



Racism and Imperialism in the Antipodes

by Robert A. Huttenback



AUSTRALIA

Australia's patterns of racial discrimination may be more typical than exceptional. The success of the White Australia policy in the past has made possible recent "liberalization" of immigration restriction acts.

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RACISM AND IMPERIALISM IN THE ANTIPODES

by Robert A. Huttenback

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The "Yellow Peril" no longer haunts the dreams of Western Americans as it did at the turn of the century, but to Australians the threat still seems very real. Australians continue to think in terms of invasion from the North, and their intervention in Vietnam is calculated to forestall the evil day. This is not to say that Australian racial attitudes have been influenced solely by the imperatives of geography, for the history of Australia in this regard follows a pattern shared with South Africa, Canada, and New Zealand—the so-called British colonies of white settlement.

It has been said with at least the spirit of truth that the British Empire was founded in a fit of absence of mind. And certainly the growth of Great Britain into a power on whose possessions the sun literally never set was not the result of clearly conceived policy or of some governmental master plan emanating from the corridors of Whitehall. Religious deviationists, commercial adventurers, and jailors in quest of prisons were more often than not the founders of British colonial settlements.

Given such a history, it is not surprising that enthusiasm for empire grew but slowly in Britain and that no lofty rationale for imperial advance was for many years forthcoming. Eventually, humanitarianism, evangelical Christianity, and the "civilizing mission" associated with "bearing the white man's burden" combined to produce an imperial philosophy of sorts—a rather undefined dedication to "fair play" and an official determination that all subjects of the crown, regardless of race, color, religion, or ethnic background, should be equal before the law.

Of course, given the disparity in strength between Great Britain and the extra-European world, it was easy for liberal motives, sincerely conceived, to degenerate into feelings of racial and national superiority. As the nineteenth century progressed, the term "British Race" was heard ever more frequently, and combined with a conviction that the inhabitants of the British Isles had reached the apogee of human existence and were uniquely endowed by the Creator with qualities and attributes lacking in other lesser human creatures—be they European, African or Asian. To be sure, a kind of evolutionary process had placed some peoples and nations higher on the ladder of civilization than others, but at the pinnacle and alone stood Great Britain.

Nineteenth century Britain constituted a singularly homogeneous community and consequently never faced the problems associated with the immigration of non-Anglo-Saxons and particularly nonwhites. The story was different in the overseas places. They were to be the battlegrounds for the struggle between the "imperial philosophy" and the determination of most of the white settlers to keep the new lands at best, British and at worst, "white." And it is, of course, in Australia that the struggle became most apparent and reached classic proportions under the banner of the crusade for a "White Australia." An Australia where even Caucasians such as Syrians and Afghans were to be considered "colored" and hence unwelcome.

A trickle of Indian and Chinese laborers who entered the Australian colonies in the late 1830s and in the 1840s constituted the first nonwhite immigrants to set foot on the continent. They were

imported by pastoralists hungry for labor and were hardly deemed to constitute a threat to a "White Australia." In the 1850s, however, a major change occurred. With the discovery of gold in Victoria and New South Wales, vessel after vessel deposited its human cargo on the shores of the two colonies. Most of the new arrivals were miners and a high proportion of these were Chinese. The New South Wales census of 1861 listed 12,988 Chinese out of a total population of 350,860. In Victoria, in 1859, there were some 42,000 in a population of about half a million. It was not simply a matter of numbers but of concentration in the gold fields where the Chinese were strongly resented by the white miners, even though they tended to work ground considered nonremunerative by the Europeans. In both Victoria and New South Wales, major riots from time to time cost Chinese their lives, destroyed their property, and drove them from the gold fields.

The key to a solution was contained in letters of early 1853 from the Duke of Newcastle, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, to the Governors of Victoria and New South Wales.¹ Newcastle purported to be concerned about the conditions under which Chinese traveled to Australia. He urged the governors to remain vigilant,

... and in case any serious abuses should come to light, or appear probable, to propose to the Legislature an act imposing penalties on all ships bringing immigrants to New South Wales in which it may appear that a sufficient portion of space had not been allotted to the Emigrants or an adequate issue of provision made regularly to them throughout the voyage or that the Ship had left China in an unseaworthy state.²

Whether he meant it to or not, the Secretary of State's letter provided the Australian colonies an ingenious device for excluding Chinese without offending the imperial sensibilities of the Colonial Office or the international sensitivities of the Foreign Office. Victoria Act 39 of 1855 stipulated that no vessel might carry immigrants in excess of a ratio of one to every ten tons of burthen. A fee of £10 was to be exacted for every immigrant landed and the governor was empowered to place further

levies on immigrants to pay for the administration of the act. To make the purpose of the law absolutely clear an immigrant was defined as, "any male adult native of China or of any island in the Chinese seas or any person born of Chinese parents."

New South Wales was slower to act but under the pressure of petitions asserting "that the Chinese by their idolatrous customs, moral depravity, and detestable habits, are viewed with a constantly increasing disgust and dislike by all classes... tend to degrade and demoralize the rising generation, and disturb the growing interests and lower the moral tone of this colony..."³ and complaints of Chinese, "moral and physical inferiority to the European races,"⁴ the legislature in 1861 passed an act almost identical to the one passed previously in Victoria.⁵ These acts brought about the desired effect almost immediately and enabled Victoria to repeal its Chinese immigration legislation in 1863 and New South Wales to act similarly in 1867. Between 1870 and 1880 the Chinese population in Victoria dropped steadily from 15,079 to 8,486.⁶ The New South Wales census of 1881 indicated a Chinese population of 10,205 or 1.36 per cent of the whole. The same decade, however, saw the rise of an Australian labor movement extremely sensitive to competition from "cheap" colored labor. The 1878 seaman's strike, aimed at steamship companies that employed nonwhite sailors, clearly defined the prevailing attitude. When, in 1881, a slight increase in Chinese arrivals was noted, mass hysteria became the order of the day, at least in the urban centers, and an intercolonial conference on the Chinese question was rapidly assembled in Sydney to which all the Australian colonies, including New Zealand, sent delegates. What emerged from the deliberations was the determination of the assembled colonies, save Western Australia, to pass restrictive legislation which would essentially end Chinese immigration to Australia. All the Australian colonies except Tasmania, Western Australia, and Queensland, which thought its legislation of 1877 adequate, passed laws in 1881 which, although they differed slightly in detail, in general agreed on a limit of one Chinese for every 100 tons of burthen, the liability of the master of a vessel to a £100 fine for every Chinese in excess, and a £10 tax on every Chinese landed. To mollify the

Colonial Office, Chinese who were British subjects were exempted. For a Chinese to satisfactorily *prove* his British citizenship was, in effect, almost impossible.

The guiding spirit of the conference had been the Premier of New South Wales, Sir Henry Parkes. In the debate on the New South Wales bill he argued:

... I am willing to admit that legislation of this kind is undesirable. I am as anxious as any can be that we should maintain the boast that whoever steps upon our shore shall find an asylum of freedom here. I am as anxious as any man can be that this land shall be a refuge for the oppressed, the poor, and the struggling from every part of the world. . . notwithstanding this, I feel that times arise when the law of self-preservation is superior to every other law. . . .

Warming to his task, Parkes went on to explain:

... I object to them [the Chinese], in the first place, because they do not assist in the permanent settlement of the country. I object to them, in the second place, because they are a class of persons who cannot possibly have any real sympathy with British progress, and with the development of those principles at which we all aim in promoting the progress of a British population. I object to them also on account of the vast numbers of the nation to which they belong. . . .

In conclusion the Premier asked: "... Is it part of our duty to encourage or to throw open the gates of the country to the inundation of persons who in no sense come to assist us in founding an empire, but who come here to better as far as they can their own condition, intending to return to their country?"⁷ Parkes' views did not represent the feelings of the entire population. Many legislators, particularly in the Legislative Council, felt that anti-Chinese immigration legislation was unnecessary, unfair, and "un-British." *The Sydney Morning Herald* was strongly critical. *The Sydney Daily Telegraph*, on the other hand, contended that:

... It is all very well indulging in sentimental talk about the equal rights of men, and these should be respected. But there are occasions and circumstances which render it necessary that we should remember that charity begins at home. The Chinese question involves a real danger. The small number at present in the colony may not be much injury to it, but a large influx would be a curse to the country. There are very few Chinese of the better class among those who leave their country, and it is well known that the Chinese in the colonies demoralise those Europeans brought into contact with them. . . . The Chinaman is no doubt a man and a brother; but it would be better for himself and his Australian brethren if he stayed at home in his own country.⁸

The legislation passed in 1881, although it essentially eliminated the possibility of a large number of Chinese entering the colony, did little to assuage the virulence of anti-Chinese feeling. Many of the public statements made indicated a view of the world and some of its peoples quite contrary to that espoused by the more utopian British imperialists. On February 16, 1886, Richard Thompson, representing West Maitland, rose in the New South Wales Legislature to give his opinion of the "Celestials."

Their filthy habits were well known, and amongst other things they were such abominable liars, there was no trusting them in a court of justice. Their habits, morally speaking, were so filthy, that they set so bad an example to our children, with whom they sought to associate that, although he was no advocate for protection as far as trade was concerned, he was certainly an advocate for protecting our population from such an infernal nuisance as the Chinese were.

Barely pausing for breath, the honorable member continued:

Not only did they interfere with grown-up people by underselling them, but they interfered with our children, male and

female, in such a way as would be disgusting to talk about even in this assembly...and he hoped the House would adopt some measure which would have the effect of lessening the number of Chinese who were coming into the Colony. We did not want them even as vegetable growers. They had been held up as patterns in that capacity; but it would be better to do without some of our vegetables than have the Chinese here as a curse and a stain on the population.

The arrival in mid-1888 of several vessels bearing Chinese—notably the “Afghan” and “Tsinan”—once again brought affairs to the boiling point. The Chinese were not allowed to land on the basis of the number aboard exceeding the established legal ratio to tonnage. But the Supreme Court of New South Wales ruled that the law of 1881 established a fine on the master or owners of the vessels if they exceeded the legal ratio but did not prohibit the actual landing of the passengers. Hence the Chinese must be allowed to land. Public indignation knew no bounds. Even before the court decision a crowd of 5,000 headed by the Mayor of Sydney had invaded the Parliament house. Now the air in the legislature fairly crackled with hyperbole. When the Governor reserved a recently passed Chinese immigration restriction bill, John McElhone, the member from Upper Hunter, roared:

I say we should insist upon our right, and we should again and again, pass legislation, and tell the home Government in plain terms that, unless they will legislate for the protection of our own social interests in this matter, and to prevent the Chinese from coming among us, we shall sever our connections with England and act independently⁹

Parkes was even more strident than previously. In times of extreme danger, he asserted, a government must not stand in fear of technically observing the law. “Why, a government that stood in fear of technical observance of the law in any such case as that would be swept away, and deservedly swept away.” 60,000 Chinese were taking the bread out of the mouths of Australian working men and their families. He had importuned the

British government for diplomatic action but to no avail. Meanwhile more and more ships were decanting waves of Chinese into New South Wales. “We can bear remonstrance, we can meet argument, we can make good our case against the world; but we cannot patiently stand to be treated with frozen indifference by persons who consider some petty quarrel in some petty state of more importance than the gigantic interests of these magnificent colonies.”¹⁰

Parkes was a seasoned demagogue and his words rang true to the vast majority of the population. The views of Thomas Walker, representing Northumberland, were probably typical:

... The Premier has shown a manliness and independence which I never expected of him; because he is protecting the rights and liberties of the working population of New South Wales, and he is protesting wilful insult from the home Government. He virtually says, “I am ready with my life to defend the high prerogative of self-government. I am ready with my life, in defiance of all that may be brought to intimidate a man, to warp the statesmanship of a man, and limit his courage and honesty—in spite of all that I am determined to protect the population of the Colony, and that the will of the people shall rise even higher, if need be, than the men-of-war in the harbour or the representative of the Crown in our country.” That is a manly course of action. . . .¹¹

Faced with such resolution the Colonial Office equivocated and determined that despite a £100 landing tax the proposed bill was not actually prohibitive—a rather startling conclusion at best,¹² and that assent could not be refused.¹³ “... Any delay in authorising the Royal Assent would gravely increase the present strong feeling in the colony and prove almost certainly prejudicial to any prospect of a full consideration of the question and of a settlement on moderate terms”¹⁴ New South Wales Act IV of 1888—which finally was sanctioned on July 11, 1888—established a ratio of one Chinese to every 300 tons of burthen as well as the previously mentioned £100 entrance tax. In addition, the fine for exceeding the ratio was raised to £500 per violation, surely a

discouragement to shippers inclined to carry Chinese to Australia. The bill also entered the domestic realm by prohibiting any future naturalization of Chinese.

Even before the New South Wales legislation had actually been passed into law, the general climate of apprehension combined with the rumor of a massive Chinese influx into Port Darwin, in the far north, to bring about another intercolonial conference on the Chinese question, this time in Adelaide. From it emerged a resolution urging the British government to enter into negotiations with the Chinese authorities with a view to the solution of the immigration question by treaty and a pro forma law. The latter was passed¹⁵, largely unaltered by all the colonies (including New Zealand) save New South Wales, which already had its slightly different act before the legislature, and Tasmania, whose Premier felt further legislation was unnecessary.¹⁶ The Conference bill was almost identical to the New South Wales Act, except that it established a ratio of one Chinese for every five hundred tons of burthen in preference to the New South Wales 1/300 formula. With the passage of the acts of 1888, the corpus of immigration legislation dealing exclusively with the Chinese was essentially complete.

Those historians who in the past have dealt with the history of the White Australia policy have too often assumed that immigration was the only issue involved. This is of course an incorrect and naive position. What must also be assessed is the status of Chinese and other colored persons who had managed to enter Australia, to become bona fide residents, and who were in some cases British subjects.

The first attempts to differentiate between Chinese and Europeans, not surprisingly, occurred in connection with the gold fields. The Victoria Gold Fields Commission was severely critical of the Chinese presence and, largely as a result of its report, Governor Sir Charles Hotham in 1856 promulgated regulations requiring all Chinese on the gold fields to live in special locations under the eyes of protectors. Act 41 of 1857 placed a special tax of £6 per annum on all Chinese, nonpayment of which would bring forfeiture of mining and business licenses. Victoria Act 80 of 1859 required the registration of all Chinese and provided for

their movement from district to district as it seemed desirable to the colonial administration. The act also excluded Chinese from eligibility to sit on the mining boards which played a major role in the governance of the gold fields.

The Queensland gold fields were never of the same significance as those to the south, and the census of 1871 showed a Chinese population in the colony of only 2,835 out of a total population of 120,104. By 1876, however, there were 10,412 Chinese to some 163,400 Europeans. As a consequence, the colonial legislature imitated Victoria and passed a bill to amend the gold fields Act of 1874 so far as it related to Asiatic and African aliens. Although the bill was careful to exempt British subjects from its provisions, it was nevertheless reserved by the Governor because it raised the license fee for Asiatic and African aliens from ten shillings to three pounds in the case of a miners' right and from three to ten pounds for a business license. Governor W. W. Cairns wrote to Lord Carnarvon, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that he questioned whether "it can be shown that, man for man, the European miner . . . contributes at all more to the revenue and general prosperity of the Colony than does his Asiatic rival . . ."¹⁷ For the time being the Colonial Office held firm, but when essentially the same bill was passed the following year it gave way. Under the provisions of Act 2 of 1878, Chinese were precluded from working any new gold field until two years had elapsed since its proclamation.

It would be possible to recite, *ad infinitum*, the acts which slowly removed the Chinese from the Australian gold fields. Suffice to say that in every colony where gold or other minerals were discovered similar legislation was passed. The Western Australian gold rush at Kalgoorlie did not occur until 1892-3. But even lesser discoveries had caused the colony to "protect" itself against the Chinese onslaught. Act 18 of 1886 stipulated that no Chinese could work a new gold field for the first five years of its existence and none might be employed by European miners. Act 3 of 1892 totally excluded "an Asiatic or African alien" from holding a mining business license on a mineral site or any mineral lease. Further acts in 1895, 1897, and 1898 stiffened these already formidable restrictions. Even New Zealand with its handful of Chinese and its meager gold fields attempted, in

1882, to pass an act to exclude Chinese from the diggings, although the proposal never reached the statute books.

The Chinese were not without their defenders. Merchants in the gold fields, liberal parliamentarians, and several government commissions rose to their support. In 1861, for instance, 111 merchants, tradesmen, and citizens of Sydney petitioned the Legislative Assembly against the Chinese immigration bill. The Chinese, the petitioners asserted, were both orderly and sober and spent large amounts of money in the colony without causing any commensurate expenses. They helped develop mineral resources, and they compared very favorably with their European counterparts. Interference with Chinese immigration might well deal a mortal blow to the prosperity of New South Wales.¹⁸ Three years later the Assembly received a petition from the Burragong gold field. The petitioners pointed out that the diggings were almost deserted and that Chinese should be encouraged to settle in the area which was well suited to the raising of grain, vegetables, and grape vines.¹⁹ What was true in New South Wales also applied to Victoria. In May 1855, a deputation from the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce waited on the Governor for the purpose of emphasizing to him the beneficial effect the Chinese were having on the colony.²⁰ A similar sentiment was expressed by fifty signers of a petition from the Ballarat gold field. Those who subscribed to the document included the chief of police, bankers, barristers, ministers, doctors, wardens, many members of the miners' council, and the keeper of the jail!²¹ Clearly, the large employers in need of labor, merchants who prospered from the Chinese trade and confirmed liberals urged equal rights for Chinese; while labor, with its frenetic fear of colored immigrants, and those members of the urban bourgeoisie who suffered from Chinese competition (i.e., the Melbourne furniture manufacturers) wanted the Chinese driven from the land bag and baggage.

By and large it was the latter group that carried the day. As the gold diggings became less remunerative and the Chinese entered fields of endeavor other than mining, legislation received sanction which attacked them and their position along a broad front. In virtually all colonies, factories and shops acts declared any place of business where

even one Chinese was employed as a factory with all the limitations this designation implied. Any shop which employed any Chinese or was Chinese owned could not be deemed a "small shop" and was consequently not eligible for the concessions, such as exemption from the prescribed hours for opening and closing, that "small shops" enjoyed. Regulations in Victoria attempted to drive the Chinese out of the furniture business by demanding that all furniture be stamped "European Labour Only," "Chinese Labour," or "European and other Labour."²² As it was assumed that the Chinese prospered because they not only lived off the smell of the proverbial oiled rag but were also unethical enough to work hard, the same measure stipulated that no work might be performed in a factory employing any Chinese before 7:30 A.M. or after 5:00 P.M. on a weekday, not after 2:00 P.M. on Saturday and not at all on Sunday. Any noise that sounded as if work was in progress was deemed to be *prima facie* proof of a violation. Only through the efforts of the Western Australia Legislative Council, in late 1904, did a bill which stipulated that any Chinese employed in a factory must work on the ground floor and be visible through a window not less than three feet from the ground, fail to reach the Governor's desk.²³

As time went on, even the rights of Chinese British subjects were impugned. Most colonies required naturalization in the local context for residents to acquire the full rights of citizenship, and Chinese were by and large denied naturalization.²⁴ Should they somehow have slipped through the net, they were often refused the right to vote by virtue of their race.²⁵ Chinese naturalized in one colony were not recognized as British subjects in the other colonies. For example, when the Premier of Tasmania wrote his colleague in New South Wales concerning a certain Ah Ham, "who had been a naturalised British subject for more than eight years, . . . [who was] steady and industrious . . ." and on whose behalf he wished the New South Wales poll tax suspended as Ah Ham passed through the colony on his way to China,²⁶ Sir Henry Parkes replied that despite Ah Ham's being a naturalised British subject, he was and would continue to be subject to the New South Wales laws affecting Chinese.²⁷

The degree to which Chinese were vilified knew few bounds. Expediency combined with deep

racial feelings to produce a bitter brew. King O'Malley of Encounter Bay in South Australia exemplified Australian hostility not only towards Chinese but all nonwhites:

... He only wished those who had said that coloured races were as good as the Whites would go to South Carolina for a night and sleep with a negro with his black woolly hair and his bad breath. The stench would be so great that he would not like to repeat the performance. Asiatics and all inferior races had certain misfortunes which pursued them to their dying day. But the great Creator had preserved Australia from these people and their leprosy...²⁸

To be sure euphemisms such as references to the differing life style of Asians and Africans as opposed to Europeans and their inability to understand democracy were invoked to obscure true feelings. The fact remained that colored persons were deemed inferior racially and thus unable to rise to levels commensurate with the standards of "white civilization."

And, of course, the Chinese were by no means the only nonwhites (in the Australian context) on the continent. From the first there had been Afghan camel drivers and Indian hawkers. South Sea Island laborers (Kanakas) began to be imported into the Queensland sugar fields in the 1860s and the Japanese made their presence felt towards the end of the century. The last decade of the nineteenth century saw a concerted attack being mounted against the position of all these peoples. At first legislation concentrated on a few specific concerns. Queensland Act 31 of 1891 forbade any Asian from gaining a permit to sell poisons. Queensland Act 11 of 1892 precluded Africans or Asians from being employed in the buildings of railways by joint stock companies and a similar act excluded those sugar estates employing colored labor from a government subsidy.²⁹ Most of the coastal colonies passed acts aimed at eliminating the Japanese from their pearl and mother of pearl industries.³⁰ Western Australia wanted colored labor for the north but not for the more temperate south. The Western Australia Labour Registry Act of 1897 consequently forbade the importation of contract labor south of the 27th parallel. The very

few hawkers who travelled the Australian countryside, especially in Western Australia and Queensland, aroused increasing animosity. In the Western Australia legislature, G.T. Simpson, representing Geraldton, reflected prevailing attitudes when he accused Indian hawkers of unfairly competing with "our own" shopkeepers. The fact that these Indians were British subjects seemed beyond the point. "There is no necessity whatever," the honorable member averred, "for coloured men to travel about the country with their wares, striking terror into lonely women and children..."³¹ Act 35 which was subsequently passed, forbade all hawking. Other states acted similarly though somewhat less drastically.³²

Acts with rather narrowly conceived objectives soon led to the decision by most of the Australian colonies to pass legislation which was designed to exclude all colored persons, not already resident in Australia, from the continent. New South Wales Act 41 of 1896, for example, extended the provisions of the Chinese Restriction and Regulation Act of 1888 to, "all persons belonging to any colour or race inhabiting the Continent of Asia, or the Continent of Africa, or any island adjacent thereto, or any island in the Pacific Ocean or the Indian Ocean..." The *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, of October 14, 1896, wrote of the measure:

... It is in no spirit of hostility to coloured aliens that we would exclude them from this community; the question is simply one of protecting ourselves against the growth of an evil which experience teaches that it is easier to prevent than cure... If we want a homogeneous Australia, we must have a white Australia, and ungracious as it may seem, it is a much fairer thing to shut coloured aliens out altogether than invite them to come in, and then refuse them the recognition afforded our citizens... It is not much use as a means of safeguarding the welfare of Australia to shut out Chinamen, and leave the door open to millions of Hindoos, Arabs, Burmese, Angolese, and other coloured races which swarm in British Asia....

When other colonies started passing similar legislation (i.e., Tasmania), it became too much

even for the Colonial Office, and the various measures were reserved for the signification of Her Majesty's pleasure. What gave Whitehall the courage to act was the discovery in Natal of a method for excluding all "undesirables" without overtly infringing the imperial philosophy of equality before the law.

The Natal Act of 1897 required an education test of all persons wishing to enter the colony. It was thus technically nonracial; in practice Europeans could pass the examination and colored persons were found wanting. The Governor of Natal, Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson clearly stated to Joseph Chamberlain, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that, "the main object of the proposed law is to prevent Natal from being flooded by undesirable Immigrants from India."³³ The latter nevertheless blandly informed the British Indians of Natal, "that the Immigration Restriction Act, . . . does not affect British Indians, as such . . ."³⁴ The Secretary of State's real view of the matter was, however, reflected in a memorandum sent by the Colonial Office to the India Office:

Some form of legislation in restriction of Indian Immigration was inevitable in Natal; and the Secretary of State was of opinion that it was desirable that a law should be passed in that colony in a form which was not open to the objection that it persecuted persons of a particular colour.³⁵

The British government found itself in a most difficult position. It had the right to disallow all legislation passed by British colonies, regardless of their state of constitutional development, but, in practice, after a colony attained responsible government, the Colonial Office only interfered in matters bearing imperial implications. Despite an official dogma dedicated to the equality of all British subjects, regardless of race, the British government found itself hard put to interfere with the will of a white colonial government discriminating against nonwhites, be they aliens or British subjects. Yet, any attack on a particular group of the Queen's subjects by other members of the British family struck at the very roots of the philosophical justification for empire. The situation was one fraught with ambivalence, for it

must have been difficult for Englishmen in the nineteenth century, not the most tolerant of ages, to feel in their hearts that Asians and Africans were really the equals of white men.

When the prime ministers of the self-governing colonies assembled in London, in 1897, to celebrate Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee, Chamberlain manifested this ambivalence when he persuasively espoused the Natal formula:

. . . We quite sympathize with the determination of the white inhabitants of these colonies which are in comparatively close proximity to millions and hundreds of millions of Asiatics that there shall not be an influx of people alien in civilisation, alien in religion, alien in customs, whose influx, moreover, would most seriously interfere with the legitimate rights of the existing labour population. An immigration of that kind must, I quite understand, in the interests of the Colonies, be prevented at all hazards, and we shall not offer any opposition to the proposals intended with that object, but we ask you also to bear in mind the traditions of the Empire, which makes no distinction in favour of, or against race or colour; and to exclude by reason of their colour or by reason of their race, all Her Majesty's Indian subjects, or even all Asiatics, would be an act so offensive to those peoples that it would be most painful, I am quite certain, to Her Majesty to have to sanction it.

. . . What I venture to think you have to deal with is the character of the immigration. It is not because a man is of a different colour from ourselves that he is necessarily an undesirable immigrant, but it is because he is dirty, or he is immoral, or he is a pauper, or he has some other objection which can be defined in an Act of Parliament, and by which the exclusion can be managed with regard to all those whom you really desire to exclude . . . the colony of Natal has arrived at an arrangement which is absolutely satisfactory to them . . . which they believe will give them

all that they want and to which the objection I have taken does not apply, and which does not come into conflict with this sentiment, which I am sure you share with us; and I hope, therefore, that during your visit it may be possible for us to arrange a form of words which will avoid hurting the feelings of Her Majesty's subjects, while at the same time it would amply protect the Australian Colonies against any invasion of the class to which they would justly object³⁶

Most of the prime ministers immediately understood Chamberlain's message. Unwanted immigrants could be excluded from the Australian colonies, provided only the spirit and not the letter of the imperial catechism were breached. Article Three of the New South Wales Immigration Restriction Act of 1897 thus stipulated:

The immigration into New South Wales, by land or sea, of any person of the class defined in the following subsection hereinafter called "prohibited immigrant," is prohibited, namely—Any person who, when asked to do so by an officer appointed under this Act, shall fail to write out in his own handwriting in some European language, and sign an application to the Colonial Secretary in the form set out in Schedule B of this Act, or in a form of a similar purport proclaimed from time to time by the Governor in substitution of the form set out in such schedule.

Some colonies, such as Western Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand followed the same course of action, while the others for one reason or another awaited the establishment of an Australian union when the whole question would be taken out of their hands.

The Commonwealth of Australia came into existence in 1901. From the first its government and legislature were determined to create as far as possible the legal framework for a truly "White Australia." In part the motivation was purely racial, in part it was the consequence of a genuine fear of inundation by foreign neighbors. Sir Henry Parkes thought that the Japanese:

. . . have shown by the extent to which they have introduced improvements in the recent war how superior they are to their antagonists, the Chinese; but this war will close . . . It will close with the certainty that similar improvements . . . will be introduced into China, and we should never forget the wise thing said by the first Napoleon, that if you once taught the Chinese the art of English ship-building and the art of English war, they would be able to conquer the world . . . Well this war, now closing, will open a new page of human history. These two great populations will never be the same as known in the past; and we have now got to realise our position as one people inhabiting these fair lands of Australia³⁷

Be that as it may, Act 12 of 1901 concerned itself with the postal and telegraphic services of the Commonwealth and Article 16 stipulated: "No contract or arrangement for the carriage of mails shall be entered into on behalf of the Commonwealth unless it contains a condition that only white labour shall be employed in such carriage" But without doubt the two most important acts passed in the first year of Commonwealth were Act 16, which concerned itself with the repatriation of Pacific Islanders, and Act 17, the Immigration Restriction Act, which was not actually allowed until July 1902. These acts constituted the main supports of the White Australia Policy. The first was intended to remove virtually all the 9,000 South Sea Islanders on the continent and the second to prevent the further immigration of any nonwhites, be they British subjects or aliens. Act 16 stipulated that no "Kanakas" would be permitted to remain in Australia after December 31, 1906, save those few who had arrived before September 1, 1879. Its passage caused a wave of resentment to sweep tplanting community of Queensland. Despite heavy pressure, the Prime Minister, Sir Edmund Barton, stood firm. By 1906, however, the islanders had so diminished in numbers that Act 22 of 1906 greatly increased the opportunity for exemption from the workings of the principal act.

Things were not so simple in regard to the Immigration Restriction Act. It was to be the keystone of the White Australia Policy, and it was

based on the Natal formula. Its heart was section 3 (a) which defined as a prohibited immigrant: "Any person who when asked to do so by an officer fails to write out at dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in an European language directed by the officer" Despite the existence of several classes of exemption, such as members of the king's regular land and sea forces, wives and children under 18 of legal immigrants or residents, and diplomats; there was no special protection for British subjects.

Although the Colonial Office was on the whole satisfied with the Immigration Restriction Act, it caused the Foreign Office grave embarrassment. The Japanese particularly objected to the racial bias in the administration of Act 17. As their power grew and their status among the nations of the world rose constantly higher, the Japanese refused to countenance any affront to their nation or their race. H. Eitaki, the Japanese Consul General addressed Barton on his government's behalf: "The Japanese belong to an Empire whose standard of civilisation 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 reproach, which is hardly warranted by the fact of the shade of the national complexion."³⁸ Eitaki would not have objected to an examination in English which would have subjected all foreigners to a similar disability, but "any European language" discriminated against non-Europeans. Eitaki did not see why Japanese were not the equals of Russians, Greeks, Turks, Poles, Norwegians, Austrians, and Portuguese. He either wanted immigrants examined in their own language or have the words "or Japanese" added after "any European language."³⁹ The Japanese did not so much object to actually being excluded from Australia as they were determined that the letter of any particular law be nondiscriminatory. By stipulating a European language for the dictation test, the Immigration Restriction Act favored Europeans over Japanese. It was a technicality but an important one for the *amour propre* of the newly emergent Japan.

And, of course, the government of Australia made no pretense as to how the act was to be administered. In debate, Prime Minister Barton was at pains to point out: "If a Swede were asked to

write a passage at dictation, I should not dream of instructing the officer to subject the immigrant to a test in Italian. That would be unfair, and is not what this House has in its mind in pressing this legislation . . . Honourable members may rely upon it that this Act will not be worked unfairly or oppressively in regard to those whom it is not our common desire to exclude, but that every care will be taken to prevent its being defeated by those whom we desire to keep out"⁴⁰ Atlee Hunt, the Secretary to the Department of External Affairs and the officer charged with the operation of the Immigration Act, made his government's policy perfectly clear when he wrote the collector of customs at Freemantle: "It is not desirable that [coloured] persons should be allowed to pass the test and before putting it to anyone the Officer should be satisfied that he will fail. If he is considered likely to pass the test if put in English, it should be applied in some other language of which he is ignorant."⁴¹ In a letter to a certain J.A. Nuno da Cunha, Hunt wrote: "With regard to the Dictation Test under the Immigration Restriction Acts it may be mentioned that its purpose is to prevent the influx into Australia of coloured persons. It has never yet been applied to a white person"⁴²

While the Japanese mounted their attacks on the Immigration Restriction Act, the Commonwealth government continued to weave its web of anticolored legislation. Acts of 1902, 1903, and 1905 provided bounties for white-grown sugar and so changed the labor picture that it was possible to pass the liberalized South Sea Islander Act in 1906. The naturalization act of 1903 denied naturalization to natives of Asia, Africa, and the Pacific Islands. At the same time, Atlee Hunt, the chief guardian of White Australia, relentlessly urged his subordinates to ever greater levels of efficiency. In the second year of the operation of the Immigration Restriction Act, he wrote the collector of customs at Brisbane:

. . . In any case where enquiries indicate that a coloured person seeking admission to the Commonwealth intends to remain, the test, if administered in English, should be put in such a form and with such stringency as to place its sufficiency beyond doubt. Officers are, of course, free

to select a passage from any other European language, and the services of your Interpreter, if necessary, may be employed for dictation of the passage in the tongue selected⁴³

Still, continued pressure from Japan and from the British Foreign Office was taking its toll and by 1905, the Australian government decided to amend the Immigration Restriction Act. It did so, however, in a way which strengthened its position vis-à-vis the White Australia Policy, yet effectively disarmed its critics. Act 17 of 1905 rescinded section 3 (m) of the principal bill which had permitted the entry of the wives and minor children of immigrants. Section 8 of the amending measure allowed the Commonwealth government to conclude agreements with other countries under which their nationals were exempted from the dictation test. The new bill facilitated temporary departure and subsequent return of Australian residents who might otherwise be prohibited immigrants. But most significantly, section 3 of Act 17 amended section 3 (a) of the principal act by substituting the words "in any prescribed language" for "any European language." The Japanese who had always contended that Act 17 of 1901 by stipulating a European language for the literacy test had discriminated against Japanese, now found the ground neatly cut from under them; for the act, in fact, gave the immigration officers even more latitude and a greater choice of weapons to use against colored immigrants.

The Colonial Office, however, was delighted:

The important point of this Bill is that it substitutes for the test in a European language the test in a "prescribed" language: i.e. in appearance at least it definitely removed any trace of discrimination between Asiatics (Japanese) and Europeans.

There is no reason why we should object: on the contrary, there is every reason why we should applaud this amendment. The practical effect as far as actual immigration is concerned is nil—since everything depends on the way in which the Act is administered: but the Act itself will now contain nothing which can offend the Japanese except niceties.⁴⁴

Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, for his part, was full of bonhomie. He saw the new measure as a means of making his Japanese and Hindu fellow-subjects happy. Besides, the Japanese were, "allies of the Empire to which we belong . . . [and] we can convey to them our appreciation of their qualities, and, while excluding permanent settlers from among them, inflict no sense of offense"⁴⁵ When a member of the House misunderstood the purpose of the amending bill, Deakin was quick to reassure him, "that the object of applying the language test, is not to allow persons to enter the Commonwealth, but to keep them out"⁴⁶

The Japanese continued to protest the Immigration Restriction Acts, but all three protagonists, the Australian, British, and Japanese governments, knew that the battle had really been lost. "I am tempted," a Japanese visitor to Australia wrote in frustration, "... to point out that already your cry of 'racial purity' is farcical. Practically every country in the world has contributed to your population! You fall back on the objection of 'colour'—and forget that many Chinese and Japanese are whiter skinned than the average Australian."⁴⁷ But despite the victory represented by Act 17 of 1905, Australian attitudes remained constant. Fear of the "Mongolian" hordes poised to descend on the continent continued to preoccupy Australians. In 1909, both a play by F.R.C. Hopkins, *Reaping the Whirlwind*, and a novel by C.H. Kirness, *The Australian Crisis*, dealt with this theme. The concluding lines of the latter work ran as follows:

... In this struggle the still larger issue is bound up with whether the White or Yellow Race shall gain final supremacy. Christian civilisation cannot afford the loss of this continent. *For Australia is the precious front buckle in the White girdle of power and progress encircling the globe.*

It might be worthwhile to point out that in the development of its racial policy, Australia felt itself greatly educated and inspired by the American example. The unfortunate result of having so many Negroes in the United States of America received frequent reference (although the blame was placed more on Britain than the United States). A short-lived journal entitled *White Australia* had on the cover of its maiden issue, August 8, 1908, a

large colored cartoon showing an Indian and a Chinese with their heads stuck through a gate labeled Northern Territory. The cartoon was titled, "Teddy's Warning" and in a field on the other side of the gate Teddy addressed a robust bearded figure called "White Australia." President Roosevelt: "Mind that back gate, my boy, you might have trouble!" White Australia: "All right Teddy! I haven't forgotten your warning." The next issue showed Uncle Sam and Lady Australia together bemoaning the lack of sufficient whites and the consequent black threat to the Northern Territory. The front of each issue was emblazoned with United States, British, and Australian flags.

From the first Australia wanted to be British and to encourage only British settlers to venture to the continent. In the minds of many, *Nigger* really did begin at Calais. Sir Edmund Barton asserted: "... that we do not want a man who can only speak Austrian, Italian or any other language that is not the English language... The English language is our language..."⁴⁸ An article in *Nineteenth Century*, put it more bluntly:

... Is it not clear beyond dispute that the continual flow of aliens, who teach us nothing, who bring no wealth nor spending power into the country, cannot speak our language, who have no conception of British ideals, who turn whole districts into foreign quarters, whose view of life is utterly different from ours, who debase the condition of existence wherever they go, and who thrive by underselling the labor of the native-born—is it not clear that this continual inflow already hampers us in the great fight we have to wage against ignorance and inefficiency with all their hateful brood....

It was the "British race" that had to be propagated in Australia. Even northern Europeans lacked the basic virtues so abundant in natives of the British Isles.

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It is all too easy to judge the past through the eyes of the present. The nineteenth century was not the most tolerant of ages. Discrimination of all sorts—be it racial, national, economic or class—was

almost universally practiced. What Philip Mason terms "patterns of dominance" had been established by all European nations wherever they ruled overseas. Germans, Belgians, French, Portuguese, Italians, Spaniards, and Dutch slaughtered indigenous populations whenever it suited their convenience. Those nations without colonies managed to indulge the same dark art in a different context, by practicing it on elements of their own domestic populations.

In focusing on Australia in this study, it was done with the knowledge that she was not alone in denying the brotherhood of all men and that her history in many ways is more typical than exceptional, if not of a European world view, certainly of an Anglo-Saxon one. What applied in Australia was also true of all the British colonies of white settlement, the United States and, finally, Great Britain herself.

Many of us grew up with the conviction that Britain, if not the birthplace of all liberal ideas, was, with the lands she spawned, at least where they flowered the most perfectly. The placing of questions, such as the crusade for a White Australia, under the historian's microscope can make us sensitive to the large number of skeletons in our collective cupboard.

To some extent, historic Australian attitudes still persist. Every year Australia expends a great deal of time, effort, and money to induce British migrants to venture "Down Under." Nevertheless, it is open to question whether Australians really like their British cousins, and certainly a considerable proportion of the British migrants who venture to Australia as assisted immigrants return home. The Australians complain that they are totally unwilling to adjust and the British migrants claim that Australians think they are all "Pommie Bastards" and refuse to accept them.

Be that as it may, Australia has enjoyed a massive transfusion in terms of immigration since World War II. Many of the new arrivals have not been British, and the addition of Greeks, Italians, and Yugoslavs, etc., to the Australian population is producing a richer culture and certainly has helped color the rather bleak gastronomic landscape. Many migrants, however, claim to have been induced to immigrate under false pretenses. A

debate on the subject has raged for some time. Some Australians continue to want only British immigrants. Others would accept any kind of white man. Still others would not encourage immigration at all. During June 1970, *The Australian*, without doubt Australia's finest newspaper, ran a series of articles on the immigration question, and letters flooded the paper in response. One of these was rather eloquent in its broken English: "Me Migrant." It read:

... Stop migration to Australia at once. Also stop those blokes overseas handing out nice little booklets. Saying Australia developed country and high standard of living. Makes migrant believe going to something better. Rubbish.

Start tell about higher prices than Europe, inferior goods, non-existent service. Tell bout country everybody but Australian realize is 25 years behind times, bout houses hardly passing for shacks elsewhere, bout Commonwealth Employment Service, help no migrant, just finds lousiest jobs. Good jobs migrant finds himself. If convincing employer him good craftsman. Otherwise no.

Money sounds good. When changed to lira or mark or dinar. Prices for everything but chow, skyhigh. No improvement in living standard. That's why migrants come. Believe funny talk in booklets.

OK for poor migrant. Yugoslav, Greek, maybe Italian, but not for developed migrant. So migrant go back. But Australia have no charterflying so migrant must save long and hard to get back. If wife and children perhaps have to stay on. But department's nice return figures not so nice if charterflying here. Some say on purpose.

... Aussie nice people, very nice to migrant. Cannot understand how Aussies can stand all complaining migrants. Perhaps because Aussie almost never can afford to go overseas himself. Like fairy tales bout rest of world. Believes pipe dream bout Australia he taught in schools. That's why

Australia such nice quiet place. Very quiet. Everybody believes pipe dream.

But migrant does not. So stop giving nice booklets to developed people in U.S. and Europe. Give to poor people. May believe the dream. May become happy citizens. Will not cause trouble on quiet continent. That solve Aussie problem.

As far as the "White Australia" policy is concerned today, the administration of the immigration restriction laws has been altered so that families may be united and persons with appropriate qualifications can enter the country, regardless of color. Indian Ph.D.'s welcome! But this change was only possible because the White Australia policy had clearly been a success and was made with the implicit understanding that in case of need old methods would be restored. Papuans are still not allowed to enter Australia except under exceptional circumstances, and they and the Aborigines are very definitely second class citizens on the order of the American Indians. An Indian scholar of note, holder of a chair at a major Australian university and a long time resident of the Commonwealth, was heard to remark that he could never contemplate remaining in Australia permanently. Not that he was treated unkindly or met direct prejudice; it was just that he was sick of people asking him how long he was planning to visit the continent (as he must obviously be a transient). He had come to realize, moreover, that it would be considered quite improper for him ever to comment negatively about Australia. In other words, he felt he was there merely on sufferance and would never really be accepted as an Australian.

Recently a Brisbane motel was turned into a hostel for Aborigines; the complaints from local inhabitants sounded much like contemporary Britain or the United States. Yet, Australians consider themselves liberal (as do most Americans). On June 4, 1970, an article by Henry Mayer in *The Australian* asserted:

... A majority of Americans backed the National Guard against four Kent University students who were shot. The chances are that our local Agnews are right: they and their views have the support of our silent majority.

Some as yet unpublished work by Dr. John Berry, of Queens University, Ontario, shows that Australians as individuals are much more racist than Canadians. Berry, who was here some time ago, debunks the notion that it's just the nasty illiberal Government which is authoritarian: it's that seemingly decent bloke working right next to you.

Our latest Gallup poll shows that a 2-1 majority wants Australia to recognise the Government of Rhodesia.

As in both Britain and the United States, the average working man, regardless of how far left his official politics are, is racist. After all, it was always the Australian Labor Party which most stoutly advocated the White Australia Policy. Also following the American example, Australia did a remarkably efficient job of destroying its indigenous inhabitants.

Has Australia and have Australians greatly changed either their attitudes or policies towards the colored peoples of the earth? In a major sense the answer must be yes. Since World War II Australia has welcomed thousands of nonwhite students to its shores. It has been an active participant in the Columbo Plan, and the liberal intelligentsia did become ever more vocal in its denunciation of the White Australia Policy. The veil of decency has certainly been drawn over the proceedings with alterations in the administration of the immigration acts. Have any fundamental changes in attitude occurred? Only a crisis, now unlikely, could effectively answer this question.

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NOTES

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