

Chapter One: Federation and the Geographies of Whiteness

Let us keep before us the noble idea of a white Australia—snow-white Australia if you will. Let it be pure and spotless.¹



1. Chinese Arch Melbourne, 1901, Australian Federation celebrations, National Library of Australia Picture Collection (nla.pic-an13117280-23)

Taken on 7 May 1901, this is a photograph of Federation street celebrations in Melbourne. Onlookers observe a carriage transporting Chinese dignitaries along a crowded Swanston Street festooned with flags, lanterns and other street decorations. The featured Chinese arch, comprising two pagoda-style tiered towers, had been recently erected to celebrate the arrival of the Duke and Duchess of York to Melbourne. The Chinese community had raised the funds to construct the arch and the residents of

1. James Black Ronald, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 11 September 1901, p. 4666.

Little Bourke Street had donated the Chinese silks to decorate the arch's timbers. On the day of the photograph, taken two days before the Duke of York opened the first Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, the Chinese eagerly participated in the city-wide celebrations. A procession of Chinese standard-bearers, musicians and dancers weaved their way through the streets of Melbourne pursued by two traditional Chinese dragons.

An article published in the Melbourne *Argus*, on the following day, offers an example of how Chinese participation in the parade was reported. The sense of antipathy and condescension which pervades the opening statements gives way to a sense of curiosity and fascination. The novelty of the dragon parade, the quality of the music and the 'prettiness' of the 'half-caste women' prompts the anonymous reporter to describe the Chinese as a skilful and diligent people capable of creating processions of great beauty. According to the description, the energy and artistry of the performers and the enthusiasm displayed for Federation celebrations stirred the interest and admiration of onlookers; so much so, that at the conclusion to the parade the spectators rose 'and gave the clever Chinese the cheers they deserved', 'forgetting for the nonce White Australia'.²

In between the two towers of the photographed arch and upon the central span is a banner welcoming the monarchs to Melbourne: 'Welcome by the Chinese Citizens'. The usage of the term 'Chinese citizens' suggests that the Chinese understood citizenship to have a lived or experiential aspect—citizenship was demonstrated through a civic commitment to Australian nationhood and a Chinese citizen's arch acted as a material symbol of this lived *citizenship*. However, while the Chinese sought to position themselves within the civic 'tapestry' of the new nation-state, the concept of *citizenship via participation* did not afford any legal entitlement. Australian citizenship was not legally defined until the *Nationality and Citizenship Act* of 1948, which subsequently became the *Australian Citizenship Act*.³ Up until this time, a non-British subject acquired British subject status by naturalisation. In most instances this entitled a person to all the rights and privileges, as well as the obligations, of a British-born

2. 'The Chinese Procession: Novel and Picturesque Display', *Argus*, 8 May 1901, p. 8.

3. For a discussion of citizenship at Federation see Kim Rubenstein, *Australian Citizenship Law in Context*, Lawbook Co., Sydney, 2002. It should be noted that sections of the Commonwealth and colonial legislation dealing with matters of immigration and naturalisation were regularly, or continuously, amended.

subject.⁴ In the pre-Federation period this was regulated by the colonies through a raft of legislation prohibiting the Chinese from becoming naturalised.⁵ After Federation, naturalisation would be governed by the *Naturalisation Act* of 1903, under which indigenous people from Asia, Africa and the Pacific Islands (excepting New Zealand) were prohibited from becoming British subjects. While naturalisations granted prior to Federation were valid under Commonwealth law, those Chinese who did not, or could not, become naturalised had no claim upon the state, and as such faced uncertain futures.

Using this account of Chinese civic patriotism as a starting point, this chapter examines the debates associated with the passage of the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901. It offers a counterpoint to Keith Windschuttle's recent critique of the 'White Australia policy', in which he argues that the parliamentary debate over the legislation was primarily focused upon the economic motivations for immigration restriction. The chapter suggests that the debate over the Immigration Restriction Bill was mediated by a pervasive and incontrovertible racism which had at its heart the assertion of white genetic and cultural superiority. This is demonstrated by exploring how the debate, which was governed by anxieties about racial intermingling, blood-mixing, contamination, and the dilution and degeneration of the white race, was committed to producing legislation which would maintain racial purity. Central to the argument is that during the Federation period *whiteness* operated as a cultural ideal critical to the formation of an Australian national identity. Through propagating fears about the loss of the white nation-*self*, the Parliament sought to transform whiteness into a normative national category; Federation sought to *indigenise* whiteness.

Motivations for Federation

There were at least four motivations for Federation: removing the divisions that separated the colonies; creating unified immigration legislation that would restrict the entry of non-Europeans; the establishment of tariff barriers to protect Australian

4. In New South Wales, a naturalised citizen could not sit in Parliament (until after the 1858 Electoral Act) and could only lease land for fixed periods. See Shirley Fitzgerald, *Red Tape, Gold Scissors*, State Library of New South Wales Press, Sydney, 1996, p. 189.

5. In New South Wales, for example, the legislation regularly changed and for extended periods there were laws which prevented the Chinese from becoming naturalised—from 1850 to 1856, between 1862 and 1867 and again after 1888 with the passing of the *Chinese Restriction Act*. By this time, 889 Chinese had taken advantage of the non-exclusionary periods and became naturalised in New South Wales. See Shirley Fitzgerald, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

workers and manufacturers from foreign competition; and the creation of a nation that would provide the citizenry with the opportunity to enjoy the fruits of a democratic political life. While the protectionist platform extended from barring the entry of cheap manufactured goods to barring the entry of cheap labour, at the heart of the federalist movement was the intention to establish a new nation defined in racial terms.

There was a determined sense that Federation presented an unparalleled nation building opportunity. The pervasive mood of optimism, the spirit of hope and nationalist ambition promoted many of the first parliamentarians to experiment with different social and political visions. When speaking to the Immigration Restriction Bill, parliamentarians commended to the people of Australia a vision of a progressive, young and pure nation defined in racial terms. The racial character of the new nation was deemed critical to preserving Australia's British heritage and it was largely considered part of one's patriotic or imperial duty to keep the nation *snowy white*. Commonly, the white nation, or anthropomorphised *self*, was represented as being threatened with imminent extinction, and as such, the legislation restricting the immigration of non-Europeans was considered 'a matter of life and death to the purity of our race and the future of our nation'.⁶

The first Parliament consisted of 111 parliamentarians and three major political parties: the Protectionists, the Free Trade Party and Labour (who were largely divided between free traders and protectionists).⁷ There were 75 Members of the House of Representatives: 31 Protectionists (who formed Government under Edmund Barton), 28 Free Traders (who formed Opposition under George Reid), 14 Labour (who were led by Chris Watson) and two 'others'.⁸ The majority had served in colonial parliaments. In

6. William McMillan, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4629. Alfred Deakin spoke of the threat to the 'national manhood': 'We here find ourselves touching the profoundest instinct of individual or nation—the instinct of self-preservation—for it is nothing less than the national manhood, the national character and the national future that are at stake'. 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 12 September 1901, p. 4804.

7. In 1908, the ALP adopted the formal name *Australian Labour Party*. In 1912, as a result of the influence of the American 'labor' movement, the Party adopted the American spelling, *Labor*; see 'History of Australian Labor Party', <http://www.alp.org.au/about/history.php> (accessed 17 July 2007). Therefore, when talking about the period pre-1912, I use the term 'Labour'.

8. See *Parliamentary Handbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*, Library Committee of the Commonwealth Parliament, 1915, and Geoffrey Hawker, *Politicians All: The Candidates for the Australian Commonwealth Election—A Collective Biography*, Wild and Woolley, Sydney, 2002.

the Upper House, the Free Trade Opposition had 17 of the 36 Senate seats, the Protectionists 11 and Labour 8.⁹ It was a requirement that all Federation parliamentarians were British subjects. This prerequisite resulted in two parliamentarians inventing a British heritage: Labour Leader John Christian Watson was born Johan Cristian Tanck in Valparaiso, Chile. His father was a Chilean of German descent and his mother was Irish-born. To this day, Watson remains the only prime minister of Australia (27 April 1904–17 August 1904) who was neither English-born nor of Anglo-Celtic descent. The second non-British subject was American-born King O'Malley. O'Malley's origin is uncertain but his biographer tentatively places his birth in Kansas, United States.¹⁰

The Immigration Restriction Bill, which enacted the white Australia policy, was initiated in the House of Representatives by Prime Minister Edmund Barton on 5 June 1901, nine sitting days after the Duke of York had opened the Australian Parliament on 9 May 1901. The Bill was one of the first substantive pieces of legislation to be introduced to the new Commonwealth Parliament and was debated in the House of Representatives and the Senate from August to December 1901. Possibly one of the most extensively debated pieces of legislation ever to come before the Parliament, it occupies 600 pages of Hansard and more than half a million words.¹¹ As there was almost universal support for the immigration restriction of non-Europeans to Australia, much of the parliamentary debate focused on the character of the bill—not whether or not it should be enacted. The debate explored the best method of exclusion and whether exclusion was best achieved through the introduction of an education or dictation test. The majority of parliamentarians advocated absolute exclusion; others supported the admission of small numbers of coloured labourers to work in the tropical regions of the north, while a minority argued for admitting a limited number of educated 'coloured aliens'.¹² The Protectionist Government was unified in its support for the Bill. Labour politicians, who were vociferous in their opposition to coloured labour, offered strong

9. See *Parliamentary Handbook of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 1915.

10. As cited in A. J. Grassby and Sylvia Ordonez, *The Man Time Forgot: the life and times of John Christian Watson, Australia's first Labor prime minister*, Pluto Press, Annandale, pp. 18, 63.

11. Keith Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy: Race and Shame in the Australian History Wars*, Macleay Press, Sydney, p. 286.

12. For example, Thomas Macdonald-Paterson (Member for Brisbane), 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 November 1901, p. 6937.

support to the Government. Dissent from the dominant position was extremely rare and when opposition was expressed it came from members of the Free Trade Party.

It was widely considered that unified immigration legislation would provide, in Alfred Deakin's terms, the 'statutory armour' that would stop all 'leakages' between the states:

... there are considerable differences between the restrictions imposed in the various States. We find ourselves to-day, it may be said, with, at all events, a half-open door for all Asiatics and African peoples, through which entry is not difficult ... It was with a full recognition of those facts that the first plank in the Government platform ... was the plank which for ease of reference was called the declaration for a 'White Australia'. It was for this reason that so much stress was laid on this issue, and it was for this reason that since the Government took office, no question has more frequently or more seriously occupied their attention, not only because of this one proposal before the House, but with regard to executive acts that have been and will be necessary.¹³

As Deakin suggests, there were other pieces of legislation that sought to supplement the *Immigration Restriction Act*. The *Pacific Islanders Labourers Act 1901*, limited import licences for Pacific island labourers (or 'Kanakas') and laid the platform to deport many of the Pacific islanders in Queensland and northern New South Wales after 1906. The *Post and Telegraph Act 1901* attempted to keep the seas white through the provision that ships subsidised to carry Australian mail only employ white labour. Together these three acts formed a package of legislation to exclude, and if necessary remove, non-Europeans from Australia.

Interpreting the Legacy of Immigration Restriction

In recent years there has been renewed debate over how historians have interpreted the legacy of the *Immigration Restriction Act*. In *The White Australia Policy*, Keith Windschuttle suggests the historical claims about the inherent racism of the policy have been exaggerated by a generation of historians too eager to please 'modern, racially-sensitive readers' and too eager to condemn the first Parliament for its racism. Windschuttle suggests that such interpretations have been informed by a narrow, cultural orthodoxy and facilitated by a methodology which favours plucking a few lines out of Hansard and producing the most 'cavalier generalisations' about the legislation. Windschuttle argues that as a result of these politicised generalisations, we have

13. Alfred Deakin, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 12 September 1901, p. 4805. Deakin uses this armour/leakage metaphor, p. 4806. Such an argument was also offered in the Senate—see Senator James Drake (Queensland), 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 15 November 1901, pp. 7335–7336.

become ‘saddled with myth and half truths about the debate and about the opinions of those who spoke it’.¹⁴ In endeavouring to restore the balance, Windschuttle’s revisionist history focuses on economic motivations for immigration restriction, arguing that concerns expressed over racial matters represented a minority view:

Rather than being ‘pervaded with ideas of race and blood’, the majority of parliamentary opinion wanted to exclude Asian immigrants because they would potentially undermine the standard of living of Australian working people. Of almost equal concern was the politicians’ fear that the creation of a racially-based political underclass would inhibit Australia’s attempt to create an egalitarian democracy. Far from being fixed on ‘racial contamination’, most politicians supported the Bill for economic and political reasons.¹⁵

As Windschuttle suggests, many parliamentarians promoted economic arguments in support of the legislation: upholding labour practices, reducing the competition of coloured labour, maintaining wages and protecting white Australia’s standard of living. The debate against coloured labour was led by Labour leader Chris Watson, who offered forceful statements about the threat posed by the Chinese:

We know that a few years ago business men—speaking by and large—looked upon the Chinese or other coloured undesirables as men who could be very well tolerated, because they took the place of labourers, of men who might be unreliable, or not quite so cheap, but when it was found that these Orientals possessed all the cunning and acumen necessary to fit them for conducting business affairs, and that their cheapness of living was carried into business matters as well as into ordinary labouring work, a marked alteration of opinion took place among business men, so far as the competition of the ‘heathen Chinese’ was concerned.¹⁶

From the 1870s, the labour union movement had protested against foreign labour. Frequently, the labour movement identified the Chinese as the greatest threat to Australian work practices: their industriousness, their ability to live frugally and what was perceived as their ‘imitative’ capacities were considered to increase competition and drive down wages.¹⁷ Numerous members of the Free Trade Party were also wary of the competitive threat posed by coloured labour. Vaiben Solomon, the importer with

14. Keith Windschuttle, op. cit., pp. 287, 289.

15. Keith Windschuttle, op. cit., p. 8.

16. Chris Watson, ‘Immigration Restriction Bill’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4633.

17. Vaiben Solomon (Member for South Australia), refers to the Chinese as ‘a most industrious and imitative people’, ‘Immigration Restriction Bill’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 September 1901, p. 5239.

mining interests and former owner-editor of the *Northern Territory Times*, offered an alternative perspective on industriousness of coloured labour:

My experience of these different races has shown me that it is not so much the vices or the uncleanliness of the Japanese, Chinese and the Malays that we have to fear, but rather their virtues, if I may put it so, their industry, their indomitable perseverance, their frugality, and their ability to compete against European labour.¹⁸

While Windschuttle's detailed analysis is useful for the way it challenges readers to reengage with the primary material, it is important to locate Windschuttle's argument within a broader and intensely ideological debate about contemporary Australian historiography. In speaking to this debate (the so-called 'Australian history wars'), Windschuttle claims that, so determined to assert that deep-seated racism is central to the Australian psyche, Australian historians have misinterpreted and misrepresented the debate over the Immigration Restriction Bill. This argument is encapsulated by the description on the back cover of *The White Australia Policy*, 'Australia is not, and has never been, the racist country its academic historians have condemned'.

Yet ironically, Windschuttle—like so many of the contributors to the 'history wars'—produces the same type of ideologically-based history that he criticises. Windschuttle's ideological stridency results in the creation of an erroneous and artificial binary. In claiming that there was a single motivation for immigration restriction and that this was economic, not racial, Windschuttle falls into the trap of considering the motivations exclusive to one another—something akin to suggesting that the history of slavery was not predicated upon racism. As we will see, the arguments identifying the negative effect of coloured labour and the arguments about blood or racial contamination operate concurrently, cross-referentially and in support of one another. Further, it becomes evident that even when the debate about immigration restriction related to the protection of labour rights, it was presented in a quasi-scientific, racist language.

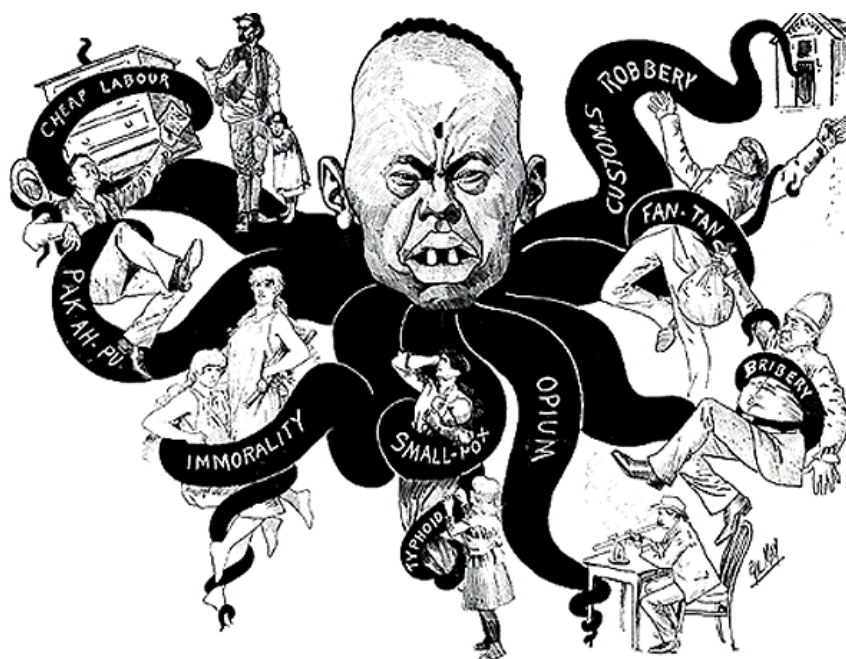
Windschuttle's failure to recognise the depth of the racism that frames the parliamentary debate appears to stem from his restrictive definition of racism. In utilising a definition that is exclusively connected to discrimination against biological or genetic difference, Windschuttle fails to fully engage with the way racism was constituted and practiced at the time.¹⁹ As it was, and often is, widely perceived that

18. *ibid.*

19. Windschuttle argues that biologically-based racial theories, like social Darwinism, had little impact on Australians who were influenced by a Scottish Enlightenment model which emphasised the historical rather than biological differences between the races.

race and culture are inextricably linked, the debates over the Immigration Restriction Bill extend well beyond the notion of the biological or genetic. In fact, the evolutionary biological theories that were employed in parliamentary debates relied upon identifying the social pathology of ‘degenerative’ cultures.

Before turning to examine the way the parliamentary debate focused on matters of contamination and racial purity, it is worth briefly identifying other rationales that were drawn upon to supplement the arguments for economic and racial protection. These might loosely be categorised as the social and the political. It was widely believed that any colouring of Australia would inevitably result in moral and social degeneration. Since the 1870s, nationalist publications like the *Bulletin*, the *Boomerang*, *Punch*, *Queensland Figaro* and the *Illustrated Australian News* consistently warned Europeans that Chinese immigration would result in moral degradation and spiritual corruption. The animosity felt towards the Chinese is rather infamously depicted in the Phillip May cartoon of 1886—‘The Mongolian Octopus’.



2. Phillip May, ‘The Mongolian Octopus—his grip on Australia’, *Bulletin*, 21 August 1886; May depicts the range of stereotypes that were popularly used to represent the Chinese. Unambiguously associated with various forms of disease, vice and immorality, the pig-tailed and buck-toothed Chinaman ensnares naïve and unsuspecting Europeans.

As if echoing elements of the Phillip May cartoon, the Labour Member for Southern Melbourne, James Ronald, utilises the metaphors of elevation and degeneration to identify the effect that contact with ‘inferior’ races has upon white women:

We do not object to these aliens because of their colour. We object to them because they are repugnant to us from our moral and social stand-points ... I want to say, however that our intention in regard to these alien races is perfectly honourable, and that we have no racial hatred or antipathy towards them. We wish them all well; we desire to do them good, but we do not believe that by allowing them to come among us we shall do any thing to elevate them. It is just like that which very often happens. Some pure-minded, noble woman marries some degenerate debauchee, with the hope of reclaiming him; but the almost inevitable result is that the man drags her down to his level. So with these inferior races.²⁰

Another argument advanced for immigration restriction was that racial homogeneity was required for the establishment of a democratic society—a notion predicated upon the belief that democracy was a political state which was only really possible for Europeans. The Chinese, it was argued, had been exposed to non-democratic or despotic regimes of governance which had rendered them unable to participate in modern democratic political life. It was considered, therefore, that the Chinese presence would stifle the new nation's democratic political development.

Debate over the Immigration Restriction Bill

The position of the Protectionist Government was clearly articulated by Prime Minister Edmund Barton. In introducing the Immigration Restriction Bill to the House of Representatives on 7 August 1901, Barton identified the Bill as '... one of the most important matters with regard to the future of Australia that can engage the attention of this House'.²¹ He then proceeded to draw a connection between the Chinese presence in Australia and the need for the legislation. Barton quotes Professor Charles Henry Pearson's *National Life and Character: A Forecast*:

The fear of Chinese immigration which the Australian democracy cherishes, and which Englishmen at home find it hard to understand is, in fact, the instinct of self-preservation, quickened by experience. We know that coloured and white labour cannot exist side by side; we are well aware that China can swamp us with a single year's surplus of population ...²²

20. James Ronald, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4665.

21. Edmund Barton, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 7 August 1901, p. 3497.

22. Edmund Barton, op. cit., 1901, p. 3503, quoting from Pearson's *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, p. 36. In *National Life and Character*, Pearson also forecasts China's emergence as a world power.

Barton also argued, in unequivocally discriminatory terms, that there was nothing that the British-born subject has in common with the Chinaman.

I do not think either that the doctrine of the equality of man was really ever intended to include racial equality. There is no racial equality. There is basic inequality. These races are, in comparison with white races—I think no one wants convincing of this fact—unequal and inferior. The doctrine of the equality of man was never intended to apply to the equality of the Englishman and the Chinaman. There is deep-set difference, and we see no prospect and no promise of its ever being effaced. Nothing in this world can put these two races upon an equality. Nothing we can do by cultivation, by refinement, or by anything else will make some races equal to others.²³

Attorney-General, Alfred Deakin, who was largely responsible for the Bill in the House, spoke at length on its character. On 12 September 1901, Deakin raised the question of how the Commonwealth will define non-European aliens once the program of a white Australia has been implemented:

The programme of a ‘white Australia’ means not merely its preservation for the future—it means the consideration of those who cannot be classed within the category of whites, but who have found their way into our midst ... We find on our hands this not inconsiderable number of aliens who have found admission to these States ... There have been determinations which hereafter may have important consequences arising out of our administration, as well as other measures submitted to Parliament, all having in view the accomplishment of the same end. That end, put in plain and unequivocal terms, as the House and the country are entitled to have it put, means the prohibition of all alien coloured immigration, and more, it means at the earliest time, by reasonable and just means, the deportation or reduction of the number of aliens now in our midst. The two things go hand in hand, and are the necessary complement of a single policy—the policy of securing a ‘white Australia’.²⁴

The two things that Deakin identified as going hand in hand, as a ‘necessary complement of a single policy’, were the repatriation of existing coloured labour currently domiciled in Australia, under the *Pacific Islanders Labourers Act*, and the prevention of any non-whites from settling in Australian in the future, via the *Immigration Restriction Act*.

When speaking to the Immigration Restriction Bill on 26 of September 1901, the merchant and Independent Member for Capricornia, Alexander Paterson, presented a

23. Edmund Barton, ‘Immigration Restriction Bill’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 September 1901, p. 5233.

24. Alfred Deakin, ‘Immigration Restriction Bill’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 12 September 1901, pp. 4805–4806.

personal narrative which attests to the way in which the perception of the economic threat posed by coloured labour was expressed in racialised and racist terms.

The first time the magnitude of this Asiatic pestilence really arrested my attention was under the following circumstances:—I had been making a little unostentatious tour through a central section of Queensland, and when I arrived home I found, standing at the back gate of my house, a vegetable cart owned by a Chinaman and driven by a Chinaman. There was trouble in the domestic establishment that day. I said, ‘Why is this? I shall lose my election if this sort of thing goes on. I shall go down to the grave unwept, unhonoured, and unsung, instead of speaking in the halls of Parliament. This must be altered.’ The reply which was made to me was this: ‘It is all very well for you to talk in that strain, but we live 6 miles from town, and how on earth we are to get vegetables from anyone excepting a Chinaman I cannot tell.’ I said—‘While the world standeth I shall eat no soup made from vegetables grown by Chinamen, you must get vegetables grown by Europeans.’ The result was that the custom of the establishment was transferred to a German, with which arrangement I was perfectly satisfied. But I may tell honourable members that it broke me all up when I afterwards found that the German bought his vegetables from a Chinaman. While this question has its humorous side, it also has a very painful aspect. How is it that we ever allowed Chinamen to interfere so much with our trade as to put them in the position of being able to dictate to us? ... I look on the [education or dictation] test as a moral anaesthetic. We have to pull a tooth out of the wolf that would destroy us, and we want to do it painlessly if possible; and the educational test gives us an excellent means.²⁵

Determined not to eat soup made with vegetables grown by a Chinaman, Alexander Paterson transferred the custom of his establishment from a Chinaman to a German only to find that the German he so recently engaged, had himself purchased his vegetables from a Chinaman. The self-deprecating humour that was attached to Paterson’s frustrated domestic intervention was quickly replaced by a genuine sense of dread or moral panic. Upon arriving at the ‘painful aspect’ of the story, Paterson shifted from the comical to the cautionary to the Sinophobic. In suggesting that it had become near impossible for any well-intentioned European to avoid any commercial dealings with a Chinaman, Paterson drew upon this personal narrative to advocate for legislative change. He concluded his address by offering his unequivocal support for the Bill, explaining that he ‘is just as anxious for a “snowflake” Australia as anyone else in the House’. In commending the Bill to the House, he explained that he approaches the question of the Immigration Restriction Bill ‘without any feeling of party spirit’ and that he would vote with the Government in order to stop this ‘objectionable alien

25. Alexander Paterson, ‘Immigration Restriction Bill’, House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 September 1901, pp. 5273–5274. Scottish-born Paterson was narrowly elected with 51% of the vote.

traffic'. He therefore endorsed the 'moral anaesthetic' that was the education or dictation test.²⁶

While motivated as much by pride and ambition, as by any perception of public good, Paterson drew upon the two major rationales for immigration restriction: those related to protecting white labour and those related to protecting the ethnic (and moral) purity of the nation. Paterson argued that the 'objectionable races' had begun to control the agricultural sector of regional Australia. The regional sector to which he was referring was his federal seat of Capricornia. Capricornia, whose very name acts as a reminder of Australia's geographic proximity to Southeast Asia, was settled later than many of the southern and costal regions of Australia, and as such, was home to large numbers of indigenous and non-indigenous people-of-colour; a racial frontier upon which the struggle for racial purity and ethnic unity was most evident.

Paterson's comments about his seat intersect with two issues which dominated parliamentary debate about labour conditions in Queensland: the question of whether white men could acclimatise in the tropics, without degeneration, and the practice of 'blackbirding'—recruiting and exploiting cheap non-white 'Kanaka' or Pacific Islander labour. Many considered the tropics a poor habitat for white men. Senator Sir Josiah Symon claimed, for example: 'Providence never meant tropical countries to be peopled by the Anglo-Saxon race'.²⁷ With regard to the practice of blackbirding, Senator George Pearce suggested that the coloured man's domination of the labour market in northern Queensland resulted in no continuity of employment for the white man who often found himself itinerant and a mere supplement to coloured labour during peak periods.²⁸

Paterson's speech suggests that he was an early advocate of what would emerge as a 'Buy White' campaign, through which Anglo traders urged Australians to refrain from purchasing the product of coloured labour. The corollary of this was that buying white would help keep Australia white.

26. Paterson uses the expressions: 'objectionable races' and 'objectionable alien traffic', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 September 1901, p. 5274.

27. Senator Josiah Symon, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 27 November 1901, p. 7988.

28. Senator George Pearce, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 26 November 1901, p. 7830.



3. White Australian Pineapples, M. Finucan Bros., Brisbane, 1910²⁹

Beyond what it says about federation anxieties concerning matters of trade—or for the insights it offers about our first parliamentarians eschewing contact with the Chinese—the extract is of interest for the way it employs a dental or medical metaphor. Metonymically, this is exemplified by the figure of the impacted or toxic tooth. By extension, parliamentarians are the practitioners, or in this instance the extractors, who have the power and moral authority to inoculate the new nation against this singularly sly and predatory Chinese ‘pestilence’. Echoing the comments by Deakin about the deportation of coloured aliens, Paterson’s uneasy central metaphor is also suggestive of not simply restriction but extraction—the removal of Chinese from Australia. The range of imagery also exposes Paterson’s overarching anxiety about disease or contamination. The general fear of contact with the Chinaman unifies Paterson’s various anxieties: the presence of coloured labour, the capacity of the Chinese to embed themselves as local traders throughout Central Queensland and the moral (if not physical) contamination that may occur from eating soup made from Chinese-grown vegetables. Together these fears coalesce around the notion of moral degradation and the fear of the dilution or devolution of the white nation-self.

29. White Australian Pineapples appears on the *Migration Heritage Centre* website and the *Making Multicultural Australia for the 21st Century* website. It is also available at the National Museum of Australia. Mimmo Cozzolino and Fysh Rutherford’s *Symbols of Australia* (Penguin, Melbourne, 1980) includes a range of early nineteenth century advertisements which champion white Australia and promote products which are deemed to help whiten the nation.

Fear of Degeneration and the Dilution of Whiteness

The late nineteenth century concept of race was powerful and pervasive and resulted in actively discriminatory social practices. Popular understandings about the hierarchy of the races borrowed heavily from evolutionary models. Whites were placed at the apex of the racial hierarchy (while ties to Britain offered a heightened sense of racial and imperial legitimacy). ‘Asiatics’ were clearly inferior to whites, Pacific islanders were inferior to Asiatics and indigenous Australians were considered little more than a dying breed—an example of predestined extinction. Unease about maintaining racial purity resulted in anxieties about the degradation of the white type as the fear of biological, cultural, social and political degeneracy manifest in a myriad of parliamentary statements about miscegenation, contamination and contagion. Within this culture of whiteness, the Chinese became the most obvious and identifiable ‘other’. This had parallel effects: while the Chinese were identified as an impediment to realising the cultural ideal of whiteness, the creation of ‘Chineseness’ also helped to stabilise whiteness as a privileged racial, social and moral category.

Throughout the nineteenth century a series of socio-biological/medical theories were assembled to legitimise white power: phrenology, social Darwinism or social evolutionism, and eugenics. The *science* of phrenology (in which the physiology of the brain and the study of the cranium enabled the indexation of human or racial development) was replaced by the *logic* of social Darwinism (in which Charles Darwin’s theories of evolutionary biology were attached to the social and racial realm), which in turn was replaced by the ideology used to promote the advancement of whites—eugenics (the deliberate interfering with human breeding in the hope of halting or reversing biological or racial degeneration).

The degree to which federation politicians drew upon these social and scientific theories of human difference, these forms of scientific racism, is open to debate. While it is true that only some supporters of the Immigration Restriction Bill made explicit reference to these bio-medical theories, or to popular racial theorists, such theories were critical to informing many nineteenth century assumptions about race and provided a framework which was employed to justify attitudes about non-European immigrants.³⁰

30. Popular racial theorists of the time included: Arthur de Gobineau, Herbert Spencer and Francis Galton. Often described as the sire of modern racism, Frenchman de Gobineau provided a ‘scientific’ rationale for white supremacy. In *The Inequality of the Human Races* (1853) he identifies physiological or phrenological differences between ‘white’, ‘black’ and ‘yellow’, arguing that if the races were not kept separate miscegenation would result in social chaos. The founder of social Darwinism, Herbert Spencer believed

Certainly, that Barton quoted from Charles Pearson reminds us that parliamentarians did not exist in an ideological or critical vacuum but rather that they were informed by contemporary debates about race. Charles Pearson distinguished between the 'evanescent' races (the Australian Aborigine, the Kanakas and the American Indians) who he claimed would disappear and the 'lower' races who were beyond extinction (the Chinese, the Hindu and the Negro).³¹ Such a claim is further supported by the fact that Protectionist Samuel Mauger quotes from the English racial theorist, Karl Pearson, and his *National Life from the Standpoint of Science* (1900), invoking social Darwinism and evolutionary theory, in an attempt to demonstrate the danger of the 'Kanaka':

If you bring the white man into contact with the black you too often suspend the very process of natural selection on which the evolution of the higher type depends. You get superior and inferior races living on the same soil and that co-existence is demoralising to both. They naturally sink into the position of master and servant, if not admittedly into that of slave-owner and slave.³²

Free Trader, and ardent advocate of the prohibition of coloured immigration, Senator Staniforth Smith similarly argued that exclusion was necessary on *scientific* and ethnological grounds:

All anthropologists agree that the Caucasian races cannot mingle with the Mongolian, the Hindoo, or the negro. Nott says—'The mulattos are the shortest lived of any of the Branch races, and are very unprolific.' Warren tells us that—'The half-cast of India comes to a premature end without reproduction, and if there are any offspring they are always wretched and miserable.'³³

that the evolution of races takes place through natural selection. It was Spencer, rather than Charles Darwin, who coined the phrase 'the survival of the fittest'. Founder of the British eugenics movement, Francis Galton was committed to improving the collective human condition through 'breeding-up' and is remembered for establishing anthropometric or biometric laboratories across Britain. Australia was represented at the First International Eugenics conference in London in 1912 by South Australian politician and medical practitioner, Sir John Cockburn, National Archives of Australia, 'International Eugenic Congress', A11804, 1912/209.

31. For a fuller description of Pearson's perspectives on racial character see David Walker, *Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850–1939*, University of Queensland Press, St Lucia, pp. 44–47.
32. Samuel Mauger, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 15 November 1901, p. 6823.
33. Senator Staniforth Smith, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 14 November 1901, p. 7246.

Senator Smith proceeded, 'We know from the teachings of science' that the 'Chinese and other coloured races cannot mix with us'. Notions of evolution and progress were also carried over to the political domain and used to support the ability of different races to participate in democracy. In fact, the evolution or whitening of Australia symbolised the transformation of the colonial settler society into a nation. Correspondingly, the marginalisation and objectification of the Chinese became an expression of Australia's national modernity.

Victorian racial anxieties, combined with a fin-de-siecle optimism, prompted some parliamentarians to speak like social and racial engineers, each with an image of the future which held at its centre the ideal of whiteness. The debate that took place between August and December 1901 was peppered with comments about racial admixture and the commingling of blood. Free Trader, Sir William McMillan, spoke of the dangers inherent in allowing for 'alien or servile races' to mix or 'interfuse' among themselves and among the Australian people³⁴. Leader of the Opposition and future prime minister, Free Trader George Reid, suggested that there was unanimity that 'the current of Australian blood shall not assume the darker hues'³⁵, while the soup-eating Alexander Paterson claimed, 'the Bill before us ... deals with the protection of blood'.³⁶ Member for Bland, Chris Watson, imagined the national challenge in terms of maintaining blood purity and resisting contamination:

... the objection I have to the mixing of these coloured people with the white people of Australia ... lies in the main with the possibility and probability of racial contamination ... The question is whether we would desire that our sisters or our brothers should be married into any of these races to which we object. If these people are not such as we can meet upon an equality, and not such that we can feel that it is no disgrace to intermarry with, and not such as we can expect to give us an infusion of blood that will tend to the raising of our standard of life, and to the improvement of the race, we should be foolish in the extreme if we did not exhaust every means of preventing them from coming to this land, which we have made our own. The racial

34. Born in England, Sir William McMillan was the Member for Wentworth representing the Free Trade Party, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4626.

35. George Reid, (Free Trade Member for East Sydney), 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 25 September 1901, p. 5168. Here he also speaks of 'highly civilised nations—who share our blood' ...

36. Alexander Paterson, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 26 September 1901, p. 5275.

aspect of the question, in my opinion, is the larger and more important one; but the industrial aspect also has to be considered.³⁷

Samuel Mauger, Member for Melbourne Ports and the author of *A White Man's World* (Melbourne 1901), was obsessed by the possibility of contamination. Here he issued a warning about the struggle to protect bloodlines and propagate whiteness in Queensland:

When I visited the northern part of Queensland recently, I was alarmed not only at the great number of aliens who are making inroads in all trades, but who are intermingling with the European races there. One only has to visit the public schools to see that the very contamination and deterioration that my honourable friend speaks of is actually taking place in Queensland to an alarming extent ... We have something like 800,000,000 Chinese and Japanese, within easy distance of Australia, from whom we have to fear contamination.³⁸

Associated with this notion of contamination was the prospect of an Asiatic invasion. Within the context of the debate, invasion most often referred to uncontrolled settlement of Asians or the domination of the Chinese in local trading and agricultural sectors, rather than any planned military offensive.³⁹

Such concerns over blood contamination manifest in an anxiety about miscegenation and the possibility of a multiracial or mixed-race future. Labour's Member for Kennedy, Charles McDonald, imagined the prospect of a region he ineloquently identifies as—*Mongrelia*. Echoing Herbert Spencer, McDonald suggested that the 'former' white man has become piebald:

Through the promiscuous intercourse with aboriginal women, a hybrid race is being established in that fair corner of the continent, such as the world has never before witnessed. To describe some of the children to be seen in the Broome district would utterly puzzle the cleverest ethnologist. The Malay, Japanese, Philipino have crossed with blacks. The union of **former** white men [emphasis added] and aboriginal women have produced half-castes, who in turn have bred from Chinese, Malays and Manillamen. Half-castes may have crossed with Quadroons, or Octoroons, and so the mixing up of the nationalities and hybrids continues until 'Mongrelia' is literally the

37. Chris Watson, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4633.

38. Samuel Mauger, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4631.

39. See, for example, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4631; 12 September 1901, p. 4804; 26 September 1901, p. 5239.

name that should be applied to the region. This rising generation inherits all the vices and physical infirmities of the Eastern coolie, who at best is a low type of humanity.⁴⁰

McDonald's comments reveal the way in which the anxiety attached to attempting to control sexual relations between Aboriginal women and members of other ethnic groups was related to a fear of racial devolution. McDonald's account of the degradation of the white man in Broome or 'Mongrelia', which is buttressed by contagionist notions of social pathology, provides a chilling example of the way in which miscegenation was considered to result in the contamination, the deterioration, the dilution and ultimately the death of whiteness.⁴¹ McDonald's comments offer an example of how, to borrow his racist nomenclature, the Half-caste, the Quadroon and the Octoroon become feared and despised because they destabilise fixed racial identity.



4. Livingstone Hopkins, 'Piebald Possibilities—a little Australian Christmas family party of the future', *Bulletin*, 13 December 1902. Interracial sexuality is considered to threaten the borders of white identity and mix-raced people become the embodiment of that threat. Ironically, many speakers to the debate fail to comprehend the way the objectification and marginalisation of non-white people resulted in forcing them together.

40. Charles McDonald reading an extract from the *Melbourne Age*, 16 August 1899, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 1 October 1901, p. 5379. In 1892 Herbert Spencer claimed, 'It is not at the root a question of social philosophy; it is at root a question of biology. There is abundant proof alike furnished by the intermarriages of human races and the interbreeding of animals, that when varieties mingle, diverge beyond a certain slight degree, the result is inevitably a bad one in the long run'. As quoted in Richard Hall, *Black Armband Days: Truth from the Dark Side of Australia's Past*, Vintage, Milsons Point, 1988, p. 120.

41. The Protectionist Member for Darling Downs, Littleton Ernest Groom, compares the coloured races to rapidly multiplying pests like rabbits and prickly pear. L. E. Groom, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 25 September 1901, p. 5173.

The Member for Maranoa, James Page, quoting from an unidentified newspaper claimed that an irreversible racial contamination had taken place in Townsville. In so doing, he introduced the brutal metaphor of bleaching:

Mr. Mauger went into the Cathedral in Townsville on a Sunday, and met 13 half-castes and no others. The first man the speculator met in Townsville was a Chinese, the second was a Chinese. 'I went a little further,' he said, 'and met a kanaka, then three yellowy-brown children passed me at a trot. Then came a Jap, with a black wife, and two children of a dirty drab colour. An aboriginal was standing at the next corner begging, and a half-caste Chinese girl gave him a penny. I had counted sixteen different complexions within the space of three blocks. At the hotel there were white people of course, and we talked the matter over. To one man I ventured to express the opinion that we would have a white Australia in twelve months. 'May-be you'll have it white enough down south' he said, 'but it'll take a thousand years to bleach Townsville.'⁴²

Bleaching is of course suggestive of removing or striping away colour—or even ethnic cleansing. Attendant to the idea of bleaching is the eugenicist imperative of 'breeding-up', halting or reversing degeneration through the inter-generational introduction of whiteness and the dilution and elimination of colour. It is here that we perceive the merging of the project of Federation governance and Victorian racial theory as we observe the way the debate was framed around notions of social evolutionary progression and the eugenicists imperative to halt or reverse degeneration.

Page's apocalyptic vision was accompanied by other alchemistic metaphors. Sounding like a concerned apothecary, Labour Senator for Queensland, James Stewart warned:

With regard to race, we cannot mix with them. There is no natural affinity between them and us. If an attempt were made to confine them and us within one bottle, so to speak, one or the other must be precipitated to the bottom. A compact and homogeneous community cannot be formed out of such heterogeneous compounds.⁴³

42. James Page, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 1 October 1901, p. 5378.

43. James Stewart, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 15 November 1901, p. 7331.



5. Parsons' Starch: A White Australian—Parson Bros. & Co Pty Ltd, Sydney, 1903⁴⁴

Matters of race and colour had become embedded in the national consciousness and were indispensable to the formation of a modern Australian identity. Whiteness became a bio-medical, legislative, commercial and even a popular cultural category. Here are examples of two agents of whiteness that emerged in the post-Federation period—each aspiring to the national ideal. In the first instance we observe the conflation of discourses of hygiene (cleanliness) and race in the commercial sphere, as the gendered female subject becomes critical to this process of whitening. In the second we find a 'game' through which 'white men' seek to remove 'coloured men' from Australia. The whitening of Australia became performed and embodied in recreational activity as players attempted to 'Get the Coloured Men Out and the White Men In'. These examples testify to the formation and production of white subjectivity through commercial and recreational form.

44. *Parsons' Starch: A White Australian* is available at the Macquarie University Australian History Museum. It also appears in Mimmo Cozzolino and Fysh Rutherford's *Symbols of Australia*.



6. The White Australia Game 1914, National Archives of Australia: A 1336, 3368 (Author: Francis James Shaw)

Alternative Voices

While the deliberately discriminatory policy had near unanimous parliamentary support, there were parliamentarians who dissented from the majority position. Two Members of the House of Representatives expressed strong opposition to the Immigration Restriction Bill: the Member for Parkes, Arthur Bruce Smith of the Free Trade Party, and the Member for Tasmania, Donald Cameron, also of the Free Trade Party. Bruce Smith opened his address to the Parliament with the following caveat: ‘I am very much afraid that the remarks I intend to make will seem exceedingly heterodox after the very continuous flow of advocacy for a white Australia ... [and the]

determination to keep Australia white and pure ...'⁴⁵ In identifying some of the 'glib phrases' that have been used throughout the debate—'white and pure', 'The equality of man' (as used by Edmund Barton), 'too beastly virtuous'—Smith suggested that 'the legislation is founded upon hysteria',⁴⁶ before offering the following assessment of the debate:

The public have been told over and over again that the purity and whiteness of the Australian Commonwealth is being endangered by the incursion of these hordes of Asiatics. I say that it is a fable; that it is altogether a fairy story.⁴⁷

However, while Smith favoured the admission of 'educated aliens' he certainly did not wish to see Australia populated by uneducated coloured labour.

Donald Cameron offered historical context for his rationale of 'fair play':

I say without fear of contradiction that no race on the face of this earth has been treated in a more shameful manner than have the Chinese. They are about the most conservative race in the world, and up to late years they had no desire whatever for any intercourse with what they called the outer barbarians, but they were forced at the point of the bayonet to admit Englishmen and other Europeans into China. Now if we compel them to admit our people into their land, why in the name of justice should we refuse to receive them here? ... Therefore I say most empathetically that we are responsible to a certain extent for forcing an entrance into China, and that we should, in a spirit of fair play, allow the Chinese to come into Australia in reasonable numbers.⁴⁸

Cameron was correct to point out that the Chinese passage to Australia had been facilitated by the European occupation of China. Once Chinese ports fell under the control of various European powers, as a result of the Opium Wars (1839–42, 1856–60), more Chinese would leave China's shores than ever before. It is also worth noting that in the months prior to Federation, the states of New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia had supplied personnel to support the British and European nations to suppress the Boxer rebellion—an anti-imperial uprising in China.

45. Bruce Smith, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 25 September 1901, p. 5153.

46. Bruce Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 5153, 5154, and 5158.

47. Bruce Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 5160.

48. Donald Cameron, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 12 September 1901, p. 4839.

Dictation Test

Under the Immigration Restriction Bill, the mechanism intended to restrict immigration of undesirable persons was the dictation test. The test was to be administered by Customs officers at ports across Australia. While some parliamentarians favoured a test in the English language, including Prime Minister Barton, the British were concerned that such a test would offend non-English speaking British subjects. Others in the House argued that such a test would also offend non-English speaking Europeans and affect the small emigration from Europe.⁴⁹ Advocates of absolute exclusion opposed an education or dictation test. One of the most strident critics of the test, George Reid, spoke repeatedly about the hypocrisy of a test which permitted a Customs officer to apply a test, in any European language, to any immigrant he considers undesirable or distasteful. Reid claimed, 'It is bad enough even for some of us to have to write our own language from dictation, but if we were asked to put into French on the spur of the moment some English read by a Customs officer, I think we should all have to be expatriated.'⁵⁰ Reid would later describe it as 'a test which will reflect ignominy and discredit upon Australian legislation'.⁵¹ Giving consideration to Britain's multi-racial Empire, British Colonial Secretary Chamberlain recommended that Australia adopt the type of European language test that was in operation in the British colony of Natal. While there was intense debate over whether the test should be applied in English, and only in English, or in a variety of European languages, in order to appease the British, the Parliament adopted a similar Natal-type test that had been previously used in Western Australia, New South Wales and Tasmania.

Labour called for absolute exclusion and Chris Watson moved an (ultimately unsuccessful) amendment which sought the exclusion of 'any person who is an Aboriginal native of Asia, Africa or the islands thereof'. Watson's opposition to the test was based on the belief that the more educated an Oriental the greater threat he became:

With the Oriental, as a rule, the more he is educated the worse man he is likely to be from our point of view. The more educated, the more cunning he becomes, and the more able, with his peculiar ideas of social and business morality, to cope with the

49. See, for example, Senator James Stewart, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', Senate, *Debates*, 15 November 1901, pp. 7331–7332.

50. George Reid, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 25 September 1901, p. 5168.

51. George Reid, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 9 October 1901, p. 5812.

people here. I do not think there is any advantage in restricting the admission of coloured people to those who are educated; and, in any case, I contend that the number which will filter through under the Government's proposal will still be sufficiently large to constitute a great menace to the well-being of the people as a whole.⁵²

This sentiment was echoed by King O'Malley who claimed the educated Chinaman 'the very worst man we can have in the community'.⁵³

While the test could theoretically be given to any person arriving in Australia, in practice it was administered selectively and applied to those deemed 'unwanted or undesirable': the 'idiot or insane person', the ill, the criminal, the deviant and the coloured. The test was, of course, a ruse and various Australian governments employed it to conceal their real motivation for excluding 'coloured undesirables' who inevitably failed a test which could be delivered in any number of European languages. Section 3(a) of the *Immigration Restriction Act* reads:

Any person who when asked to do so by an officer fails to write out and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in a European language directed by the officer.

The test would be no less than fifty words, and the passage chosen could often be difficult and obscure, so that even if the test was given in English, a person was likely to fail. An example of a test given in Western Australia on 1 May 1908 reveals how arcane, elliptical and impenetrable the test could be:

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 filament and tissues. For a very long time low-grade marine organisms are simply hollow cylinders, through which salt water streams.⁵⁴

Natural phenomena, business affairs, design of sea craft, book-keeping practices and animal behaviours were popular sources for content. Here is an example from August 1926:

52. Chris Watson, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4636.

53. King O'Malley, 'Immigration Restriction Bill', House of Representatives, *Debates*, 6 September 1901, p. 4639.

54. Myra Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1923, p. 126.

The butcher bird is known to all. He is a robber and the chief of feathered ruffians. He usually has a stronghold in the glade in the bush, which for him is home during at least two or three months of the year, whence he sallies forth over the surrounding country plundering and pillaging.⁵⁵

The Dictation Test was administered 805 times in 1902–03 with 46 candidates passing the test and 554 times in 1904–09 with only six people successful. After 1909 no person passed the dictation test.⁵⁶ While the numbers of those who sat the test is relatively low, the test clearly had a deterrent effect. Applicants became fewer as the nature of the test became more widely known. Its mere existence kept uneducated classes from attempting it. The test was ultimately abolished by the Commonwealth *Migration Act 1958*.⁵⁷

Chinese residents who wished to travel abroad could gain exemption from the test by applying for a Certificate of Domicile. This Certificate was required to ensure that a shipping company would give passage to a Chinese returning to Australia. The Act reads:

Anyone who is domiciled in the Commonwealth, and is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, and who desires on his return to be excepted from the Act under

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55. National Archives of Australia, Test Passages: Immigration Act 1901–33, A1, 1935/704.
56. Making Multicultural Australia for the 21st Century, <http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/hotwords/hottext.php?id=78> (accessed 25 May 2007).
57. Comparisons have recently been made between the dictation test and today's Australian Citizenship Test. However, the two tests have different objectives: the dictation test was employed to limit the entry of non-Europeans into Australia, whereas the Citizenship Test seeks to achieve civic integration through testing an individual's English language skills and understanding of Australian 'values'. Nevertheless, in spite of this distinction there is at least a perception of a historical link. *The Report of the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs into Citizenship Testing* claims: 'This test might also suffer from historical perceptions of previous practice in immigration during the "White Australia" era', (*Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Act 2007* [Provisions], p. 14). The Dissenting Report of the Australian Greens also identifies this historical parallel suggesting that the people of Australia 'have had to stand up for a vision of Australia based on openness and generosity—not one based on fear and a closed door' (*Australian Citizenship Amendment (Citizenship Testing) Act 2007* [Provisions], p. 61). The effect of the two pieces of legislation might also be dissimilar. For while the *Immigration Restriction Act* was successful policy in its (albeit brutal) capacity to restrict coloured immigration, the intended citizenship test is unlikely to become an effective instrument for instilling Australian 'values'.

paragraph (a), subsection 3 thereof (that is the test), may apply to the Collector of Customs at the port of departure for a certificate of domicile.

After Federation these certificates were only given to Chinese who owned property in Australia and while the issue of certificates allowing for readmission increased after 1903, as A. T. Yarwood suggests, every encouragement was given to the Chinese to visit China ‘in the hope that they would be tempted to remain’.⁵⁸

In the fifty years following the introduction of the *Immigration Restriction Act* the numbers of Chinese living in Australia reduced substantially, from 32,700 in 1901 to 12,100 in 1947.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Federation was a moment of self-determination which presented the new nation with a unique opportunity to reflect upon matters of identity, citizenship and nationhood. In its attempt to construct the ‘statutory armour’ that would keep the nation white, the first Parliament of Australia drew upon this opportunity—this moment of sovereignty—to construct deliberately discriminatory and racially exclusive legislation. As the *White Australia Game* of 1914 suggests, the *Immigration Restriction Act* announced that it was now time to—‘Get the Coloured Men Out and the White Men In’. Yet, for a white nation on the edge of Asia, surrounded by seas of yellow (as depicted in the *White Australia Game*), the challenge of building a snowy white Australia had only just begun.

In the observations of the Federation celebrations that were reported in the *Argus* on 8 May 1901, we find that the public image of the Chinese became transfigured by their participation in the Federation parade. For the duration of the parade citizens, who were typically separated by race and class, were able to partake in new kinds of social interaction. This enabled the Chinese to escape from the racist objectifications that often shadowed them, allowing them to demonstrate a different type of civic identity—an identity which challenged the way they were represented in the nationalist press and in the parliamentary debate. Indeed, with a people brimful with optimism, and guided by nationalist idealism, such a moment hinted at the possibility of a more tolerant, more inclusive—even multi-racial—national future.

58. A. T. Yarwood and M. J. Knowing, *Race Relations in Australia: A History*, Methuen, Sydney, 1982, p. 238.



7. Wong Ah See's Certificate of Domicile, National Archives of Australia (Queensland): J2482, 1903/163. Certificates of Domicile included the recipient's biographical data (physical description, dates of arrival and departure and names and addresses of references in Australia), a left hand impression, and a photograph of the full face and profile. Certificates of Domicile were issued by the Collector of Customs in each State or port of departure and hand prints were used by Customs officials to identify Chinese residents of Australia returning from overseas.

A native of Canton, Wong Ah See had lived in Townsville since 1895. Wong was an unmarried gardener who owned a 1/3 share in a garden at Mundingburra, valued at £150. Wong departed Australia on the *Taiyuan* for Hong Kong on 23 November 1903.

The passivity of the regulated non-citizen contrasts the energy exhibited by the Chinese during the Federation celebrations. Certificates of Domicile testify to the elaborate system of registration, compliance and surveillance that shadowed the Chinese in the post-Federation period.

59. 1911: 25,800; 1921: 20,800; 1933: 14,000; see Arthur Huck, *The Chinese in Australia*, Melbourne, Longmans, 1968, p. 5.

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Book No. 246

Form No. 21. COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA. No. 091
 DUPLICATE. Immigration Act 1901-1912 and Regulations.

CERTIFICATE EXEMPTING FROM DICTATION TEST.

I, **WILLIAM HENRY BARKLEY** the Collector of Customs for the State of **NEW SOUTH WALES** in the said Commonwealth, hereby certify that *Choy Yee* hereinafter described, who is leaving the Commonwealth temporarily, will be exempted from the provisions of paragraph (a) of Section 3 of the Act if he returns to the Commonwealth within a period of **THREE YEARS** from this date.

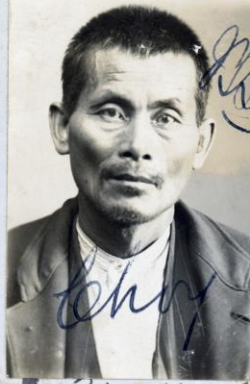
Date *30 Dec 1918* *W. H. Barkley*
 Collector of Customs.

DESCRIPTION

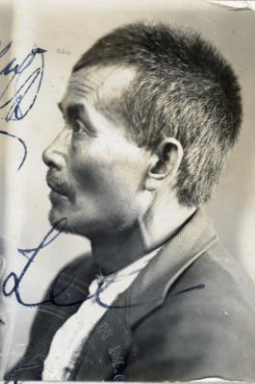
Nationality *Chinese* Birthplace *Canton*
 Age *50 years* Complexion *Dark*
 Height *5ft 6 in* Hair *Dark*
 Build *Medium* Eyes *Brown*
 Particular marks *mole left side upper lip*

(For impression of hand, see back of this document)

PHOTOGRAPHS.



Full Face



Profile :-

Date of departure *31. 12. 18* Port of Embarkation *Sydney*
 Ship *Changsha* Destination *China*
 Date of return *29/9/21* Ship *Victoria*
 Port *Moony* *Post Road*

Customs Officers.

4.214/8.17.—0.2005.

8. Choy Yee's Certificate of Exemption from the Dictation Test, National Archives of Australia (Sydney): ST84/1, 1918/246/91. In the decade after Federation the legislation was amended to contain provisions to admit particular categories of desirable coloured labour to Australia on a non-permanent basis. A native of Canton, Choy Yee departed Sydney for China on the *Changsha* on 31 December 1918; he was temporally exempted from the dictation test providing he returned to Australia within three years.

