds strong views about the manner in which his people are treated, but that is a sign not of insanity but of an unusually strong mind.'⁴¹

Fernando refused to be intimidated by anyone. In 1929 he appeared before the court in London after pulling a gun on a white man 'who had abused him because he was black'. He utilised the platform and moment to vent his anger once more at the powers that be:

'I have pleaded my people's cause since 1887', he declared, 'I have seen whites in Australia go unpunished for murdering and ill-treating Aborigines. I have been boycotted everywhere. Look at my rags. All I hear is "Go away, black man" but it is all Tommy rot to say we are savages. Whites have shot, slowly starved and hanged us!'⁴²

In Fernando's eyes if the British needed an example of savagery they needed to look no further than the mirror. For over two decades Fernando had waged a one-man campaign of unrelenting protest; as late as 1938 he was still in the news. Once more in court now aged seventy-four, he remained unbowed, 'We are despised and rejected, but it is the black people who keep this country in all its greatness'.⁴³ Fernando died shortly after this court appearance and as Goodall reverently describes, he had maintained 'his struggle against enormous odds, alone but unfailingly presenting his peoples case on the other side of the world,

³⁹ *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 5.

in the heart of the land of the colonisers'.⁴⁴ What Fernando sadly was not to know was that his efforts and sacrifice in challenging the foundations of Empire itself did not go unnoticed. As Goodall tell us, 'Aboriginal activists like Pearl Gibbs back in New South Wales hungrily clipped the press accounts of his words, taking them for inspiration for their own campaign'. Fiona Paisley has also shed new light on the remarkable and courageous Anthony Martin Fernando.⁴⁵

Aboriginal women sometimes left Australia too. An Aboriginal missionary, born at Pialba in Queensland, Mrs Charles Aurora, was described by an old missionary friend Elizabeth McKenzie Hatton as a 'woman carrying a high standard of Christian character – a clever, refined, and educated woman, she has been used to help in the translation of the scriptures in the language of the Solomon Islands.'⁴⁶ In 1921 and after fourteen years service in the Solomon Islands she returned to Queensland and was 'shocked to find, in this Christian land of ours, so little being done for her own people and the half caste girls'.⁴⁷ She was so distressed by the conditions she witnessed she travelled to Melbourne beseeching McKenzie Hatton to 'go back and help her to rescue these young and helpless girls'.⁴⁸ In unleashing the determined McKenzie Hatton on a collision course with government authority Mrs Charles Aurora could well be said to have played no small part in the rise of Aboriginal political mobilisation some three years later. McKenzie Hatton would prove one of the most astute and courageous allies of Aboriginal rights to surface in the early decades of the twentieth century.⁴⁹

The freedom of international travel and its impact on Mrs Charles Aurora and Anthony Fernando can be contrasted with the tight and restrictive controls of movement exerted over the Aboriginal population within Australia during those years. Tom Lacey, later to be treasurer of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association 1924 to 1928, revealed those very restrictions to an international audience when he penned a letter to Amy Jacques Garvey – wife of Marcus Garvey in 1924:

We have a bit of trouble to see some of our people, as the missionaries have got the most of them, and we have great difficulty in reaching them. The authorities won't allow us to see them unless we can give them (the Aboriginal Board) a clear explanation of what we want them for.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Fiona Paisley 2001, 'Into Self-imposed Exile', *Griffith Review*, vol. 2, no. 4.

⁴⁶ McKenzie Hatton, 1921 - The National Archives AI/15 21/6686.

⁴⁷ Hatton, 1921.

⁴⁸ Hatton, 1921.

⁴⁹ *The Negro World*, 2 August 1924.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

Lacey recognised the negative long-term effect of confinement on missions and reserves for the Aboriginal population. The authorities 'have got their minds so much doped that they think they can never become a people', he wrote.

International travel gave Aboriginal people a much broader perspective of events and made them aware that others around the globe had shared similar tragedy under the weight of colonisation. Certainly they were given the courage to challenge the notions of inferiority they were expected to accept. Many recognised the importance of maintaining or re-establishing strength from their own cultural identity and history. This sense of identity and history was very much at the forefront of Marcus Garvey's platform, and later W. E. B Du Bois and Frantz Fanon. As Robert Young has argued, both Du Bois and Fanon moved away from analysing the 'psychological effects of domination and disempowerment plotted in the terms of Hegelian consciousness, to increasingly radical social and political demands for empowerment and self determination'.⁵¹ This was the very platform and directive taken up by the Aboriginal movement in Sydney during the mid 1920s.⁵²

This chapter has traced how I myself became interested in transnational/transcultural history, and some of the approaches it suggests to a reworking of Australian Aboriginal history. There is a great opportunity for broader awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history to a degree previously beyond the wildest imagination. There are so many areas that could be explored – for instance the impact on Aboriginal activism of Aboriginal servicemen and women returning from fighting overseas in the Boer War, World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam. My aim here is simply to highlight a long tradition of international interaction between Aboriginal people and many differing groups, in the hope of inspiring others to pursue these most unlikely areas of study.

⁵¹ Robert Young 2001, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers), p. 221.

⁵² Maynard, 'Vision, Voice and Influence', pp. 91-105; Maynard 2003, 'Australian History: Lifting Haze or Descending Fog', *Aboriginal History*, vol. 27, pp. 139-45.

13. From Mississippi to Melbourne via Natal: the invention of the literacy test as a technology of racial exclusion

Marilyn Lake

‘Wave upon wave, each with increasing virulence, is dashing this new religion of whiteness on the shores of our time.’ W. E. B. Du Bois, ‘The Souls of White Folk’, *Independent*, 1910.

‘This new religion of whiteness’

In 1910, in an article first published in the New York journal the *Independent*, called ‘The Souls of White Folk’, the Black American historian, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about his perception of a sudden change in the world, indeed the emergence of a ‘new religion’: ‘the world in a sudden emotional conversion, has discovered that it is white, and, by that token, wonderful’.¹ In noting that ‘white folk’ had suddenly ‘become painfully conscious of their whiteness’, Du Bois was pointing to the emergence of a new subjective mode of identification that crossed national borders, an identification as white men. That same year Du Bois helped establish the journal, *The Crisis*, to combat ‘race prejudice’. ‘It takes its name’, declared the first editorial, ‘from the fact that the editors believe that this is a critical time in the history of the advancement of man’.²

As an historian, Du Bois wanted to emphasise the historical novelty of what he witnessed, especially the emergence of a new ‘personal’ sense of self:

The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing – a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed. The ancient world would have laughed at such a distinction. The middle age regarded it with mild curiosity, and even up into the eighteenth century we were hammering our national manikins into one great Universal Man with fine frenzy which ignored color and race as well as birth. Today we have changed all that...

He also noted white men’s proprietary claims, likening the intermittent outbursts of rage among white folks to the tantrums of possessive children, who refused to share their candy. When applied to the relations between the different races

¹ W. E. B. Du Bois 1910, ‘The Souls of White Folk’, *Independent*, 18 August, p. 339; this essay was re-published in a revised form in W. E. B. Du Bois 1920, *Darkwater* (New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace and Howe).

² *The Crisis A Record of the Darker Races*, Editorial, vol. 1, 1910, p. 10.

of the world, however, the message seemed rather more ominous: 'whiteness is the ownership of the earth, forever and ever, Amen!' A new global movement was in the ascendancy. 'Wave upon wave, each with increasing virulence, is dashing this new religion of whiteness on the shores of our time'. That nations were coming to believe in it, wrote Du Bois, was 'manifest daily'.³

In seeking to explain the rise of this 'inexplicable phenomenon', Du Bois noted the political claims to equality that were beginning to be made by colonised and coloured peoples around the world: 'Do we sense somnolent writhings in black Africa, or angry groans in India, or triumphant "Banzais" in Japan? "To your tents, O Israel!" these nations are not white. Build warships and heft the "Big Stick"'.⁴ In 1908, United States President Theodore Roosevelt (the author of the diplomacy 'Speak Softly and Carry a Big Stick') had sent the United States Naval Fleet on a tour of the Pacific, its ill-concealed intention to intimidate the Japanese, whose challenge to the United States over its restrictive immigration policy and the Californian policy of segregated schooling had led to a crisis in relations between the two naval powers, their 'Gentlemen's Agreement' of 1907, notwithstanding.

In seeking to explain the 'new fanaticism' that was taking hold, Du Bois insisted on the transnational nature of, and response to, the movement for racial equality:

when the black man begins to dispute the white man's title to certain alleged bequests of the Father's in wage and position, authority and training; and when his attitude toward charity is sullen anger, rather than humble jollity; when he insists on his human right to swagger and swear and waste – then the spell is suddenly broken and the philanthropist is apt to be ready to believe that negroes are impudent, that the South is right, and that Japan wants to fight us'.⁵

As Du Bois noted, the proclamation of 'white men's countries' was a defensive reaction to the mobility and mobilisations of colonised and coloured peoples around the world. The global migrations of the late nineteenth century provide the crucial historical context for claims to racial equality that were often expressed as equal rights of mobility.

In his influential book *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson defined nations as 'imagined communities' in the sense that they were composed of individuals who, though they might never meet face to face, came to identify with their compatriots and believed themselves to hold certain values, myths and outlooks in common. At the core of this process of identification was the cultural and

³ Du Bois 1910, 'Souls of White Folk', p. 339.

⁴ *ibid.*, p. 340.

⁵ *ibid.*

historical imagination, its key instruments the novel and newspaper. Anderson stressed the affective as well as the imaginary dimension of national identification which he imagined as 'fraternal'.⁶

Paradoxically, one outcome of Anderson's argument has been to naturalise the nation as *the* imagined community of the modern age, an effect that has obscured what Du Bois saw so clearly in 1910: the ascendancy of racial identifications and the emergence of an imagined community of white men that was transnational in its reach, drawing together the self-styled 'white men' of southern Africa, north America and Australasia in what Theodore Roosevelt liked to call a condition of 'fellow feeling'.⁷ In this context, the designation 'white men' referred to those of 'Anglo-Saxon' descent or 'English-speaking peoples' who shared what Roosevelt in *The Winning of the West* called the same 'race history', which began, following E. A. Freeman, with the 'great Teutonic wanderings'.⁸

White men were thought to have a genius, not just for self-government, but also for colonisation. The settlement of the continents of Australia and America, Roosevelt argued, were key events in world history: 'We cannot rate too highly the importance of their acquisition', he wrote. 'Their successful settlement was a feat which by comparison utterly dwarfs all the European wars of the last two centuries.'⁹ Clearly, the 'manhood' espoused by white men was a racialised as well as gendered condition.¹⁰

Just two years before the publication of Du Bois' essay on the 'Souls of White Folk' in the New York *Independent*, the same journal had featured a long report by W. R. Charlton, a Sydney journalist, of the effusive welcome offered by Australians to the visiting American Fleet, white men rapturously greeting fellow white men from across the Pacific. On arrival in Sydney, Rear Admiral Sperry told his hosts he spoke to them 'as white man to white men, and, I may add, to "very white men"'.¹¹ Charlton's article celebrated the new alliance between the 'Republic and the Commonwealth': 'It is delightful to us to say – whether it be delusion, half-truth or the truth-absolute – that the Americans are our kinsmen,

⁶ Benedict Anderson 1991, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London: Verso).

⁷ See Theodore Roosevelt 1902, 'Fellow Feeling as a Political Factor', in Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (London: Grant Richards), pp. 71-87.

⁸ Theodore Roosevelt 1889, *Winning of the West*, vol. 1 (New York, NY: Putnam's), pp. 4-5.

⁹ Roosevelt 1889, *Winning of the West*, p. 14.

¹⁰ Marilyn Lake 2003, 'On Being a White Man, Australia, circa 1900', in Hsu-Ming Teo and Richard White (eds), *Cultural History in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press); Gail Bedermann 1995, *Manliness and Civilisation: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press).

¹¹ *Age*, 27 August 1908.

blood of our blood, bone of our bone, and one with us in our ideals of the brotherhood of man.’¹²

In recent scholarship, the investigation of ‘whiteness’ has emerged as a productive new field of historical enquiry, but most studies have conceptualised their subject within a national frame of analysis, charting national dynamics and histories. When overseas ideas are identified as important they are usually conceptualised as external influences shaping a national experience rather than as constituting transnational knowledge.¹³ Yet, as Du Bois saw clearly, the emergence of this ‘new religion’ of whiteness was a transnational phenomenon and all the more powerful for that. It produced in turn its own powerful solidarities of resistance. One commentator writing in *Fortnightly Review*, in 1907, worried that the new solidarity of white men and their claim to monopoly of four continents, would drive Chinese and Indians into an unprecedented pan-Asiatic alliance led by the Japanese that would ultimately see the eclipse of Western civilisation.¹⁴

White men, meanwhile, whether in the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Rhodesia or Kenya, looked to each other for sympathy and support, for ideas and practical instruction. They exchanged knowledge and know-how, in particular the uses of the census, the literacy test and the passport as key technologies in building and defending white men’s countries.¹⁵ This chapter looks at the deployment of the literacy test as an instrument of

¹² W. R. Charlton 1908, ‘The Australian Welcome to the Fleet’, *Independent*, vol. LXV, no. 3123, 8 October, p. 815.

¹³ On ‘whiteness’ see, for example, Ruth Frankenberg 1993, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press); David Roediger 1994, *Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso); Matthew Frye Jacobsen 1999, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press); Aileen Moreton-Robinson 2000, *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press); on the influence of external ideas on national formations see, for example, Russell McGregor 1989, *Imagined Destinies Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press).

¹⁴ *Fortnightly Review*, 1 February 1908.

¹⁵ On the census see Marilyn Lake 2004, ‘The White Man under Siege: New Histories of Race in the Nineteenth Century and the Advent of White Australia’, *History Workshop Journal*, vol. 58, pp. 41–62; Tony Ballantyne 2002, ‘Empire, Knowledge and Culture: From Proto-Globalization to Modern Globalization’, in Anthony Hopkins (ed.), *Globalization in World History* (London: Pimlico); and Margo J. Anderson 1988, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press); on passports see Radhika Vyas Mongia 2003, ‘Race, Nationality, Mobility: A History of the Passport’, in Antoinette Burton (ed.), *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking with and through the Nation* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press).

racial exclusion and its circulation between the United States, South Africa and Australia. It also charts the concomitant racialisation of a diversity of national groups, including Africans, Americans, Australians, Indians, Japanese, Hungarians and Italians in a process that produced dichotomous categories of white and non-white, subsuming earlier multiple classifications.

The targets of the literacy test changed as did its specifications, from the requirement to write one's name, to demonstration of the comprehension of the constitution, to the ability to fill out an application form in English to a dictation test in any European language. Beginning with Mississippi in 1890, the deployment of a literacy test for racial purposes was a key aspect of the transnational process noticed by Du Bois: the constitution of 'whiteness' as the basis of both personal identity and transnational political community. Literacy was used to patrol racial borders (electoral as well as national) within and between nations, and in the process literacy became code for whiteness.

While a number of Australian historians have noted that the infamous Australian dictation test of 1901 followed the precedent of Natal in 1897, they have not noticed that the Natal legislation explicitly emulated an American Act of 1896 – passed at the behest of the Boston-based Immigration Restriction League, but which, as it happened, was vetoed by President Grover Cleveland. The United States example was all important, but the British imperial frame of analysis adopted by most historians of Australia has diverted attention from the importance of American experience to white colonials. Both in Australia and South Africa, white men looked to the example of the country they liked to call 'the great republic'.

And they looked to American history lessons more generally. The main lesson they imbibed from nineteenth century American history was the impossibility of a multi-racial democracy and the most influential source for this understanding was James Bryce's magisterial *The American Commonwealth*, first published in 1888 and re-published in a new and expanded third edition in 1893, that included two chapters on 'The South Since the War' and 'The Present and Future of the Negro'. The 'negro question', said Bryce, was 'the capital question in national as well as state politics'.¹⁶ Moreover, 'the problem was a new one in history, for the relations of the ruling and subject races of Europe and Asia supply no parallel to it.'¹⁷

At Oxford University, Bryce had been a student of the pre-eminent race historian of the nineteenth century and leading proponent of Anglo-Saxonism, E. A. Freeman, whose work was also much admired both in the United States and

¹⁶ James Bryce 1893, *The American Commonwealth*, third and revised edition (London and New York, NY: Macmillan), p. 510.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 514.

Australia. Bryce was not so committed as his mentor to racial determinism, but following his extended visits to the United States in the 1880s he, too, became convinced of the unfitness of non-whites for self-government.¹⁸ 'Emancipation found them utterly ignorant', he wrote of American Blacks in 1888, 'and the grant of suffrage found them as unfit for political rights as any population could be.'¹⁹

Bryce was a key transnational educator on the subject of history, nation and race. He played a crucial role in circulating knowledge about the 'failed experiment' of racial equality ushered in by Radical Reconstruction following the Civil War, when the passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution guaranteed the 'equal protection' of the law to 'all persons born or naturalized in the United States' and that prevented States from denying the right to vote on grounds of race or colour. Hailed by Liberal Republican Carl Schurz as 'the great Constitutional Revolution', in Bryce's account, Radical Reconstruction was a ghastly mistake, leading to terrible violence on the part of whites accompanied by 'revolting cruelty'.²⁰

As Hugh Tulloch has observed:

His summary of slavery and reconstruction classically stated the Gilded Age orthodoxy which was developed more fully in the historical works of such friends as C. F. Adams Jr, James Ford Rhodes, Woodrow Wilson, John W. Burgess and W. A. Dunning: 'Such a Saturnalia of robbery and jobbery has seldom been seen in any civilised country, and certainly never before under the forms of free self-government'.²¹

Wendell Phillips Garrison, on the other hand, writing in the *Nation*, regretted that Bryce had thrown 'the weight of his humane authority into the white scale' and Bryce drew further criticism from old English friends, including A. V. Dicey.²²

In Australia, however, *The American Commonwealth* commanded a faithful following, where it was taken up in the 1890s as the 'bible' or 'great textbook' by colonial leaders engaged in the work of drawing up a new federal

¹⁸ Lake 2004, 'The White Man under Siege', pp. 54-5.

¹⁹ James Bryce 1888, *The American Commonwealth*, vol. 3 (London and New York, NY: Macmillan), p. 92.

²⁰ On Carl Schurz, see Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York, NY and London: W. W. Norton & Co.), p. 106.

²¹ Hugh Tulloch 1988, *James Bryce's American Commonwealth: the Anglo-American Background* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press), p. 195.

²² Review 1895, *New York Nation*, 31 January, pp. 86-8; Tulloch 1988, *Bryce's American Commonwealth*, pp. 197-8.

constitution.²³ In South Africa, too, as John Cell, in his study of the origins of segregation in South Africa and the importance of the American example, has noted, Bryce became the accepted authority on American race relations among English-speaking white men.²⁴

The Mississippi precedent: the education test of 1890

In *The American Commonwealth*, Bryce canvassed possible solutions to the Negro problem, including the feasibility of deporting Blacks – all eight million – to Africa. He also drew attention to the Mississippi legislation of 1890, which for the first time used an ‘education test’ to exclude otherwise qualified Black voters from the electoral roll. Prevented by the 14th and 15th Amendments from disenfranchising Blacks on the grounds of race, the southern state of Mississippi led the way among self-styled white men’s countries in deploying an education test – in this case a comprehension test – to achieve racial exclusion. The law required that to be registered a voter ‘shall be able to read any section of the Constitution, or be able to understand the same when read to him, or to give a reasonable interpretation thereof’.

The requirement that voters demonstrate a degree of literacy was not itself new. The importance of literacy and education to the exercise of self-government was central to republican understandings of citizenship in the United States, as Matt Jacobsen has pointed out and, it was the northern states of Connecticut (1855) and Massachusetts (1857) that first stipulated that electors should be able to read the Constitution. Massachusetts also required that electors be able to write their names.

The 1890 Constitutional Convention of Mississippi marked a new departure, however, in the recommendation of an education test as a means to effect racial discrimination. The Supreme Court of Mississippi commented on the ways in which Blacks’ racial characteristics rendered them unfit to exercise the suffrage:

Within the field of permissible action under the limitations proposed by the Federal Constitution, the Convention swept the field of expedients to obstruct the exercise of suffrage by the Negro race. By reasons of its previous condition of servitude and dependency, this race had acquired

²³ J. A. LaNauze, *The Making of the Australian Constitution*, quoted in Marilyn Lake 2003, ‘White Man’s Country: The Trans-National History of a Trans-National Project’, *Australian Historical Studies*, vol. 34, no. 122, p. 358.

²⁴ John W. Cell 1982, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press), p. 23.

or accentuated certain peculiarities of habit, temperament, and of character, which clearly distinguished it as a race from the whites.²⁵

Although not ostensibly discriminatory, the educational test permitted race distinctions in several ways, as Gilbert Stephenson observed in his 1910 study of *Race Distinctions in American Law* :

In the first place, registration officers may give a difficult passage of the Constitution to a Negro, and a very easy passage to a white person, or vice versa. He may permit a halting reading by one and require fluent reading by the other. He may let illegible scratching on paper suffice for the signature of one and require of the other a legible handwriting. But race discriminations in such cases rest with the officers; they do not have their basis in the law itself.²⁶

Other southern states followed suit: South Carolina in 1895, Louisiana in 1898, North Carolina in 1900, Alabama in 1901, Virginia in 1901, and Georgia in 1908. The legislation had the desired effect, as Stephenson reported:

In one county in Mississippi, with a population of about 8,000 whites and 11,700 Negroes in 1900, there were only twenty-five or thirty qualified Negro voters in 1908, the rest being disqualified, it is said, on the educational test. In another county, with 30,000 Negroes, only about 175 were registered voters ... As a general rule, taking the country at large, about one person in five is a male of voting age. In Iowa four out of five possible voters have actually voted in the last four elections; in Georgia, a State of nearly the same population, the proportion is one to six ... These figures show that the ratio of actual voters to total population in the Southern States is astoundingly smaller than in other States.²⁷

In *The American Commonwealth*, Bryce observed that the strategy of racial exclusion in Mississippi had proven so effective, that it had recommended itself to 'a British colony where the presence of a large coloured population has posed a problem not dissimilar to that we have been examining'.²⁸ At his suggestion, the Cape Colony in South Africa followed the Mississippi precedent in its Franchise and Ballot Act of 1892, which for the first time applied an education test as well as a property test to further restrict the number of non-whites who could vote there.

²⁵ Gilbert Thomas Stephenson 1910, *Race Distinctions in American Law* (New York, NY and London: Appleton and Co.), p. 295.

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 303-4.

²⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 320-1.

²⁸ Bryce 1893, *American Commonwealth*, p. 511.

A literacy test to restrict immigration to the United States

The decade of the 1890s in the United States – as in Australia and South Africa – saw growing demands that the government further restrict immigration to exclude undesirable races. In the case of the United States it was the vast numbers who were entering the country that began to cause alarm as well as the changing complexion of immigrants. Italians, Hungarians, Poles and other allegedly ignorant and illiterate European peoples – ‘removed from us in race and blood’ – began to be targeted for exclusion.²⁹

In 1790, the United States had restricted naturalised citizenship to ‘all free white persons who have or shall migrate into the United States’.³⁰ Clearly, the legislation was racially discriminatory, but as Jacobsen points out the law also proved to be radically ‘inclusive’:

What is too easily missed from our vantage point, however, is the staggering inclusivity of the 1790 naturalization law. It was this law’s unquestioned use of the word ‘white’ that allowed for the massive European migrations of the nineteenth century, beginning with the Famine Migration from Ireland, and ultimately including the 48ers from Germany, the Scandinavian pioneers, and then successive waves of East European Jews, Italians, Greeks, Poles, Ruthenians, Slovenians, Magyars, Ukrainians, Lithuanians – none of whom the framers [of the constitution] had ever envisioned swelling the polity of the new nation when they crafted its rules for naturalization.³¹

It was these groups on whom American immigration reformers focused in the 1890s, opening up in the process the categories of ‘white’ and ‘non-white’ for re-definition. Many southern and eastern Europeans began to be considered not quite white enough for Anglo-Saxon America.³²

The Chinese had been excluded by name in United States legislation of 1882. Now on the east coast, especially in Massachusetts, attention was focused on other undesirable ‘races’ who allegedly threatened the American standard of living and system of government. In two articles in the *North American Review*, in 1891, Boston Anglo-Saxonist and Republican Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge made the point that ‘the immigration of those races which had thus far built up the United States, and which are related to each other either by blood or language

²⁹ Henry Cabot Lodge 1891, ‘Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration’, in *North American Review*, vol. 152, no. 414, p. 611.

³⁰ Jacobsen 1999, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, p. 22.

³¹ *ibid.*, p. 40.

³² *ibid.*, pp. 43-60.

or both was declining, while the immigration of races totally alien to them was increasing'.³³

In the first article, in January, he used consular reports to show that immigration was 'making its greatest relative increase from races most alien to the body of American people and from the lowest and most illiterate classes among those races'.³⁴ He pointed in particular to the rise in the number of Hungarian Slovacs who, according to the American consul in Budapest, had 'so many items in common with the Chinese' in that they were prey to drug addictions of various kinds (alcohol not opium) and their low standard of living was undermining the 'white labourer's wages'.³⁵ It was time, Lodge argued, to 'discriminate against illiteracy':

It is a truism to say that one of the greatest dangers to our free government is ignorance ... We spend millions annually in educating our children that they may be fit to be citizens and rulers of the Republic. We are ready to educate also the children who come to us from other countries; but it is not right to ask us to take annually a large body of persons who are totally illiterate ... We have the right to exclude illiterate persons from our immigration, and this test ... would in all probability shut out a large part of the undesirable portion of the present immigration.³⁶

Lodge's second article in May 1891 was prompted by the lynching of eleven Italians in New Orleans and although he condemned the lawlessness of the mob, Lodge nevertheless considered there was reason for it. The local community had reason to believe the Italians were connected with the Mafia, 'offspring of conditions and of ideas wholly alien to the people of the United States', whose presence provided further evidence of 'the utter carelessness with which we treat immigration in this country'. If new restriction measures were not soon introduced – including a test of immigrants' ability to read and write – then 'race antagonisms' must surely increase.³⁷

In 1894, Lodge joined other New Englanders, Prescott F. Hall, Robert DeCourcy Ward, Charles Warren and John Fiske in forming the Immigration Restriction League. As Jacobsen has observed, the 'league crystallized around the issue of a literacy test for incoming aliens' and 'race was central to the league's conception

³³ Lodge 1891, 'Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration', p. 606.

³⁴ Henry Cabot Lodge 1891, 'The Restriction of Immigration', *North American Review*, January, p. 32.

³⁵ *ibid.*, p. 31.

³⁶ *ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁷ Lodge 1891, 'Lynch Law and Unrestricted Immigration', p. 612.

of literacy from the beginning'.³⁸ Literacy was fundamental to the citizen's capacity for self-government and only Anglo-Saxons were blessed with that capacity. But arguably, just as important as the New Englanders' 'Anglo-Saxon complex' was Lodge's knowledge from State department reports that the groups he wanted to exclude – migrants from eastern and southern Europe – had very low levels of literacy.

The Immigration Restriction Bill, which required immigrants to show knowledge of reading and writing in their own language, for admission to the United States, was sponsored by Lodge in 1895 and passed in 1896. As Barbara Solomon has noted:

An educational basis of admission seemed reasonable; the Massachusetts State Constitution already contained such a reading and writing requirement for voting. Moreover, the bill had the strategic usefulness of not discriminating against any group by name, nationality, religion or race [but] would keep out 'people we wish to exclude'.³⁹

Its strategic value was immediately apparent to Joseph Chamberlain in the British Colonial Office, who was thinking about ways of preventing colonists in South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and British Columbia from passing legislation that discriminated explicitly against Chinese and Indian British subjects or Britain's Japanese allies.

In the event, the American Immigration Restriction Act of 1896 would be vetoed by President Grover Cleveland, but not before it was taken up by political leaders in Natal, who were looking for ways to stop the further immigration of Indians. In the United States, Lodge and others continued to press for immigration restriction based on a literacy test, with their political support increasingly coming from the South and the west coast, as agitation there against 'Asiatics' grew ever more strident. Twice more when immigration restriction legislation incorporating a literacy test was passed by Congress, it was vetoed by Presidents Taft and Wilson.

Founded on the American Act: Natal introduces immigration restriction

In Natal, agitation against immigrants also became vociferous in the 1890s, focused on an 'invasion' of Indian immigrants, many of whom were also accused of bringing the plague. More important than the fear of disease, however, was the prospect of their competition in employment and business and their future

³⁸ Jacobsen 1999, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, p. 77; see also Barbara Miller Solomon 1965, *Ancestors and Immigrants: A Changing New England Tradition* (New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons), pp. 59-81.

³⁹ Solomon 1965, *Ancestors and Immigrants*, pp. 17-18.

participation in politics for, as the Colonial Office observed sympathetically with reference to an 1894 franchise amendment, 'the Whites would never submit to being overruled by the Indian vote'.⁴⁰

In promising to limit Indian immigration, the Natal government insisted on the political imperative of securing white man's rule:

We have got a large unenfranchised [Black] population of roughly 500,000; we have got a European population – which in fact is the governing body as regards the whole community – roughly in numbers, 50,000; and we have got Indians who have come here at our own expense, or who have come here as a consequence of our own Immigration Laws, in round numbers nearly equal to Europeans. And we think that a large addition to the Indian population will be a cause for difficulty, not only in the present as regards competition, but also in the future as regards the political conditions of the colony.⁴¹

The government initially determined to follow the Australian colony of New South Wales, which had recently passed legislation extending its earlier 1888 exclusion of Chinese to 'all coloured races' regardless of their status as British subjects. However, on preparation of a similar Bill called 'A Bill to restrict the immigration of Asiatics into Natal', the government was informed that the New South Wales legislation had been 'reserved' by the Colonial Office.

Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain explained to both New South Wales and Natal that these measures – and the issue of discrimination against Chinese and Indian British subjects more generally – would be discussed later that year in London when the colonial Premiers gathered to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Her Majesty Queen Victoria's accession to the throne. The invitation to join the celebrations was welcomed in Natal as a great compliment to 'the self-governing Colonies'.⁴²

Clearly, explicit race-based legislation would not receive royal assent, so Natal looked to the example of the 'great Republic of America' which claimed, like themselves, 'an absolute right' 'if they think fit to place a restriction on the introduction of immigration into their country of persons who are regarded by the community as undesirable immigrants'.⁴³ In moving the second reading of

⁴⁰ Minute in response to Petition from MK Gandhi and others, re amendment to Franchise Act, CO 189, 1894, UK National Archives.

⁴¹ Legislative Assembly Debates, Natal, 25 March 1897, CO 179/198, p. 28. UK National Archives.

⁴² Legislative Council Address to Governor, Natal, 24 March 1897, CO 179/198, UK National Archives

⁴³ Legislative Assembly Debates, 25 March 1897, CO 179/198, p.30.

the Immigration Restriction Bill in the Legislative Assembly, in March 1897, the Premier explained:

The great Republic of America has found it necessary to have recourse to that restriction and I may say generally that the Bill that I now have the honour to submit to this Assembly is founded on the American Act. But it goes one step further. The American Act prohibits the immigration of ... 'persons who cannot read and write in their own language or in some other language' (these are the words of the statute) 'being of the age of sixteen and upwards'.⁴⁴

The Premier explained further that the Natal legislation had to 'go one step further than the American Bill' because the persons whom Natal desired to exclude were 'perfectly well able to read and write in their own language'. The Natal Bill stipulated that if prospective immigrants were

unable to satisfy the immigration officer that they can read and write in the English language in the form prescribed by the Bill – a form that will not admit of any evasion – that if persons are unable to comply with that educational test it will be competent for the Government of this country, through the proper officers, to exclude those people from forming part and parcel of this community'.⁴⁵

The final legislation actually specified that the application must be written in 'any European language', both to avoid discouraging other European immigrants and causing offence to Britain's European allies.

Several members of the Natal Legislative Assembly had objected to the provision for a literacy test because, on the one hand, 'the wily Hindoo' could certainly circumvent such a requirement, while on the other, it would prevent otherwise excellent European colonists from immigrating to Natal. Some argued, as they would also argue in Australia, that it was more becoming to white men to speak honestly about their intentions and forget about Colonial Office objections on behalf of coloured British subjects, for 'the idea of the British subject was fading more and more every year'. It was also suggested that the American precedent was inappropriate because their legislation was thought to be directed at lower class Europeans. Rather, some politicians urged, Natal should follow her 'sister colony' of New South Wales and join them in presenting a united front to the Colonial Office on the particular matter of 'Asiatic immigration'.

In the event, the Bill 'founded on the American Act' was passed with few dissenting voices and would thence be recommended by Secretary of State Joseph Chamberlain as a model to the Australians in 1901.

⁴⁴ Legislative Assembly Debates, Natal, 25 March 1897, CO 179/198, pp. 30-1.

⁴⁵ Legislative Assembly Debates, Natal, 25 March 1897, CO 179/198, p. 31.

The White Australia policy

When Prime Minister Edmund Barton rose in the first federal parliament, in Melbourne, to support the measures that comprised the White Australia policy – the Immigration Restriction Bill and the Pacific Islands Labourers' Bill – he held aloft a copy of Charles Pearson's prophetic book, *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, and quoted the following passage:

The day will come, and perhaps is not far distant, when the European observer will look round to see the globe circled with a continuous zone of the black and yellow races, no longer too weak for aggression or under tutelage, but independent, or practically so, in government, monopolising the trade of their own regions, and circumscribing the industry of the Europeans; when Chinamen and the natives of Hindustan, the states of Central and South America ... are represented by fleets in the European seas, invited to international conferences and welcomed as allies in quarrels of the civilised world. The citizens of these countries will then be taken up into the social relations of the white races, will throng the English turf or the salons of Paris, and will be admitted to inter-marriage. It is idle to say that if all this should come to pass our pride of place will not be humiliated ... We shall wake to find ourselves elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside by peoples whom we looked down upon as servile and thought of as bound always to minister to our needs. The solitary consolation will be that the changes have been inevitable.⁴⁶

Pearson, a former professor in modern history at King's College, London had become by the 1890s a leading Melbourne intellectual, a headmaster and journalist, a politician and educational reformer and mentor to future Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, the architect of the White Australia policy. Pearson was a progressive: he had written in support of land tax, women's rights, the Polish uprising and the Haitian revolution. His book, published by Macmillan in London and New York, in 1893, with its prediction of the decline of the white man and the rise of 'the Black and Yellow races' caused a sensation around the world.

It was reviewed at length by Theodore Roosevelt, who commended it for alerting him to the movement of 'world forces' of which he had previously been ignorant. In a personal letter, from Washington, where he was working as Civil Service Commissioner, he wrote to tell Pearson of the 'great effect' of his book:

all our men here in Washington ... were greatly interested in what you said. In fact, I don't suppose that any book recently, unless it is Mahan's

⁴⁶ Quoted by Barton in House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 7 August 1901, p. 3503.

'Influence of Sea Power' has excited anything like as much interest or caused so many men to feel that they had to revise their mental estimates of facts'.⁴⁷

Roosevelt, thenceforth, would embark on a re-assertion of American racial vigour ('the strenuous life') that led to a vociferous campaign in support of national expansion and to his personal command of the Rough Riders in the Spanish–American war in Cuba.

Pearson, back in London in 1893, wrote to his friend and protégé in Melbourne, Alfred Deakin, gratified at the book's reception: 'It has been an unexpected but I think real success.' 'Hutton, Huxley, Green, Mahaffy & Simcox have been among the critics: and it has altogether been reviewed in some thirty papers.'⁴⁸ Grant Duff was an indignant reviewer, suggesting that 'the English race [would] certainly awake to its duties, when the time came, and massacre as many Chinese and Hindoos as were found superfluous'.⁴⁹ 'Can you imagine any European power setting itself to massacre 100 millions of Chinamen?' Pearson asked Deakin.⁵⁰

The more acute of the English reviews of his book noted the significance of his change of domicile for his perspective on world forces. The London *Athenaeum* noted that Pearson's analysis of world history 'quits the beaten track of anticipation':

His view is not purely or mainly European, nor does he regard the inferior races as hopelessly beaten in the struggle with Western civilization. The reader can indeed discern that Mr Pearson's point of view is not London or Paris, but Melbourne. He regards the march of affairs from the Australian point of view, and next to Australia what he seems to see most clearly is the growth of the Chinese power and of the native populations of Africa. In this forecast, in fact, Europe loses altogether the precedence it has always enjoyed.⁵¹

Residence in the New World provided a quite different perspective on world forces. Singapore, for example, in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, had suddenly become Chinese, as had much of northern Australia.

⁴⁷ Roosevelt to Pearson, 11 May 1894, Pearson papers, Bodleian Library, MS English letters, D190, Oxford University.

⁴⁸ Pearson to Deakin, no date, 1893 Deakin papers MS 1540/1/193; 29 March 1893, MS 1540/1/201, National Library of Australia.

⁴⁹ *Athenaeum*, 4 March 1893.

⁵⁰ Charles Pearson to Alfred Deakin, 29 March 1893, Deakin Papers, National Library of Australia, MS 1540/1/201.

⁵¹ *Athenaeum*, 4 March 1893.

Faced with the ascendancy of coloured and colonised peoples, Pearson considered these developments to be humiliating for the white man – whose sense of self was constituted in relations of racial dominance – but historically inevitable. The proper response for the white man was to accept these changes with stoicism and manly fortitude.

Not many agreed with Pearson's stance. Australian political leaders – presiding in the 1890s over the inauguration of a new nation state – certainly could not. Encouraged by historians such as Bryce and Freeman and political theorists such as John Burgess, of Columbia University, they regarded the exclusion and expulsion of undesirable races as their primary duty as nation builders and they would confront the Colonial Office over their right to see the project through. In 1892, Pearson was moved to write to Bryce in London warning that if the British denied the Australians complete self-government in this respect, there would certainly be a Declaration of Independence within five years. The historical memory of American events loomed large.

When the Australians determined, as Barton put it, to legislate their racial identity, they had American experience in mind. 'We have only to look at the great difficulty which is being experienced in America in connexion with the greatest racial trouble ever known in the history of the world, in order to take warning and guard ourselves against similar complications', leading Liberal H. B. Higgins told the first Australian parliament in 1901.⁵² Attorney-General and future Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin also pointed to the importance of American history:

We should be false to the lessons taught us in the great republic of the west; we should be false to the never-to-be-forgotten teachings from the experience of the United States, of difficulties only partially conquered by the blood of their best and bravest; we should be absolutely blind to and unpardonably neglectful of our obligations, if we fail to lay those lessons to heart.⁵³

Deakin praised those who drew up the Australian constitution (of whom he was one) for improving on the American example. He highlighted the significance of Section 51, sub-sections 26-30, in equipping Australia to deal with the problem of 'the admixture of other races':

Our Constitution marks a distinct advance upon and difference from that of the United States, in that it contains within itself the amplest powers to deal with this difficulty in all its aspects. It is not merely a question

⁵² House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4659.

⁵³ House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 12 September 1901, p. 4806; Lake 2003 'White Man's Country'.

of invasion from the exterior. It may be a question of difficulties within our borders, already created, or a question of possible contamination of another kind. I doubt if there can be found in the list of powers with which this Parliament, on behalf of the people, is endowed – powers of legislation – a cluster more important and more far reaching in their prospect than the provisions contained in sub-sections (26) to (30) of section 51, in which the bold outline of the authority of the people of Australia for their self-protection is laid down.⁵⁴

Whereas the United States Constitutional Amendments provided ‘special inhibitions’, Section 51 of the Australian Constitution made provision for ‘special laws’ to deal with other ‘races’.

In supporting the legislation to expel the Pacific Islanders, Higgins again referred to the history of the United States:

I say that that country, more especially the Southern States, would have been ten times better off if the negroes had not been left there. There are no conditions under which degeneracy of race is so great as those which exist when a superior race and an inferior race are brought into close contact.

At issue for Higgins were the prospects of white workers:

I feel convinced that people who are used to a high standard of life – to good wages and good conditions – will not consent to labour alongside men who receive a miserable pittance and who are dealt with very much in the same way as slaves.⁵⁵

The legislation was, according to Higgins, who would shortly become president of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration, ‘the most vitally important measure on the programme which the government has put before us’. He watched its course, he said, with the ‘deepest anxiety’. In 1907 Higgins would use his position on the Arbitration Court to define a ‘living wage’ designed to secure the status of the white men as workers, whom he was always careful to define as ‘civilised beings ... living in a civilised community’.⁵⁶

With the passage of the Pacific Islands Labourers Act in 1901, the Commonwealth of Australia was inaugurated in an act of racial expulsion. Australians would do what the United States – with a population of eight million Blacks – could not. For Deakin and his fellow members of parliament, the sovereignty of the people

⁵⁴ House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 6 September 1901.

⁵⁵ House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, House of Representatives, 3 October 1901, pp. 6815-19.

⁵⁶ *Commonwealth Arbitration Reports*, vol. 11, 1907–08, pp. 3-4.

meant the capacity to protect their racial character. But when they spoke of the necessity of 'self-protection', they spoke not as 'Anglo-Saxons', but as 'white men'. Although neither the Pacific Islands Labourers Act nor the Immigration Restriction Act referred to race by name, their intention was clear enough. 'The two things go hand in hand', advised Attorney-General Deakin. They were 'the necessary complement of a single policy – the policy of securing a "White Australia".'

The Australian Immigration Restriction Act, following Natal and the United States, incorporated a literacy test, in this case, a dictation test, that was so framed as to give Customs Officers maximum flexibility in ensuring that all undesirable immigrants would fail. Applicants could not prepare for this test, which required them to write out, at dictation, any prescribed passage of fifty words in any European language. The American emphasis on understanding the constitution and the importance of education to citizenship had disappeared altogether. In 1908, for example, the following dictation test was given in Western Australia:

Very many considerations lead to the conclusion that life began on sea, first as single cells, then as groups of cells held together by a secretion of mucilage, then as filaments and tissues. For a very long time low-grade marine organisms are simply hollow cylinders, through which salt water streams'.⁵⁷

The aim in Australia was not to 'discriminate against illiteracy', as Cabot Lodge had recommended, but to discriminate against non-whites, in particular 'Asiatics' and more particularly, Japanese, as their mortified diplomatic representatives soon learned when they read the parliamentary debates. The point that caused most offence to the Japanese was that they were racialised as 'Asiatics' or worse, lumped together with all non-whites, including Kanakas and Negroes. On 3 May 1901, H. Eitaki, the Japanese Consul in Sydney wrote a note of protest to the Australian government:

The Japanese belong to an Empire whose standard of civilization is so much higher than that of Kanakas, Negroes, Pacific Islanders, Indians or other Eastern peoples, that to refer to them in the same terms cannot but be regarded in the light of a reproach, which is hardly warranted by the fact of the shade of the national complexion ...

Might I suggest, therefore, that your Government formulate some proposal which, being accepted by my Government would allow of the people of Japan being excluded from the operation of any Act which

⁵⁷ Myra Willard 1968, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920*, reprint (New York, NY: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers), p. 126.

directly or indirectly imposed a tax on immigrants on the ground of colour.⁵⁸

As the wounded Japanese realised, the literacy test was a method of 'indirect' racial discrimination. Even so, they tried to change Australian minds by pointing to the high educational standards of modern Japan, which faithfully emulated 'the most approved European methods'. Four months later, on 18 September, as the legislation was passing through the House of Representatives, Eitaki wrote again to Barton:

In Japanese schools and other educational establishments the most approved methods are adopted, and the most important works on science, literature, art, politics, law etc which are published in Europe from time to time, are translated into Japanese for the use of students. Thus a Japanese, without being acquainted with any other language than his own, is frequently up to a very high educational standard in the most advanced branches of study, by means of a liberal use of these translations.

Why could not the Japanese language be put on the same footing as, say, 'the Turkish, the Russian, the Greek, the Polish, the Norwegian, the Austrian, or the Portuguese, or why, if an immigrant of any of the nationalities ... mentioned may be examined *in his own language* [emphasis in original], the same courtesy should not be extended to a Japanese'. The Consul advised that his government requested that his people not be marked out 'to suffer a special disability; or in other words, that they may be examined in Japanese. This can easily be provided for by adding the words "or Japanese" after the word "European"' in the legislation.⁵⁹ Despite their pained and persistent protests, in Sydney and to the Foreign Office in London, they were unable to defeat the test's binary racial logic, its division of the world into 'white' and 'non-white'.

In employing a literacy test in a European language as an instrument for racial exclusion, the Australians paid deference to Imperial sensibilities. Meeting with the colonial premiers at Queen Victoria's Jubilee, in London, in June 1897, Chamberlain impressed on them the importance of upholding the 'traditions of the empire' which made no 'distinction in favour of or against race or colour'. In the white colonies of the empire, as in the southern states of the American Union, the modern instrument of a literacy test was adopted to meet and defeat prohibitions against racial discrimination. As in South Africa, many Australian politicians, including Higgins, protested against using a cowardly subterfuge

⁵⁸ H. Eitaki, Consul for Japan to Prime Minister Edmund Barton, 3 May 1901, CO 418/10, UK National Archives.

⁵⁹ Eitaki to Barton, 18 September 1901, CO 418/10, National Archives, UK.

and introduced an amendment into parliament, that almost passed, calling for a straight out, manly, declaration against non-white immigration.

The Colonial Office preference for courtesy, or hypocrisy, in immigration restriction legislation prevailed, but the adoption of an American – republican – model of exclusion had an unintended consequence for the Colonial Office: the removal of the special status accorded to British subjects across racial barriers. As Charles Lucas noted perceptively in his paper ‘The Self-Governing Dominions and Coloured Immigration’:

It is, I think noteworthy that Mr Chamberlain, who was in full sympathy with the self-governing communities, was especially outspoken in protesting against giving offence in the methods of exclusion and against harsh treatment of coloured British subjects, but it will be noted at the same time that the object of avoiding offence in methods of exclusion militates against giving any preference to British subjects. The principle of the Natal Act, which Mr Chamberlain accepted and recommended, is not to specify any particular race, but to exclude all who cannot write a European language ie not to distinguish in any way among non-Europeans between those who are and those who are not British subjects.⁶⁰

And in declaring for a White Australia, that was the Australians’ intention. In that same founding year of 1901, they passed legislation (the Post and Telegraph Act) that, to the intense annoyance of the British, specifically targeted non-whites for exclusion from employment on ships carrying mails: ‘only white labour shall be employed in such carriage.’ The Japanese again protested: the legislation contained ‘the same objectionable reproach to the Japanese nation, on the ground of color, against which protests have been made on former occasions.’⁶¹ Further legislation relating to suffrage, naturalisation, old age and invalid pensions and the maternity allowance all specified racial grounds for discrimination in the name of White Australia. The dictation test remained in immigration legislation until 1958 and lingered – oddly but symbolically – in some industrial awards (such as the Margarine Award). Australia had nailed its colours to the mast.

White Australia became, in turn, an example for others to follow in South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. In 1908, Roosevelt, as president of the United States was conspiring with Canada to bring pressure to bear on Britain to bring a complete stop to Asian immigration to white men’s countries (‘the Japanese must learn that they will have to keep their people in their own

⁶⁰ Charles Lucas, ‘The Self-Governing Dominions and Coloured Immigration’, pp. 52-3. CO 886/1/1, UK National Archives.

⁶¹ Eitaki to Barton, 18 September 1901, CO 418/10, National Archives, UK.

country’).⁶² In 1910, the new Union of South Africa was described by Sir Charles Lucas in the Colonial Office, with the precedent of Australia in mind, as ‘a White Man’s Union’.⁶³ A ‘new religion’ was indeed sweeping the world. When the American writer, Lothrop Stoddard, published *The Rising Tide of Color* in support of a eugenicist scheme of immigration restriction in the United States, he saluted the ‘lusty young Anglo-Saxon communities of the Pacific’ for setting an example by emblazoning across their portals the legend: “All White”.’⁶⁴ ‘Nothing is more striking’, he wrote, ‘than the instinctive and instantaneous solidarity which binds together Australians and Afrikanders, Californians and Canadians, into a “sacred union” at the mere whisper of Asiatic immigration.’⁶⁵

Conclusion

In becoming an instrument of racial exclusion, in a world increasingly characterised by the mobility of migration and mobilisations for political rights, the literacy test consolidated understandings of ‘race’ in terms of a dichotomy of whiteness and non-whiteness across the world, so that not only in the United States, as John Higham has argued in *Strangers in the Land*, but in southern Africa, northern America and Australasia, ‘the Negro, the Oriental and the southern European appeared more and more in a common light’.⁶⁶ In Higham’s account of American ‘nativism’ ‘race’, however, belongs to others. What Du Bois saw so clearly was that the same historical processes that worked to place ‘the Negro, the Oriental and the southern European’ ‘in a common light’ were also producing ‘whiteness’, as both global in its power and personal in its meaning, at once the basis of transnational political identifications and a subjective sense of self. As a modern technology, the literacy test was the instrument of whiteness *par excellence*.

⁶² Quoted in William Lyon 1959, *Mackenzie King: A Political Biography* (London: Methuen and Co.), p. 152.

⁶³ David Phillips 2003, ‘Towards a “White Man’s Union”’, in John Chesterman and David Phillips (eds), *Selective Democracy: Race, Gender and the Australian Vote* (Armadale: Circa), pp. 38-49.

⁶⁴ Lothrop Stoddard 1920, *The Rising Tide of Color Against White World-Supremacy* (New York, NY: Scribner’s), p. 281.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁶ John Higham 1988, *Strangers in the Land Patterns of American Nativism 1860–1925*, second edition (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press), p. 173.

