

AUSTRALIAN EUGENICS FROM 1900 TO 1961

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In the first half of the 20th century, colonialism spread the eugenic movement to every inhabited continent. When eugenic ideology declined in the wake of World War II, only the American and German eugenics movements were studied and publicized extensively - the attitudes and policies of countries like Australia were forgotten or even actively buried. This thesis delves into how the eugenics movement specifically manifested in Australia, from who advocated for it to what kind of legislation was proposed, and examines why Australian eugenics presented differently from Britain and other British colonies

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Outline

Skeletons in the Closet

The University of Melbourne's Richard Berry School of Mathematics had been a source of controversy for aboriginal students, faculty, and their allies for decades. While the math taught there is likely innocuous, the building's namesake was one of the most vociferous advocates of eugenics in Australian history. Dr. Richard J. Berry established the building in 1923 as Australia's first Department of Anatomy.¹ Soon after, he took interest in the anthropometric relationship between head size and intelligence. Berry began collecting skulls and bones for craniometric measures from a variety of sources – some were sourced from museums, some from unclaimed bodies at the coroner's, and some from ancient aboriginal burial sites.² Berry used this research to argue that criminals and the 'feeble-minded' could be identified through routine head measurements and that Aboriginals had, on average, smaller heads than Caucasians, were intellectually inferior, and should be treated as such.³ In the first half of the 20th century, Berry lobbied actively in the Victorian Australian legislature for "sterilisation, segregation, and the lethal chamber," particularly for Aboriginal people, homosexuals, prostitutes, and the poor.⁴

In 2003, the campaign to remove Berry's name from the building was reignited after media outlets reported that over 400 skulls and skeletons, collected by Berry, had just been uncovered from a locked university storeroom. Aboriginal communities expressed anger that many of the bones were ancestral remains that should have been returned years ago. With the issue brought to the public eye, the University of Melbourne officially changed the name of the

¹ Erica Cervini, "It's Time Melbourne Uni Stopped Honouring Eugenicist Richard Berry," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, March 6, 2016.

² Marika Dobbin, "Heart of Darkness: Melbourne University's Racist Professors," *The Age*, November 30, 2015.

³ Erica Cervini, "A Theory Out of the Darkness," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 13, 2011.

⁴ Dobbin, "Heart of Darkness: Melbourne University's Racist Professors."

school to the Peter Hall School of Mathematics in February 2017.⁵ However, the battle is not over. The Frank Tate Learning Center, Wilfred Agar lecture room, and Baldwin Spencer are on the short lists of building that could warrant a name change due to their involvement in eugenics.

The publicity surrounding this discovery was probably the first time many Melbourne residents had ever heard of Berry's deep and longstanding association with eugenics, in no small part because many Australians were unaware Australia ever had a eugenics movement. When the conclusion of World War II revealed the eugenic practices of Nazi Germany, the global eugenics movement quickly dissipated as former leaders quietly curtailed their support. And though many prominent scientists and government officials had publically advocated for eugenics, mentions of these involvements was inconspicuously left out of their official biographies. Only the most organized and extensive eugenics movements – those of Britain, the United States, and Nazi Germany – were documented, researched, and publicized. The movement was nearly totally scrubbed from Australian history.

The Purpose of this Thesis

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how its unique origins as an isolated convict colony influenced the Australian eugenics movement in the first half of the twentieth century. Between 1905 and 1930, eugenics movements developed in more than 20 countries.⁶ At its peak, eugenics found dedicated adherents on every inhabited continent.⁷ However, these eugenics movements were often poorly recorded, largely because of the aforementioned very unsavory Nazi connection. For decades, the Australian eugenics movement was literally unheard of. It

⁵ Marika Dobbin-Thomas, "Melbourne University Bows to Pressure, Removes Racist Professor's Name from Campus," *The Age*, March 21, 2017.

⁶ Nicholas Baker, "Eugenics and Racial Hygiene: The Connections between the United States and Germany" (Western Oregon University, 2016). 32.

⁷ Baker.

wasn't until 1980 that Carol Bacchi reintroduced Australian eugenics into the national history with her article "The Nature-Nurture Debate in Australia, 1900-1914".⁸ Bacchi's article inspired a handful of historians to seek new primary sources about the subject, but new information is slow to surface and is often hidden in decades worth of government gazette archives and stacks of personal correspondence. In compiling all of the current segmented research on Australia's eugenic movement, finding new primary sources from the Australian TROVE archives, and comparing how Australia enacted, or failed to enact, certain eugenic policies seen in Britain, this thesis aims to present one of the first comprehensive histories of Australian eugenics and advance some new arguments for why Australian eugenics diverged from its British progenitor.⁹

In Chapter 2, I will cover the history of eugenics focusing on the development of eugenics into a scientific field by Sir Francis Galton and on variations in eugenic theory. The initial hesitation Galton experienced highlights the timeliness of eugenics as a science that gained popularity on the coattails of the rediscovery of Mendelian inheritance. The chapter also clarifies the role that Lamarckian inheritance played in creating the mainline and reform divisions within eugenics. Quick definitions of positive eugenics, negative eugenics, racial degeneracy, and hybrid vigor expound upon how so much variation could exist in a single Eugenics movement.

Chapter 3 will focus on the unique settlement of Australia as a convict colony for the British. Throughout this chapter, I will argue that penal transportation led to a heightened commitment to the principle of habeas corpus amongst settlers, an increased influence of the

⁸ Ross Jones, "The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918–1939," *Australian Historical Studies* 29, no. 113 (1999): 319–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314619908596105>. 319.

⁹ TROVE is a project by the National Library of Australia to digitize archives across Australia.

Catholic Church, and national nativism stemming from insecurities about the fitness of the Australian stock.

In Chapter 4, I will look at how Australia's geography affected its eugenic development. I will first examine Australia's fear of an Asian invasion due to its proximity to Asia and distance from Britain's protection will be explored. Next, I will cover Australian settlers' desire for representative government and how this led to an increase in women's participation in the Australian eugenics movement. Finally, I will discuss how Australia's eugenics societies developed as distant branches of British societies and how Sydney and Melbourne's isolation allowed very different genetic ideologies to develop.

Chapter 5 marks the shift from Australia's specific eugenic pressures into Australia's specific eugenics practices. In this chapter, the history of higher education in Australia and its relationship to eugenics is discussed. Special attention is given to Frank Tate, Victoria's first Director of Education, and how his eugenic beliefs influenced the development of trade schools throughout Victoria. Finally, Victoria and NSW's approaches to higher education are compared to show how one eugenicist changed a state's entire educational system.

Chapter 6 explains Australia's eugenic response to 'mental deficiency' through a detailed examination of its proposed and implemented legislation across the continent. This chapter also discusses the state and national surveys of mental defectiveness that were seen as legitimizing eugenicists' concern about this subject. This chapter also explores how the Catholic Church and the Australian commitment to the principles of habeas corpus were obstacles in the successful implementation of segregation and sterilization measures.

In Chapter 7, I move to the periphery of Australia's eugenics movement. This chapter focuses on Australia's Aboriginal people and the child removal policy. Like eugenics, the policy

of child removal was forgotten or simply glossed over for decades. While the policy itself contradicts many of the basic tenets of eugenics, eugenics was still used to justify certain aspects of the policy during the early years of its implementation. The child removal policy and the resultant 'Stolen Generations' were what originally interested me in the topic of Australian eugenics and serve as an excellent case study of how eugenics could be used as a 'scientific supplement' to almost any policy.

Finally, in Chapter 8 I will provide a conclusion to the thesis that synthesizes the history and importance of the Australian eugenics movement discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, the unique eugenic pressures identified in Chapter 3 and 4, and the actual policy implementation discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 7 to form a more complete picture of the Australian eugenics movement.

Chapter 2: The History of Eugenics

The invention of eugenics by Sir Francis Galton

The term eugenics was first coined by Sir Francis Galton (the cousin of Charles Darwin, of *Origin of Species* fame) in his 1883 book *Inquiries into Human Faculty and Its Development*.

¹⁰ Galton derived the word from the Greek *eugenes*, where *eu* means ‘good or well’ and *genes* means ‘stock and defined eugenics broadly as “the study of the Agencies under social control, that improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations either physically or mentally.”¹¹

Before he began his eugenic advocacy, Sir Francis Galton had discussed the heredity of non-physical traits at length in his book *Hereditary Genius* (1869), where he attempted to show that ‘character’ and ‘talent’ were inherited.¹² In his book, he studied the families of prominent male statesmen and judges and determined that close family members of these individuals were more likely to be equally prominent than those more distantly related. Through this research, he independently derived the mathematical concept of the normal distribution¹³ Galton’s further research, touching on everything from the heredity of pigeon speeds to forearm length and height ratios, would lead to his theorizing of the statistical concept of regression and the rediscovery of the coefficient of correlation.¹⁴ Galton turned to Cambridge mathematician Karl Pearson to work out the technical details, effectively developing statistics as an independent discipline.¹⁵ The relationship with Pearson would be a fruitful one as Pearson became a powerful advocate for eugenics. The collaboration between Galton and Pearson to develop novel statistical analyses

¹⁰ James A Field, “The Progress of Eugenics,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 26, no. 1 (1911): 1–67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1884524>. 16.

¹¹ Field. 23.

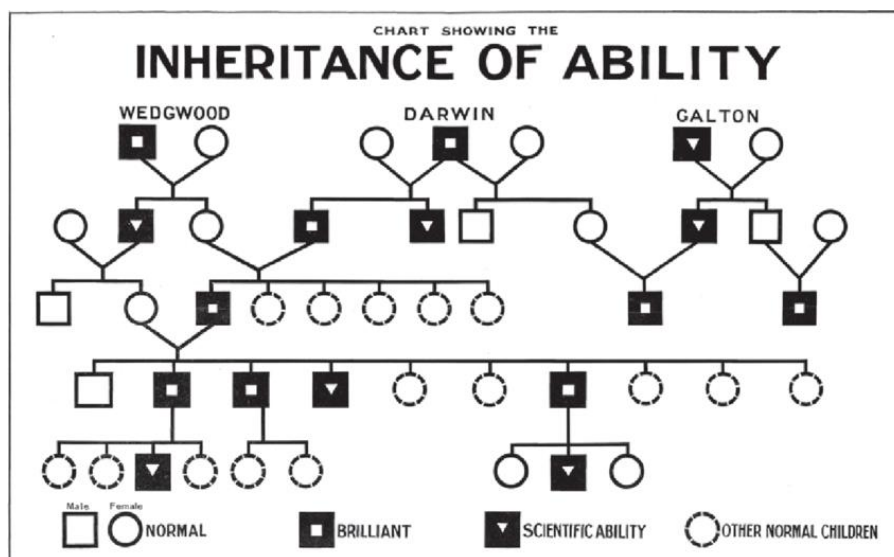
¹²Nicholas Wright Gillham, “Galton, Francis,” in *Ethics, Science, Technology, and Engineering*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Farmington Hills: Macmillan Reference USA, 2015), 322–23.

¹³Gillham.

¹⁴ Brian E. Clauser, “The Life and Labors of Francis Galton: A Review of Four Recent Books About the Father of Behavioral Statistics” 4, no. 32 (2007): 440–44.

¹⁵Clauser.

gave the eugenic movement the scientific basis it needed to gain powerful adherents in science and politics.



Poster commissioned by the English Eugenics Education Society and designed by Philip Benson's London advertising agency in 1926. Amusingly, the inventor of eugenics was not considered as "brilliant" as his two well-known cousins.¹⁶

In addition to developing the statistical methods that made eugenics a scientific field, Galton also did lots of research in anthropometrics, or measurement of the body's shape, size, and sensory acuity. His research in this field led to his introduction of the questionnaire as a form of scientific data collection and eugenic record keeping. Charles Davenport, the driver of the eugenics movement in the United States, would go on to use extensively questionnaires in this motif to obtain data for the Eugenics Records Office.¹⁷ And anthropometrics would be taken up by Berry, et al as convenient shorthand for recording mental acuity and bodily fitness.

¹⁶ "Chart Showing Inheritance of Ability, Eugenics Education Society: 1926 by Benson's Advertising Agency at Museum of London" (London: Philip Benson's Advertising Agency, 1926).

¹⁷ Clauser, "The Life and Labors of Francis Galton: A Review of Four Recent Books About the Father of Behavioral Statistics."

Initial Reception to Eugenics

Galton, drawing his readings of Plato's dialogues, and stimulated by the writings of Thomas Malthus, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer, had advocated for eugenics as early as 1865. In his book *Hereditary Genius* (1883) Galton suggested new policies to remedy his dysgenic observations that those who married young produced larger families and that those of low ability would marry earlier.¹⁸ But his book was not widely read, and his wife Louisa wrote in her diary, "Frank's book not well received, but liked by Darwin and men of note."¹⁹

Acutely aware of his lukewarm reception, Galton waited until 1901, when he had the opportunity to speak at the *Huxley Lecture* at the Royal Anthropological Institute, to relaunch his plan for eugenics.²⁰ At this point, Gregor Mendel's laws of heredity, originally published in 1865, had been rediscovered, and the Boer War was eliciting national panic about pan-Imperial British racial health. Galton's speech was well-received, and in 1904 Galton gave another, more viral talk, entitled *Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims*, which quickly gained high-profile admirers like George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, Theodore Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Margaret Sanger.²¹

Eugenics grew quickly, in step with its fast-paced new century, and it grew more radical. When eugenics was first presented, Mendelian genetics had just recently been rediscovered. Many people had a difficult time believing that human heredity could be entirely based upon genetics. Lamarckian inheritance (which explained evolution and natural selection by postulating that organisms pass on characteristics acquired throughout their lifetime) still held sway with

¹⁸ "Later Life," Galton Institute, 2017, <http://www.galtoninstitute.org.uk/sir-francis-galton/eugenics-and-final-years/>.

¹⁹ N W Gillham, *A Life of Sir Francis Galton: From African Exploration to the Birth of Eugenics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). 169.

²⁰ "Later Life."

²¹ Alexander Sanger, "Eugenics, Race, and Margaret Sanger Revisited: Reproductive Freedom for All?," *Hypatia* 22, no. 2 (2007): 210–17.

many prominent scientists, including Charles Darwin.²² With so many unwilling to relinquish their Lamarckian beliefs, social programs that aggressively encouraged selective breeding did not receive much support.²³ So the popularity of Mendelian genetics was a kind of limiting resource for eugenics support. Conversion to the eugenics cause required first that one acquire the belief in its underlying genetic premises.

Initially, interventions were crude variations on the theme of segregating out the unfit. If the unfit could be institutionalized throughout their reproductive years, deleterious genes could not be passed on to the next generation.²⁴ But institutionalization proved to be a costly endeavor, and sterilization became a popular alternative in the face of the great depression. By 1940, “sterilization laws had been passed by thirty American states, three Canadian provinces, a Swiss canton, Germany, Estonia, all of the Scandinavian and most of the Eastern European countries, Cuba, Turkey and Japan.”²⁵

Variations within Eugenics

The exuberance of eugenics proponents precluded the development of a single, cohesive eugenic theory. The definition of eugenics delineated the end, but left the means up to interpretation. To understand how diverse eugenic policies could be, it is important to understand four major dichotomies in eugenic thought. First, there was the division of eugenics in positive and negative eugenics. Galton was fascinated by the apparent higher incidences of genius in certain families. He collected data about these families and used statistical analysis to discuss

²²Diane B Paul, “Darwin, Social Darwinism and Eugenics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Darwin*, ed. Gregory Radick and Jonathan Hodge, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 214–39, <https://doi.org/DOI: 10.1017/CCOL0521771978.010>. 229.

²³ Paul. 229.

²⁴ Paul. 230.

²⁵ Paul. 230.

heritability of intelligence in his book *Hereditary Genius* (1869).²⁶ Galton interpreted his data as demonstrating that encouraging those with above average intelligences to reproduce could increase an entire population's intelligence. This was the germinal seed for positive eugenics strategies, which focused on encouraging additional reproduction by those deemed fit. Galton is often referenced to as a generally more positive eugenicist because of this work, yet many of his less popular and more radical early papers advocated for severe negative eugenic policies, and he vocalized his support for negative eugenics throughout his lifetime.²⁷

His American contemporary, Richard Dugdale, studied the inheritance of the Juke family, a family with noticeably elevated instances of pauperism, insanity, and alcoholism²⁸. While Galton focused on familial intelligence, Dugdale took interest in undesirable traits, and can be said to be the forefather of negative eugenics, which focused on discouraging the reproduction of those deemed unfit. Unfortunately, Dugdale's study was often cited as supporting "nature" based inheritance; his "nurture" based solutions to the heredity he documented in the Juke's pedigree were largely ignored.²⁹

Negative eugenics generally proved to give itself over more easily to brutal implementations than did positive eugenics. This comports with our present-day intuitions, which regard positive eugenics as more a field of personal choice than coercion. Yet there were many eugenicists who advocated for voluntary negative eugenics. In fact, the Institute of Family Relations, a eugenic organization founded by radical feminist Marion Piddington after her

²⁶ C Dyrbye, "Galton Publishes Hereditary Genius," The Eugenics Archive, accessed December 11, 2017, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/tree/535eebbb7095aa0000000225>.

²⁷ "Later Life."

²⁸ R Wilson, "Eugenic Family Studies," The Eugenics Archive, 2014, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/tree/535eebbb7095aa0000000225>.

²⁹ Wilson.

resignation from the Racial Hygiene Association, oversaw the very first voluntary sterilization in Australia.³⁰

A second division, between mainline and reform eugenicists, was largely temporal. Mainline eugenics was the dominant way of thinking in the early years of the eugenics movement, and was premised somewhat inconsistently on both Lamarckian inheritance assumptions, where acquired traits were passed onto offspring, and basic biological inheritance.³¹ Mainline eugenics often overstated the effects of nature over those of nurture, and stressed the necessities of preventing those of “inferior genetic stock” from reproducing. The theory’s habit of opportunistically drawing on principles Lamarckian inheritance would help it justify eugenic advocacy for temperance and for the prevention of venereal disease. Finally, mainline eugenics dogma emphasized implementing negative eugenics for those classed as feeble-minded and developing theories of racial eugenics.³²

When advancements in the study of human genetics began to upend and complicate earlier theories that had postulated simple mechanisms of inheritance, many eugenicists were forced into a softer “reform” eugenics, that focused on voluntary eugenics and public health and education.³³ Daniel Kevles discusses this shift in the U.S. and Britain following the end of World War I, and there is some evidence of a similar trend in Australia. He proposes that reform eugenics became popular as a reaction against the class biases of mainline genetics, and a desire to see the integration of eugenic thought with advances in genetic science. This form of eugenics continued to be strongly supported, until backlash against Nazi eugenics forced many of its most

³⁰ Diana H Wyndham, “Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia 1910s TO 1930s” (The University of Sydney, 1996). 90.

³¹ D J Kevles, *In the Name of Eugenics: Genetics and the Uses of Human Heredity*, ISSR Library (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). 88.

³² *ibid.*

³³ Kevles. 164-174.

prominent theorists to renounce eugenics and scrub mentions of the movement from their biographies and obituaries.

Further complicating things, two dominant schools of racial eugenics theory emerged within mainline eugenics in the first half of the twentieth century: the theory of racial degeneracy and that of hybrid vigor. The former held that genetic mixing between two races would result in inferior offspring.³⁴ Contrariwise, the theory of hybrid vigor held that miscegenation produced offspring in whom favorable traits from both races would endure. This theory was initially developed under the moniker, “racial hybridity” by an English geographer named Griffith Taylor who was the Commonwealth’s first official Australian geographer.³⁵

In Australia, both these theories held sway when it came to interbreeding between the white colonists and Aboriginal people. The theory of racial degeneracy was very active in the implementation of anti-miscegenation laws that legally prevented “full-blooded” Aborigines and male “half-castes” from marrying white Australians because such marriages were feared to have produced genetically inferior offspring. Where anti-miscegenation laws did not apply to female half-castes marrying white Australians, the theory of racial degeneracy was ignored on the assumption that the positive traits of the white male would overpower the unfavorable traits of the half-caste.

Politicians alternately used the theory of hybrid vigor to justify their decision, as it suited them. Cecil Cook, for example, while Chief Protector of Aborigines for the Northern Territory, argued once that “the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value — intelligence, stamina, resource, high resistance to the influence of tropical environment and the

³⁴ Stephen Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Philippa Levine and Alison Bashford (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 2010), 243–57.

³⁵ Garton. 248.

character of pigmentation, which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.”³⁶ In general, mainline racial eugenics was invoked behind eradication policies, and reform eugenics supported assimilation policies, though oftentimes these policies were the exact same programs under different names. These programs are discussed at length in Chapter 8.

³⁶ McGregor, Russell. "‘Breed out the Colour’ or the Importance of Being White." *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 120 (2002): 298.

Chapter 3: Eugenic Pressures from Penal Transportation

The History of Convict Transportation

Australia's eugenics movement was brief, disorganized, and heavily influenced by Australia's colonial past. Its very method of settlement, the transportation of tens of thousands of convicts, raised questions of the long-term fitness of the colony long before eugenics became a formal movement. The convicts also brought with them a well-founded commitment to the principle of habeas corpus that would limit many of the possible extremes of negative eugenics. Irish convicts brought with them eugenics' most universal enemy, the Catholic Church.

The first observations of Australia by Europeans were recorded in 1606 when the Dutch sailed along the western coastline of Australia.³⁷ Rumors of a *Terra Australis Incognita*, "unknown southern land," filled with giants (*gigantes*), and rich in gold, enticed The Dutch East India Company in their search for new lands to secure resources and establish trade.³⁸ After multiple ships scouted this western coastline, the Dutch ultimately found nothing that would indicate that Australia had any of the riches or oddities they had expected and they never established any trading posts on the continent. While Australia was known from 1606, no country began colonizing the area for more than 150 years.

The colonial history of Australia began when English explorer Lieutenant James Cook charted the Australian east coast for the first time in his ship the *Endeavour*.³⁹ Before this, only the western coast, parts of Tasmania, and the northern coast that bordered the Torres Strait had been explored. Cook claimed the east coast for King George III of England on 22 August 1770 at

³⁷Susan Broomhall, "Australians Might Speak Dutch If Not for Strong Emotions," *The Conversation*, November 21, 2013.

³⁸ Broomhall.

³⁹ "European Discovery and the Colonisation of Australia | Australia.gov.au," Australia.gov.au, 2015, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/european-discovery-and-colonisation>.

Possession Island and called the region New South Wales.⁴⁰ Though the Dutch, French, and English had each made direct claims on Australia's land at some point, the English claim was secured 1788 when the first English settlers arrived to hold the land.

The bloated English jails were the chief motivation in undertaking Australian colonization. The population of England, which had held steady between 1700 and 1740, began growing noticeably after 1740, and overcrowding became a major issue in English cities.⁴¹ England also underwent the Industrial Revolution between 1760 and 1840, when unemployment rose as unskilled laborers were replaced by mechanization. Unable to employ the increased number of workers, many people fell into extreme poverty and turned to crime. Both crime and punishment became excessive — with no formal police force, no defense lawyers, and very few trials by jury, individuals were bought by wealthy property owners before wealthy, propertied judges and sentenced to jail.⁴² Crimes as miniscule as stealing a hairbrush, pickpocketing, or stealing two candlesticks resulted in jail.⁴³

The jails became so overcrowded that hulks left over from the Seven Years War were kept in the waterways of Britain and used as makeshift floating prisons: 2,000 of every 6,000 placed on these hulks died, usually from infectious diseases.⁴⁴ Facing overcrowding, punishments became more severe and by the 1770s, the “bloody code” established the death penalty as the punishment for 222 crimes. The majority of these crimes were specific violations of property rights, such as stealing property worth more than a week's wage, cutting down a tree

⁴⁰ “European Discovery and the Colonisation of Australia | Australia.gov.au.”

⁴¹ “Australia's Migration History Timeline,” | NSW Migration Heritage Centre, 2015, <http://www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au/exhibition/objectsthroughtime-history/ott1778/index.html>.

⁴² “Australia's Migration History Timeline.”

⁴³ Steve Thomas, “Crimes of Convicts Transported to Australia,” Convict Records, 2017, <https://convictrecords.com.au/crimes>.

⁴⁴ “Australia's Migration History Timeline.”

in another's orchard, or poaching animals from private estates.⁴⁵ After an outcry that the punishments for these minor crimes was too harsh, penal transportation became an increasingly popular alternative to execution. Officials hoped the system of penal transportation would be a solution to overcrowding, an example of the king's mercy, and an effective deterrent to crime.⁴⁶



A redditor jokes about Australia's founding in 2017.⁴⁷

Once sentenced to transportation, prisoners would be loaded onto ships, along with soldiers, and shipped off to some colony where they would work as indentured servants. Before 1775 Britain sent convicts to its American and West Indian colonies, but the loss in the Revolutionary War meant transportation would cease until a new location could be found.⁴⁸ A few years later, the government decided to settle NSW as a penal colony, and the first

⁴⁵ "Australia's Migration History Timeline."

⁴⁶ "Australia's Migration History Timeline."

⁴⁷ Reddit.com is an online discussion and news board where users are free to share content.

https://www.reddit.com/r/funny/comments/6fdv3/overcrowding_in_british_prisons/

⁴⁸ Hamish Maxwell-Stewart, "Convict Transportation from Britain and Ireland 1615–1870," *History Compass* 8, no. 11 (November 1, 2010): 1221–42, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-0542.2010.00722.x>.

transportation vessels left Britain in 1787. In January 1788, the 11 ships of the First Fleet arrived at Sydney Cove.⁴⁹ While the exact numbers of those that departed and disembarked are unknown, an Australian government website states that “751 convicts and their children disembarked, along with 252 marines and their families.”⁵⁰ Overall estimates of those who arrived ranged from 1,000, to just under 1,500 individuals. Governor Arthur Phillips reported that 1,030 individuals were living in Australia at the first census in 1788, which would not include the 300 or so members of the ship crews that returned to England.⁵¹ Transportation continued until 1868, when the last shipment of convicts arrived in Western Australia. The total number of convicts transported is estimated to be around 162,000 men and women, transported on 806 ships, to sites in Tasmania, Queensland, Victoria, Western Australia, and New South Wales.⁵²

Transportation - Civil Liberties

Today, "the question for scholars of eugenics in Australia and NZ is not whether eugenics thrived as a currency for negotiating some of the great questions of the day — it did — but why it failed to have the influence its proponents hoped."⁵³ One reason it failed to have the same influence observed in the U.S. and Britain was the sheer *number* of transported convicts and their mutual and unwavering commitment to civil liberties. Making up a large proportion of the population, the strong opposition of ex-convicts to arbitrary imprisonment or loss of bodily integrity was set in Australian culture. This commitment came with the hungry desire to have all the rights and writs given to other British citizens.

⁴⁹ “Convicts and the British Colonies in Australia | Australia.gov.au,” Australia.gov, 2016, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/convicts-and-the-british-colonies>.

⁵⁰ “Convicts and the British Colonies in Australia | Australia.gov.au.”

⁵¹ Lachlan Macquarie, “Convictism and Colonization, 1788 TO 1828,” *Journal of the Australian Population Association* 5 (1988): 31–43.

⁵² “Convicts and the British Colonies in Australia | Australia.gov.au.”

⁵³ Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand.” 244.

Take, for example, the commitment to the right of habeas corpus. Habeas corpus was important as a right given to British citizens, but particularly important to indentured convicts. Many of the early habeas corpus cases in Australia arose from a law that forbade workers from quitting without permission from their employer, and the cases in which employees (in this case convicts who had deserted) had been wrongfully detained.⁵⁴ There was also an instance where an Irish political rebel sent to Tasmania was able to successfully argue that the law sending him to Australia did not apply to his case, since it was only intended to cover persons sent from England to Australia.⁵⁵ This culture of commitment to habeas corpus would make legislation for eugenic segregation of the feeble-minded difficult.⁵⁶ Without proofs that this segregation was a scientific necessity, eugenic segregation showed clear parallels to wrongful imprisonment. An equally important example lies with the Australian commitment to bodily integrity, which may have contributed to Australia's rejection of proposed sterilization laws.⁵⁷

Transportation - The Catholic Church

Another pressure that made it difficult for the eugenics movement to gain traction in Australia was the presence of that stolid enemy of eugenics: The Catholic Church. An estimated 24% of the convicts brought to Australia were Irish, and the majority of those were devout Catholics.⁵⁸ While Anglican Christianity was the dominant religion of Australia during the Australian eugenics movement, between one quarter and one third of the population was Catholic, and the Church had considerable influence over both voters and legislators.⁵⁹ Catholic

⁵⁴ David J. Clark and Gerard. McCoy, *Habeas Corpus : Australia, New Zealand, the South Pacific* (Leichhardt: Federation Press, 2000). 1.

⁵⁵ Clark and McCoy. 1.

⁵⁶ Garton, "Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand." 244.

⁵⁷ Garton. 244.

⁵⁸ Sue Ballyn, "The British Invasion of Australia. Convicts: Exile and Dislocation," in *Lives in Migration: Rupture and Continuity*, ed. Martin Renes (Barcelona: Centre for Australian and Transnational Studies, 2011), 16–30.

⁵⁹ Wyndham, "Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia 1910s TO 1930s." 152.

opposition to birth control and eugenics had considerably more impact on these issues there than in Britain and the U.S., where a smaller proportion of the population was Catholic.⁶⁰

The Catholic Church also gained influence by the clarity of its stance. While protestant groups were bitterly divided in Britain and mostly silent in Australia, Pope Pius XI published a number of decrees clarifying the Church's official positions. In 1930, the Pope published "On Christian Marriage" to extend the Church's contraception and abortion bans to apply to those participating for eugenic aims, and to condemn those trying to use public authority to prevent marriages based off of arbitrary measures of fitness.⁶¹ Decrees condemning positive and negative eugenics were issued on the 18th and 21st of March 1931, and decrees condemning sterilization of any kind were issued in February of 1940.⁶² While other religious groups or political parties chose to support eugenics when it suited them, the Catholic Church stood staunchly against all policies justified under the name of eugenics. However, the Church did run residential schools used for the removal and retraining of aboriginal children that, while not explicitly eugenic, were justified by a number of methods, including eugenics. The Catholic Church's involvement in running residential schools is discussed in Chapter 8.

Transportation - The British Comparison and Nativism

Convict settlement created doubts about the quality of the Australian population, which would later lead to virulent nativism. The British expressed these thoughts early on, and openly. Within the first five years of settlement, Australian Governor Arthur Phillip wrote back to Britain that, "as I would not wish convicts to lay the foundation of an empire, I think they should ever remain separated from the garrison, and other settlers that may come from Europe and not

⁶⁰ Wyndham. 153.

⁶¹ Wyndham. 367.

⁶² Wyndham. 367.

be allowed to mix with them, even after the seven or fourteen years for which they are transported may be expired.”⁶³ At this time, the “moral deficiency” that led to stealing, stabbing, conning, prostitution, and many of the other offenses for which the Australian convicts had been exported, were believed to be inherited. These fears were not eugenic — eugenics would not take off until 1900 with the rediscovery of Mendelian inheritance — but a kind of proto-eugenics that contributed significantly to the environment in which eugenics policies would be shaped.

The popular belief that British convicts sent to populate Australia would produce increasingly morally deficient offspring was not unopposed. A competing theory called Australian exceptionalism gained traction in the 1920s when historian George Arnold Wood published a new assessment of the convicts transported to Australia.⁶⁴ In this assessment, Wood argued that the convicts brought to Australia were not epitomes of the criminal class, but were simply honest, hardworking laborers forced to crime by the vicissitudes of capitalism as manifested in the Industrial revolution.

Because these convicts had been untouched by the sedentary and decadent lifestyles of the Industrial Revolution, they were actually a more vigorous strain of the British stock, went the argument. Adherents to this theory logically added that the convicts who made it to and thrived in Australia had to be physically and mentally fit. High mortality rates during transportation and in the harsh conditions of the early colonial years provided real-time natural selections, if you will, for the founders of the colony. The same logic was also applied to the free settlers by the American eugenicist Ellsworth Huntington, who believed that Australian free settlers tended to be more fit than the average Briton because, “the sick would not consider the long, hazardous

⁶³ “Historical Records of New South Wales, Vol 1, Phillip 1783-1792,” Govt. Printer, 1892, <https://archive.org/details/historicalrecord1pt2sidnuoft>. 53.

⁶⁴ Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand.” 248.

journey, the timid might make a shorter journey to a more assured future in America, and the poor could not afford the trip.”⁶⁵

Australian competitive sports can be read as a microcosm for studying the development of a full-throated theory of Australian exceptionalism. In the Colonial era, sport was the metaphorical field on which Commonwealth camaraderie was built. On May 27th, 1878, the first white Australian cricket team toured England and handily defeated the home team in a test match.⁶⁶ The test was covered extensively in Australian press. In the *Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser*, one writer asks “On the Kennington Oval, the Australian team scored 110 in their first innings, while the Surrey Eleven were far behind hand. Not had for a commencement. Who'll tell us now of the degenerating and enervating influence of this climate upon the British constitution?”⁶⁷ This defeat stirred fears of urban degeneracy in England and signaled race stability or even improvement in Australia.⁶⁸

This compelling desire to portray themselves in as good a light or even as better than the British had Australians turning their attention away from the genetic concerns within the population and instead addressing the unfitness of the non-British foreigner. Here, Australia diverged from the British eugenics movement. While the British were more concerned with social class, the Australians were preoccupied with race. In fact, the British created the social class classification on the 1911 Census to test assumptions about heredity for eugenics.⁶⁹ The split between the two groups can be seen in what kinds of people each considered to be affected by ‘racial poisons’ such as venereal disease, alcoholism, and feeble-mindedness. In Australia,

⁶⁵ Ellsworth Huntington, *West of the Pacific* (New York: Schribner, 1925). 170-171.

⁶⁶ John Nauright and Timothy John Lindsay. Chandler, *Making Men : Rugby and Masculine Identity* (Portland: F. Cass, 1996). 128.

⁶⁷ “Stella,” “Metropolitan Gossip.,” *Glen Innes Examiner and General Advertiser (NSW : 1874 - 1908)*, June 6, 1878.

⁶⁸ Nauright and Chandler, *Making Men : Rugby and Masculine Identity*. 128.

⁶⁹ Wyndham, “Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia 1910s TO 1930s.” 7.

prostitutes, epileptics, the mentally ill, those with tuberculosis, and those with genetic diseases were considered affected by racial poisons. However, the British stigmatized the poor and included paupers on their list.⁷⁰

One idea as to why this focus on class was less common is that class in Australia could change very rapidly — like when a convict received their ticket of leave and then squatted happily on 100 acres of land, or when a South Australian gold rush offered poor tenant farmers wealth far beyond expectation. Another potential answer is the fact that unemployment and true pauperism were simply more rare in Australia. The country had huge amounts of land to work on and lots of room for urban development — meaning that there was more often a shortage of labor than an excess. Australians took pride in this relative classlessness. The June 4th, 1878 issue of *The Ballarat Courier* asked, “has not the youthful Australian a sense of personal independence, of manly self-sufficiency — impossible to a boy born in a country where there are fifty several gradations of rank in society higher than his own?”⁷¹ This relationship between class consciousness with eugenics certainly would bear further inquiry, particularly into the ways class can condition or shelter confusions between seeking genetic ‘quality’ and eradication of difference.

Indeed, Australians were fearful of the importation of degeneracy. The fear of other races tainting the exceptional national stock led to the first Australian Parliament passing the Immigration Restriction Act 1901.⁷² This act would become famously known as a starting point of the government sanctioned “White Australia Policy” which would not be entirely dismantled until 1973. The White Australia Policy was never one piece of legislation, but a series of policies

⁷⁰ Wyndham. 17.

⁷¹ “The Daily Ballarat Courier,” *Ballarat Courier*, June 4, 1878. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page22745977>

⁷² Wyndham. 39.

designed to bar non-Europeans from immigrating to Australia. In this way, Australians could be sure to keep their superior British heritage safe.

One of the collection of policies under the auspices of the White Australia Policy was the British emigration plan to get new British people to Australia after World War II. The decline in population in Australia after the war rekindled anxieties over invasion. To bolster population in the British dominions, post-WWI legislation like the Empire Settlement Act was brought up for renewal before Parliament. The Commonwealth Relations Secretary, Lord Salisbury, referred to assisted immigration policies as “a transfusion of blood which strengthens the whole” and between 1945 and 1970, more than 1.5 million Britons immigrated to Australia.⁷³ With their fees subsidized by the government’s Assisted Passage Migration Scheme, adults paid only 10 pounds, and children travelled free.⁷⁴ Amusingly, plans to move entire intact towns of Britons to the dominions were also proposed, but never enacted.⁷⁵

The White Australia Policy also had the support of the Labor party that represented the majority of agricultural workers and miners within the country. While White Australia was supported by politicians, and the upper classes in the name of eugenics, the workers had developed a decidedly nativist perspective even before the advent of eugenics. In the 1850s, Australian laborers had to contend with high numbers of Chinese immigrants in the countries gold rushes.⁷⁶ The competition from the new immigrants in the gold fields and later the crop fields led the colonies to restrict immigration from China. Beyond stopping new Chinese workers from arriving, the colonies also prevented Chinese family members from joining immigrants

⁷³ C Hanson, *Eugenics, Literature, and Culture in Post-War Britain*, Routledge Interdisciplinary Pe (New York: Routledge, 2013). 141.

⁷⁴ Hanson. 142.

⁷⁵ Hanson. 141.

⁷⁶ Wyndham. 38.

who had already established themselves in the country, levied special taxes on Chinese laborers, and required furniture made with Chinese labor to be specially labelled.⁷⁷ In this way, the government-sponsored White Australia Policy was simply an extension of nativist colonial restrictions propped up more sturdily by eugenics.

While the Labor party benefited from the effects of increased concern over protecting the British stock, the Labor party generally opposed eugenics. The enthusiastic eugenic advocacy of the upper classes for the segregation or sterilization of the feeble-minded left many Australian workers speculating that the ‘feeble-minded’ set to be sterilized might be *themselves*, and many workers viewed the movement with suspicion.

⁷⁷ Victorian Cultural Collaboration, “Fear of the Chinese,” Special Broadcasting Service, accessed December 12, 2017, <https://www.sbs.com.au/gold/story.php?storyid=46#>.

Chapter 4: Eugenic Pressures from Geographic Isolation

Australia's remote, island geography contributed to unique eugenic pressures. Geographical isolation from Britain led to fears of an, "Asian invasion" in the Tropical North. The government's response to these concerns legitimized the role of eugenics in national policy. Isolation also led to Australia's desire for self-representation, and the hastening of its nascent women's suffrage movement. Women exerted a notable influence on Australian eugenics as many chose to pursue eugenic advocacy as their first forays into politics. Isolation between major centers of populations aggravated the incoherency in the application of eugenic ideology discussed in Chapter 2 was amplified in Australia.

Geography - Asian Invasion and The National Birth Rate

Geographically isolated from the protection of mother Britain's military, one of the biggest threats to colonial Australia was the threat of an "Asian invasion." In the North of the continent, huge tracts of uninhabited land lay open for the taking and Australians feared that the Japanese would invade and settle. Calls to populate the "Tropical North" rang out far and wide, even President Theodore Roosevelt advised Australia to "populate or perish."⁷⁸ However, the British belief that the African and Aboriginal peoples living in the lands they colonized were inferior led to a popular theory that warm, tropical climates reduced the fitness of the people living in those areas.⁷⁹ Australians and British alike were concerned that the more time British citizens spent in these regions, the more like Aboriginal people they would become.

This theory was central to policy suggestions about settling the "Tropical North" near Townsville (present day Darwin) to discourage the invasion of the Japanese into Australia.

⁷⁸ Wyndham. 41.

⁷⁹ Wyndham. 54.

Arguments about populating the tropics took place during the peak of the Australian eugenics movement and policymakers frequently deployed the rhetoric of eugenics. One policy suggested giving great swaths of land near Darwin to only the very fittest Australian families who would be the most resistant to degeneracy. This plan was opposed by Townsville Surgeon Joseph Ahearne, who claimed that, “the tropics have an injurious effect upon adult Europeans, [and] that their children develop into a more nervous, slighter and less enduring type.”⁸⁰

Richard Arthur, the inaugural president of the Eugenics Society of New South Wales, a doctor, and a member of the NSW Parliament, proposed that Australia should accept a large number of immigrants from the Mediterranean.⁸¹ These immigrants would still be European, but would be more accustomed to procreation in the heady Tropical “torrid zone,” and be able to do needed manual labor that Northern Europeans could not in such hot and humid conditions. Arthur’s proposal agreed with the advice of President Theodore Roosevelt, who suggested that Australia bring in Italians, Spaniards, and Portuguese to, “fill up the North.”⁸²

Fear of an Asian invasion also brought the national birth rate to public attention. In 1904, a publication comparing the birth rate in Australia and to that overseas showed Queensland as having the greatest decline in fertility, at a 23.9% reduction between 1891 and 1900.⁸³ This issue became an immediate source of anxiety for the British and alarmism over this issue led to a Royal Commission to being called in the same year to determine the causes of and discuss possible solutions to the falling birth rate.

⁸⁰ Wyndham. 52.

⁸¹ Wyndham. 53.

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ *Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-Rate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales*, vol. 1, Appendi (Sydney: Govt. Printer, 1904).

In 1920, statistician George Udny Yule published a paper on birth rates across the world showing that a decrease in national birth rate was a trend in most countries during the period from 1891 to 1910.⁸⁴ However, Yule's statistics showed that Australia had the 2nd to highest decrease in birth rate, below only New Zealand. Yule also found that the Japanese birth rate during that period was one of the few that was not decreasing.

There was no consensus opinion on what to do about this perceived national crisis. Pro-natalists argued that women should be encouraged to have as many children as possible and frequently blamed birth control and women's laziness for the decline in national birth rate.⁸⁵ Unsurprisingly, many pro-natalists were men. Others argued that the hysteria over the national birth rate was exaggerated because the available statistics did not account for a declining infant mortality. Knowing this, neo-Malthusians, a lot that advocated population control programs to ensure future generations would have enough resources to survive, stressed the importance of quality over quantity for Australian child rearing and advocated for birth control and restricting who was allowed to marry.⁸⁶ Others, particularly feminists, sat somewhere in the middle, wanting to encourage mothers to have more children by providing better services to help mothers raise their children. For example, Francis Molesworth wrote a response in *The Argus* to Dr. Richard Berry's column on the declining birth rate suggesting that, "the Government, for instance, allow the poorer mothers something weekly (not only in a lump sum at birth) and do not tax the income of the better-off mothers. If a woman knows that all the brunt of every new baby falls on her, it is hardly to be wondered at that the birth-rate is declining."⁸⁷

⁸⁴ G. Udny Yule, *The Fall of the Birth-Rate; a Paper Read before the Cambridge University Eugenics Society, 20 May, 1920*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1920), 11-12.

⁸⁵ Philippal Mein Smith, "Blood, Birth, Babies, Bodies.," *Australian Feminist Studies* 17, no. 39 (November 2002): 305-23.

⁸⁶ Mein Smith. 309.

⁸⁷ Francis Molesworth, "DECLINING BIRTH RATE.," *The Argus*, March 7, 1918.

These groups fought a pitched battle for the right to use the hot new language eugenics for their respective strategies for addressing the fertility scare. For the pro-natalists, preventing foreign genes from proliferating in Australia would preserve the superior British stock and thus colonists ought to have more children to populate the North as quickly as possible. For the neo-Malthusians, encouraging everyone to have children would result in proportionally more unfit children than fit children, reducing the fitness of the Australian population. This provides an excellent example how eugenics was rarely considered on its own in Australia but was instead used to bolster a variety of opposing opinions and thus never found much success in legislation.

Image One⁸⁸Image Two⁸⁹

Two letters to the editor of the Argus (dated March 7th and January 2nd) responding to Dr. Richard Berry's column on the declining birth rate. In Image One, Francis Molesworth agrees it is the woman's duty to produce children, but argues that women are not supported enough by the government, and that they do not tend to get enough rest after childbirth and are thus deterred from it. In Image Two, Clara Weekes argues that the State should focus on the children that already exist and provide financial assistance to poor mothers who cannot even afford powdered milk.

⁸⁸ Molesworth. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1644902>

⁸⁹ Clara Weekes, "Decreasing Birth Rate," *The Argus*, January 2, 1918. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article1631413>

Still, general alarm prompted the Australian government put together a number of policies and services to encourage women to have more children. Resources such as “baby health clinics, home visiting nurses, motherhood training, pamphlets, and advice manuals proliferated.”⁹⁰ In 1912, Australia introduced a “baby bonus” that gave new mothers financial means to the tune of 5£ to cover the cost of infant care for the first few weeks.⁹¹ Overall, the government’s establishment of the 1904 Royal Commission to investigate the birth rate and the creation of incentives such as the baby bonus set the tone that eugenic concerns were legitimate enough to be addressed on a national scale and had a valid place in politics.

Geography – Self-Governance and Women’s Suffrage

As mentioned in *Transportation: Civil Liberties*, the settlers in Australia very much expected to be given the rights and writs granted to every British citizen. The colonial Australian was a simply a transplanted Briton with all the “essential characteristics of his British forebears, the desire for freedom from restraint, however, being perhaps more strongly accentuated.”⁹² The Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia published by the Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics posted that, “the greater opportunity for an open-air existence and the absence of the restrictions of older civilisations may be held to be in the main responsible for this.”⁹³ Just as this bolstered desire for their usual civil liberties contributed to Australian commitment to habeas corpus, it also manifested as a fervent wish for self-governance.

This was especially true of the free settlers who came to Australia by choice. Established as a free colony in 1836, South Australia never had any shipments of convicts arrive at their

⁹⁰ Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand.” 250.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹²G. H. Knibbs, *The Official Year Book of the Commonwealth of Australia, no.6, 1901 - 1912* (Melbourne: McCarron, Bird, and Co., 1913). 110.

⁹³ Knibbs.

coast.⁹⁴ The planning of South Australia was influenced by reforms happening in Britain around that time. The Reform Act of 1832 expanded the British and Welsh electorate by about 300,000 members.⁹⁵ The Scottish Reform Act of 1832 increased their electorate from 5,000 to 65,000 members, exemplifying the growing desire for representative democracy. Additionally, laws that had discriminated against Catholics, Jews, and nonconformist Protestants had been repealed around this time.⁹⁶

Representation was promised to the South Australians in its colonial charter: the colony would be given self-governance government upon achieving a population of 50,000.⁹⁷ However, the Act was repealed in 1842, and the promise removed. From 1836 to 1843, the colony was ruled by an autocratic governor, much to the dismay of the settlers. The settlers disagreed with many governing practices, including the allocation of state funds to religious groups, the removal of settler's right to minerals and metals on their purchased land, and the frustrating long wait to get permission for certain governmental decisions.⁹⁸ A reply from the Colonial Office in Britain took a minimum of 6 months to arrive back in South Australia and issues that required more discourse could take years to resolve.

In 1843, a Legislative Council was devised to advise the governor on issues in South Australia. However, the seats were filled by British officials and colonists appointed by the governor who retained power to make all final governing decisions.⁹⁹ Disgruntled colonists,

⁹⁴ "South Australia," Getting it Together: From Colonies to Federation (Museum of Australian Democracy), accessed December 12, 2017, <https://getting-it-together.moadoph.gov.au/south-australia/index.html>.

⁹⁵ Thomas Ertman, "The Great Reform Act of 1832 and British Democratization," *Comparative Political Studies* 43, no. 8–9 (May 12, 2010): 1000–1022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414010370434>. 1001 - 1020

⁹⁶ "Establishing Representative Government," Parliament.sa.gov.au (Parliament of South Australia, 2010), [http://www.parliament.sa.gov.au/AboutParliament/History/EstablishingRepresentativeGovernment/Pages/The birth of democratic ideas in South Australia.aspx](http://www.parliament.sa.gov.au/AboutParliament/History/EstablishingRepresentativeGovernment/Pages/The%20birth%20of%20democratic%20ideas%20in%20South%20Australia.aspx).

⁹⁷ "Establishing Representative Government."

⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁹⁹ "Establishing Representative Government."

knowing the trouble the American Revolution had caused the British government in the name of representative government, began to protest peacefully and write fiery editorials in the Adelaide newspapers. In 1851, the Legislative Council was expanded to 24 members and propertied male settlers were permitted to vote for 16 members. The Legislative Council would then draft a constitution for South Australia to set up representative government.¹⁰⁰ By 1857, South Australia had full self-government including a bicameral parliament and universal male suffrage.¹⁰¹

South Australia continued to live out its democratic ideals when propertied women were given the right to vote in local elections in 1861, just four years after universal male suffrage was granted. However, women across Australia wanted their full right to vote in state and federal elections. From the 1880s through the 1890s, “each Australian colony had at least one suffragette society.”¹⁰² In an impressive campaign, Victorian suffragettes managed to gather 30,000 signatures on an 1891 petition supporting universal women’s suffrage.¹⁰³ The final petition ended up being 260 meters long and is referred to affectionately in the Victorian archives as the “Monster Petition”. A similar petition was organized in South Australia in 1894 and received 11,600 signatures.¹⁰⁴

In 1902, the lobbying of the suffragettes paid off when Parliament passed the Commonwealth Franchise Act and, “the Commonwealth of Australia became the first country in the world to give women both the right vote in federal elections and the right to be elected to federal parliament.” But the Act did not grant total suffrage to women in Australia. State

¹⁰⁰“South Australia.”

¹⁰¹“Establishing Representative Government.”

¹⁰² “Australian Suffragettes,” Australia.gov.au, 2016, <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-suffragettes>.

¹⁰³ “Australian Suffragettes.”

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

governments still had to pass state laws allowing to women to vote in state elections, and Aboriginal women were excluded entirely until 1962.¹⁰⁵

This early enfranchisement of women, “left the middle-class women's movement freer to concentrate on constructively contributing to the “new” nation.¹⁰⁶” The overlap between the eugenics and the feminist movements in Australia was evident in the eugenic discourses embraced by groups such as the Victorian Mother’s Club and the Women’s Reform League.¹⁰⁷ In some groups, women led the charge for eugenics. For example, in the Workers’ Educational Association (WEA), a special subchapter called the Women's Organizing Committee established eugenics study circles for the public.¹⁰⁸

Teaching eugenics through public education was incredibly important to one Marion Piddington, who Diana Wyndham categorized as “perhaps Australia’s only strong eugenicist.”¹⁰⁹ Marion Piddington volunteered with the WEA to teach classes on sexual hygiene to the people of New South Wales. The topics covered in these lectures were usually about eugenics, the dangers of sex, and the importance of speaking frankly to children about sex to prevent unwanted pregnancies and the spread of venereal disease. At the time, venereal disease was considered heritable as it could be passed from mother down to newborn during childbirth. Many women believed the lack of healthy, disease free men to be one of the chief causes of the declining birthrate.

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ Jane Carey, “The Racial Imperatives of Sex: Birth Control and Eugenics in Britain, the United States and Australia in the Interwar Years,” *Women’s History Review* 21, no. 5 (November 1, 2012): 733–52, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2012.658180>. 124.

¹⁰⁷ Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand.” 245.

¹⁰⁸ Ann Curthoys, “Marion Louisa Piddington,” *Australian Dictionary of Biography, Volume 11* (National Center of Biography, Australian National University, 1988).

¹⁰⁹ Wyndham, “Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia 1910s TO 1930s.” Footnotes of 67.

Piddington also had very radical ideas about how eugenics should direct motherhood, anonymously introducing the concept of 'scientific motherhood' to the press in 1916.¹¹⁰

Scientific motherhood argued that single women or women left widowed by World War I should be given the opportunity to become mothers through artificial insemination from genetically superior donors, a process later deemed eutelegensis. The concept found very little support amongst other eugenicists and the medical community, which was unsurprising because medical etiquette prevented doctors from speaking publicly on many suggested eugenic policies.

In 1926, Marion Piddington helped bring together the founding board of the Racial Hygiene Association (RHA) of New South Wales, which would grow to be the main eugenic organization in NSW.¹¹¹ Women played another key role here, when Piddington recruited Ruby Rich and Lillie Goodisson, prominent Australian feminists, to be the founding co-president and secretary of the RHA. While Goodisson and Rich also identified as eugenicist, their beliefs were less individualistic and more focused on the fitness of families.

In addition to continuing classes on sexual hygiene, eugenics, and venereal disease, the RHA came to advocate for pre-marital safeguards to purify the Australian stock. Through the development of hygiene clinics, mental and physical tests, and the issuing of certificates of approval to engaged couples deemed 'fit', the RHA hoped to encourage only the most morally, physically, and mentally fit to reproduce. To further this goal, the RHA also supported the segregation and sterilization of the mentally deficient in its earliest years and later went on to open the first birth control clinic in Sydney.¹¹² Finally, women both inside and outside the RHA campaigned for child endowment policies to help families support their children. Ultimately,

¹¹⁰ Wyndham. 72.

¹¹¹ Wyndham. 82.

¹¹² Wyndham. 108.

women approached eugenics to advocate for policies that improved quality of the Australian stock and carved out a starting point for family planning in Australia.

Geography - Isolated Urban Centers

Far away from the eugenics epicenters like the United States and Britain, Australian eugenicists received little support from the bastions of eugenics thought/advocacy in those places. The largest cities in Australia, Sydney and Melbourne, were geographically and ideologically isolated from each other and separate eugenics movements developed with little collaboration. Movements in Western Australia, Southern Australia, Tasmania and Queensland were even more isolated. In the end, very few aspects of the Eugenics movements were coordinated nationally or internationally. On an international scale, a few Australian eugenics societies wanted to be associated with reputable eugenics societies already established in Britain. For example, in 1911, when South Australia formed the first Australia eugenics organization, the group applied to be a sub-committee of the British Science Guild. The British Science Guild placed an emphasis on eugenics as a ‘hard’ science supported by research and statistical evidence. Emulating this ‘hard’ science approach, the South Australian group set out to create a register of eugenic diseases and withhold marriage licenses from those affected by these ‘diseases’.¹¹³

At the other end of the spectrum, Sydney’s first eugenics society was founded in December 1912 as a branch of the Eugenics Education Society, which viewed eugenics more as a ‘soft’ science intended to influence social policy for racial betterment than as a rigorous field of academic study.¹¹⁴ One of the biggest advocates for environmental eugenics in Australia, John

¹¹³ Wyndham. 153.

¹¹⁴ Garton, “Eugenics in Australia and New Zealand.” 245.

Eldridge, joined the organization as its first secretary and greatly influenced the society's aims. The Eugenics Education Society of NSW (EESNSW) was decidedly more supportive of environmental reform than its British parent organization, and was on occasion rebuked for its support of child endowments that would increase the 'pauper stock' in Australia. In addition to its support of child endowments, the EESNSW was also active in the eradication of venereal diseases. However, the society crumbled after Eldridge withdrew in 1922.

A second Australian branch of the Eugenics Education Society was formed in Melbourne in July 1914. But it was suspended after only 7 months of existence due to the outbreak of World War I.¹¹⁵ Disbanding for the duration of the war was the norm for reform-minded organizations and the EESNSW also went inactive during this period.

In each of these cases, the British were cautious and unsupportive of the Australian's attempts at association. In addition to simply not responding to the Eugenics Education Society of Victoria's founding greeting, the British Eugenics Education Society twice sent undercover 'informants' to assess the quality of the group in NSW and were reluctant to give a start-up grant to the Victorian group.¹¹⁶ As the EESNSW grew and developed its own interests, the British EES disapproved of its focus on environmental reform. In 1921, the British EES published a letter from Eldridge summarizing Australian child endowment legislation and subsequently disparaged it as supporting, "the cult of incompetence."¹¹⁷ The following year, Eldridge sent the British EES a letter asking whether the British EES stood by a statement published in the *Eugenics Review* that the economic division of the upper and lower classes corresponded with the eugenic division. In their response, the British EES clarified that they used the terms "poverty" and

¹¹⁵ Garton. 245.

¹¹⁶ Wyndham. 144.

¹¹⁷ Wyndham. 100.

“lower class” to refer to those who were so inferior a stock that they are non-self-supporting”, indicating to both the Australian and British branches that their eugenics ideologies were incompatible.¹¹⁸ No further correspondence between the two groups was recorded.

While three of Australia’s eugenic organizations were associated with a British counterpart, the two most successful organizations were actually unaffiliated. The RHA, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was founded in 1926 by members of the politically conservative Women’s Reform League spearheaded by Marion Piddington. The society’s goals were, from the start, not strictly eugenic. While Marion Piddington was a eugenicist who supported mainline eugenic practices such as sterilization, the other founders were more interested in using ‘eugenics’ as an umbrella to advocate a wide-variety of peripherally related issues like teaching sex education, eradicating venereal disease, and providing birth control. The RHA’s dedication to social reform under the name of reform eugenics fit geographically with the environmental bent of eugenicists in NSW, evidenced by the advocacy of the EESNSW.

The extremely reform-minded focus of the eugenics groups in NSW stood in stark contrast with Melbourne’s successful Eugenics Society of Victoria (ESV). The ESV was founded by academics associated with the University of Melbourne such as Wilfred Eade Agar and Richard Berry, high-level politicians such as Frank Tate, and well-known doctors such as Dr. Victor Wallace. The group tended to be mainline and staunchly scientific in its approach to eugenics. Many of its members involved in research on mental defectiveness and Richard Berry’s craniometry research was frequently publicized in the Melbourne newspaper *The Argus*. In general, the ESV did not make any special attempts to make eugenics accessible to the public.

¹¹⁸ Wyndham. 100.

While the RHA sponsored TV and Radio shows to discuss eugenics and the family, the ESV sponsored scientific lectures for the public.¹¹⁹

On the whole, the members of the Eugenics Society of Victorian seemed more interested in lobbying for legislation and policy than educating the public through grassroots campaigns. This may be because the ESV membership read as a who's who of Melbourne, making partnerships between doctors, researchers, and legislators more readily available. Examples of more legislative ideas supported by ESV members include forced sterilization, the segregation of the mentally deficient, and "no-baby bonuses" for individuals of poor stock who remained childless. The ESV's own Dr. Wallace became one of two clinics in Australia that admitted to performing voluntary serializations, along with a clinic founded by Marion Piddington separate from the RHA.¹²⁰

A desire for a national eugenics society led to the RHA's expansionist dream. In the 1930s, three attempts were made to establish a branch of the RHA in South Australia, but nothing ever came from these meetings. In 1934, Lily Goodisson, the president of the RHA, spent two months trying to convince one of Melbourne's eugenics societies to become a chapter of the RHA, but the organization failed shortly afterwards. In 1936, the RHA hosted Bessie Rischbieth, a member of Perth's Women's Service Guild in Sydney hoping that she might start an RHA in Perth. The Women's Service Guild already had a Racial Hygiene Committee supportive of legislative intervention for the mentally defective and Goodison hoped it would transform into the RHA's. It did not.

The most unfortunate example of the failures of the RHA's dream for a national eugenics policy was the founding of the Eugenics Society of Victoria. Goodison had gone to Melbourne to

¹¹⁹ Wyndham 173.

¹²⁰ Wyndham. 170.

discuss founding an RHA branch with Professor Agar. By the end of the meeting, the Victorian eugenicists invited to the meeting had decided to create their own organization that more closely reflected their more stringent eugenic beliefs. This foreclosed most positive relations with the RHA before they could even begin. During the whole Australian eugenics movement, a meeting between all of the organizations only occurred once. In 1929, eugenicists from across Australia met at the Australian Racial Hygiene Congress and passed seven pro-sterilization resolutions before parting ways, never to collaborate again.¹²¹

Really, this lack of collaboration was not a surprise. Two of the eugenics organizations mentioned above, the South Australian organization and the EES in Melbourne, became inactive so quickly that collaboration would never have been possible. The EESNSW was not contemporary with the two most successful groups, the RHA and the ESV. Because these eugenics organizations developed over such a long period of time and initially organized on a state level, groups were able to develop their ideology in relatively isolated conditions. In the end, this led to the RHA and ESV's radically different and seemingly irreconcilable regional views on eugenics.

¹²¹ Wyndham. 14.

Chapter 5: Higher Education

Through the next three chapters, I will examine how Australia's policies in four areas of Australian life- education, 'mental defectiveness', and indigenous relations - developed and changed in response to these eugenic pressures. The connection between the earlier chapters, where I examined Australia's complex national origin and its relation to eugenics, and the later chapters, where I will trace the evolution of particular Australian public policies, is by no means simple or linear. To best illustrate the nature of the Australian eugenics movement, I will identify policies that were implemented with eugenic in mind, discuss the eugenic pressures that contributed to each policy, and explore each policy's effects after implementation.

A Case Study: Post-Primary School

The development of post-primary education in Victoria and New South Wales provides an excellent example of geographic isolation leading to divergence in eugenics ideology. As discussed in Chapter Four, eugenics in Victoria tended to consist of academics who espoused mainline eugenics policies. In contrast, prominent eugenicists in New South Wales tended to focus more on environmental aspects of eugenics and more frequently subscribed to reform eugenics. These two opposing ideologies led to the development of a more restricted and classist approach to post-primary education in Victoria while NSW devised their educational system to be widely available to people from all classes. A closer look at the actual policies implemented as well as their implementers' rationale provides key insights into how vastly different eugenic beliefs contributed to their chosen method of education.

The first schools in Australia were Christian schools established in NSW by the Anglican Church in the late 1700s.¹²² As more transportation ships arrived, a variety of religious denominations established schools across the colonies, with the biggest two being the Anglican and Catholic Churches.¹²³ Schools were built with federal assistance when a certain number of students to be enrolled could be found and funds had been raised to cover part of the building costs.¹²⁴ When these criteria were met, the government would purchase the land, finance the rest of the building, and pay a teacher to teach at the school. These schools could either be secular and federally run or they could be religious and run by a church, but most schools were run by churches because they could fundraise and organize students most efficiently.

Unfortunately, church-run schools were not an effective use of government funds because churches of different denominations usually built schools in the same area and competed for students instead of distributing to serve as many children as possible.¹²⁵ In response to this issue, Victoria passed the Education Act of 1872 to provide free, secular public education and cease the government funding of religious education.¹²⁶ By 1908, all of the colonies adopted a similar policy and government schools became the backbone of primary education in Australia.¹²⁷ Still, post-primary education was dominated by private religious schools, and the price was prohibitive for many poorer families.¹²⁸

¹²² Jennifer Buckingham, "The Growth of Religious Schooling," *ABC Religion and Ethics*, October 1, 2010.

¹²³ Ross Jones, "Thinking Dangerous Thoughts: Post-Primary Education and Eugenics in Australia," in *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire: New Zealand, Australia, Canada and South Africa*, ed. Diane B. Paul, John Stenhouse, and Hamish G. Spencer, 1st ed. (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 153–74, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-64686-2>.

¹²⁴ "Free Education Introduced," National Museum of Australia, n.d., http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/free_education_introduced.

¹²⁵ "Free Education Introduced."

¹²⁶ <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2010/10/01/3027021.htm>

¹²⁷ http://www.nma.gov.au/online_features/defining_moments/featured/free_education_introduced

¹²⁸ Radio Natasha

Around the time all the colonies adopted secular public education, eugenic scientists were conducting research to determine which children would be fit for secondary education. Chris McRae, a well-known early psychologist, proclaimed that working class children were not fit for academic secondary education. Researching different suburbs around Melbourne, he concluded that those in poorer suburbs almost never go to university, and he shared these findings with every state school primary teacher via the Victorian Education Gazette.¹²⁹ He also argued that “people live in slums because they are mentally deficient and not vice-versa”.¹³⁰ Listening to eugenics advice of McRae, the Victorian Education Department set up technical schools in poorer suburbs of Melbourne and provided them little access to academic secondary schooling.¹³¹ Access to academic secondary schooling would become even more difficult when in 1927 the government, still under the impression that technical schools were where the working-class belonged, abolished all fees for technical schools but left fees in place for academic schoolings to discourage attendance by making them cost-prohibitive.¹³²

¹²⁹ Ross Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite” *The Conversation*, September 20, 2011.

¹³⁰ Jones. “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite”

¹³¹ Cervini, “A Theory Out of the Darkness.”

¹³² Ross Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: Striving for National Fitness (Review),” in *Eugenics at the Edges of Empire*, vol. 60, 2005, 239–41.



A house in the slums of Collingwood in Melbourne with an external tap as the only water supply. This house rented for \$1.25 AUD/week. The people living here would have been considered for trade school or be sent to a special school for the feeble minded in the adjacent Fitzroy slum.¹³³

This belief that the working class people were genetically fit for technical school but not for higher education seems also to have been held by Frank Tate, Victoria's first Director of Education.¹³⁴ After 1910, Tate began the process of setting up post-primary education in Victoria. He modelled his educational system so "every child who has the strength to climb may,

¹³³ Herald Sun Image Library, "Image of a Collingwood House," *The Herald Sun*, May 1936.
<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/victoria/haunting-images-of-the-streets-that-were-once-home-to-melbournes-slums/news-story/8929dd97a96343ae9de160c637a16c0c>

¹³⁴ Cervini, "A Theory Out of the Darkness."

by using that strength, reach the place for which nature intends him.”¹³⁵ This vaguely eugenic sentiment is not surprising due to his close association with Dr. Richard Berry, the hardline eugenicist from this thesis’ introduction who advocated staunchly for sterilization and even gas chambers. While no evidence suggests Tate was nearly as radical as Berry, he served on many councils with Berry, attended Berry’s presentations on craniometric research, and occasionally introduced Berry’s public lectures.¹³⁶ When Tate finally retired from his government position, he joined the Eugenics Society of Victoria as a dues-paying member.

Though I’ve chosen to focus on the eugenic motivations behind Tate’s educational system reform, Tate’s contributions to education are generally regarded as positive, and he is considered a hero amongst educators for establishing public secondary schooling.¹³⁷ Tate also made reforms outside of secondary education. Compatible with, if not stemming from, his eugenic beliefs, Tate believed that education should be fitting curriculum to the student’s ability. He loathed the system of payments by results for teachers because he believed it stifled innovation and did not accurately assess a student’s progress over a year.¹³⁸ Tate’s beliefs led him to set up the first school for the subnormal in Fitzroy, which he hoped would allow mentally deficient students a chance to learn to the best of their abilities.

In comparison to Frank Tate’s policies in Victoria, the New South Wales Director of Education, Peter Board, championed higher education opportunity for all and focused on building more public academic high schools.¹³⁹ The attitudes towards eugenics in NSW followed an environmental perspective and, if Board was influenced by them, would have been

¹³⁵ Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: Striving for National Fitness (Review).”

¹³⁶ Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite.”

¹³⁷ NATASHA RADIO

¹³⁸ R. J. W. Selleck, *Frank Tate, Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 12* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1990).

¹³⁹ Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite.”

encouraged to provide more schools to increase the fitness of the general population. Looking at a numerical comparison between the results of Victorian and NSW education policy, the effects of the emphasis on trade schools can be easily seen. In 1920, Sydney had 12 public academic high schools and an enrollment of 4000 students while Melbourne only had 5 public academic high schools enrolling about 2,000 students.¹⁴⁰ Two researchers, McCalman and Peel, conducted a long-term assessment of these different educational systems: in 1992, they reported that in Sydney, state leaders were more likely to have attended a state school, while the majority of Melbourne leaders attended elite private schools.¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ Jones, "Eugenics in Australia: Striving for National Fitness (Review)."

¹⁴¹ Jones, "Eugenics in Australia: Striving for National Fitness (Review)"

Chapter 6: Mental Defectiveness

The primary concern of mainline eugenicists in Australia was eliminating mental defectiveness. Attempts to rid the country of mental defectives usually fell under the categories of segregation or sterilization, both as negative eugenics measures intended to keep those deemed mentally defective from reproducing. The Australian approach to mental defectiveness was seriously hindered by the fervent opposition of the Catholic Church, and the country's commitment to habeas corpus and medical consents. However, national concern that mental defectives were producing offspring more often than fit families legitimized the issue in Parliaments throughout the country and a number of attempts to pass legislation occurred between 1920 and 1940.

At the turn of the century, panic surrounding the national birthrate led to detailed surveys of the Australian population's reproductive habits. In the course of these conversations, the belief that mental defectives were exceptionally prolific became so commonly held that in 1911, after four years of research, the Australasian Committee on the Feeble-minded did not address the differential fertility of the feeble-minded because it "could be taken as proved" that "the sexual instinct in particular is apt to be utterly uncontrolled in feeble-minded persons."¹⁴²

Surveying Mental Deficiency

Attempts to uncover the percent of the population affected by feeble-mindedness led to numerous surveys. The first systematic survey was conducted in Sydney in 1901.¹⁴³ Eldridge considered this survey 'one of the most important events' in the history of NSW.¹⁴⁴ Individual states and researchers conducted their own surveys. A 1918 survey of 10,000 Victorian children

¹⁴² Wyndham, "Striving for National Fitness: Eugenics in Australia 1910s TO 1930s." 277.

¹⁴³ Wyndham. 283.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*

by Richard Berry and Stanley Porteus concluded that at least 15% of Victorian school-aged children were mentally defective.¹⁴⁵ Continued calls for a national survey led to the Federal Minister for Health, Sir Neville Howse, commissioning the survey in 1928. Unlike many other policies related to feeble-mindedness, this commission was supported by all the Australian states.¹⁴⁶

The commissioned survey was carried out by William Ernest Jones, the Victorian Chief Inspector for the Insane. The conclusion of the survey suggested that 3% of the total population was mentally deficient and that deficiency was more common in the working class. He also argued that the incidence of mental deficiency was increasing, doubling over the last 20 years. Jones claimed that 80% of the cases he examined creating the survey were genetic in origin and recommended urgent government action that included sterilization. However, the thoroughness of the study was called into question by the Mail, a newspaper in Queensland, which noted that the prison population examined in Queensland was reported as having almost no cases of mental deficiency.¹⁴⁷

First Attempts at Legislation

Because Australia's national policy only policed lunacy and did not address feeble-mindedness, eugenicists had to pass any relevant legislation state by state.¹⁴⁸ The first Mental Defectives Act was proclaimed in South Australia in 1913. However, the Act failed to give any group the power to assess or institutionalize those deemed mentally defective, making it more symbolic than actionable.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Wyndham. 283.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

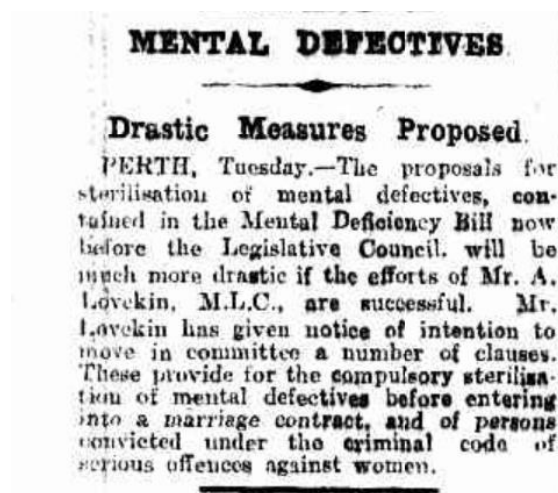
¹⁴⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ Garton. 247.

¹⁴⁹ Garton. 247.

Amusingly, the only successful mental defectiveness legislation passed in Australia belong to Tasmania, a state with no formal eugenics societies.¹⁵⁰ In 1920, Tasmania passed a Mental Defective Act that conferred power to assess and segregate mentally defective school children. The Act created an official Mental Defectives Board that would test children for defectiveness.¹⁵¹ However, disputes on who was in charge of the children deemed defective after their assessment prevented the large-scale segregation imagined by lawmakers.

In 1929, a mental defective act in Western Australia that would require “compulsory steralisation[sic] of mental defective before entering into marriage” was proposed.¹⁵² The Act made it to a second reading before being tabled.¹⁵³



Description of Western Australia’s proposed eugenic marriage law in *The Age*¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Wyndham. 177.

¹⁵¹ Garton. 247.

¹⁵² “Mental Defectives,” *The Age*, November 27, 1929. <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/203266050>

¹⁵³ Garton. 247.

¹⁵⁴ “Mental Defectives.” <http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/203266050>

Legislative Initiatives in Victoria

In the typical Eugenics Society of Victoria fashion, members of the ESV introduced three ‘mental deficiency’ bills to the Victorian parliament in 1926, 1929, and 1939.¹⁵⁵ The bills were presented by Premier Stanley Argyle, a friend of Berry’s who supported eugenics. Argyle also ran *The Argus*, the Melbourne newspaper that frequently defended eugenics and gave Berry his own column. The bills were all pretty much the same with slight modifications and had been developed by Berry and a committee of experts over the course of two years.¹⁵⁶

In 1926 and 1929, the bill made it through the lower house of Parliament, the Victorian Legislative Assembly, and were expected to make it through the Legislative Council before the government was derailed by a constitutional crisis within the Labor party.¹⁵⁷ The 1939 version of the bill, which Argyle called “in many respects a duplicate of the bill introduced in 1929” was passed unanimously in both houses but was never proclaimed.¹⁵⁸ The outbreak of World War II and the subsequent discrediting of eugenics following the Holocaust kept the bill from ever going into effect.¹⁵⁹ Eerily, Dr. Richard Berry had supported the use of lethal chambers to euthanize “grosser types of our mental defectives” before the practices in concentration camps were revealed.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁵ Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite.”

¹⁵⁶ Jones, “The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918–1939.” 325

¹⁵⁷ Jones. “The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots”. 340.

¹⁵⁸ “Bill Revived,” *The Argus*, July 23, 1938. [http:// nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12447659](http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article12447659)

¹⁵⁹ Jones, “Eugenics in Australia: The Secret of Melbourne’s Elite.”

¹⁶⁰ K. F. Russell, *Berry, Richard James (1867-1962), Australian Dictionary of Biography, Vol. 7* (National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, 1979).

Mr. Innes-Noad (N.S.W.): Is mental deficiency in children a growing and national danger?

Witness: My answer is emphatically "Yes."

Faced with a national danger on one side and the maternal instinct so jealous of the child on the other side, how are you going to bring about an effective scheme? The British Parliament passed an act applying to feeble-mindedness ten years ago. Recently the Tasmanian Government passed an act giving it control over feeble-minded children. In Victoria we can do nothing because there is no legislation. We can only get hold of a feeble-minded child under the lunacy law, which is based on a legal definition of insanity introduced in 1834. I or any College-street specialist would refuse to sign the certificate because of one word in that form—the word "insane." We cannot certify that a child is insane. We can only certify that a child is unable to take care of himself. Cooperation of all States in the treatment of mentally defective types was essential. A Commonwealth laboratory, costing, say, £7000 a year, should be established.

Richard Berry writing in *The Age* reinforcing the belief that feeble-minded is a national threat¹⁶¹

While this set of bills was probably the most advocated for eugenics legislation in all of Australia, it was not Victoria's only legislative attempt. In 1934, James Herbert Disney introduced a bill that would require compulsory examination of all fourteen year olds. Radically, Disney proposed that those that failed the examination would be classified as unfit and sterilized. One of his biggest supporters was Dr. John Richards Harris, who also supported the sterilization of repeat criminals.¹⁶² Both the sterilization of recidivist criminals and young adults was supported by the Medical Journal of Australia. This support by the medical community would have been unheard of in Britain where doctors did not want to be associated eugenics. In Australia, doctors were some of the most devout members of the movement alongside academics.

¹⁶¹ Richard Berry, "Mental Types," *The Age*, February 25, 1925. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-page18722315>

¹⁶² Jones, "The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918–1939." 329.

Defining Feeble-mindedness

The main concern of eugenics during the first half of the 20th century was the mental, physical, and moral degeneracy of Australian ‘stock’. Of these three, Australia’s bureaucrats, progressives, and academics primarily feared what society perceived as an increase in feeble-mindedness, or mental deficiency. However, feeble-mindedness was hard to define.

In 1908, the British Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded determined six categories to sort the feeble-minded into: “persons of unsound mind, persons of mental infirmity, idiots, imbeciles, feeble-minded and moral imbeciles”¹⁶³. In 1918, Richard A. Berry, a visiting researcher at the University of Melbourne and prominent member of Melbourne’s eugenic society, concluded that mental deficiency should include all people who could not be productive members of society due to poor control of will or abnormal impulses¹⁶⁴. Then in 1920, Stanley Porteus, a psychologist and academic, expanded the definition of feeble-mindedness as a trait that applied to a person “who by reason of mental defects other than sensory cannot attain to self-management and self-support to the degree of social sufficiency”¹⁶⁵. These shifting definitions proved how difficult it was to determine who qualified as ‘feeble-minded’, adding a certain moral haziness to legislation intended to institutionalize or sterilize those determined to fit the selected criteria.

Australian Legal Culture

As mentioned in Chapter 3, one of the main reasons that Australia struggled to pass eugenic legislation was Australia’s legal culture, which was firmly committed to the principles of habeas corpus.¹⁶⁶ The precautions taken against arbitrary imprisonment made legislation

¹⁶³ Wyndham. 230.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Garton. 248.

concerning feeble-mindedness difficult to advocate for. In general, eugenicists assumed that those with noticeable physical or mental impairments would be sorted out of the breeding population without any governmental assistance, but those on the border of mental deficiency were the true threats to the Australian population as they were often passed over by tests designed to prevent wrongful imprisonment.

This blurry line between the feeble-minded and the fit added to fears of unjust segregation and kept eugenicists from legislative success. William Ernest Jones acknowledged the hesitancy around negative eugenics stating that it was “hardly likely that, with our present views on the liberty of the subject, such a law will be passed and put into effect.”¹⁶⁷ Although there was almost no open opposition to eugenics by the public, Australians tended to be unwilling to support any extreme measures, especially those which could infringe on their individual rights.¹⁶⁸ In addition to the legal culture surrounding habeas corpus, there also appears to have been concerns from doctors about their vulnerability to legal charges if they violated informed consent in cases of forced sterilization.¹⁶⁹

The Catholic Church

The public opposition to eugenics was ‘almost none’, with the notable exception of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church disagreed with the theory of heredity backing the bills being introduced in Victoria. In 1929, in response to the Mental Deficiency Act in Parliament, the Church wrote in its newspaper, *The Advocate*, that “mental deficiency is no more inherited than wooden legs”¹⁷⁰ Another example where the Catholic Church’s influence can be seen is in

¹⁶⁷Ross Jones, “Removing Some of the Dust from the Wheels of Civilization: William Ernest Jones and the 1928 Commonwealth Survey of Mental Deficiency,” *Australian Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 63–78, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610802663027>. 73.

¹⁶⁸ Jones. “Removing Some of the Dust”. 73.

¹⁶⁹ Garton. 248.

¹⁷⁰ Jones, “The Master Potter and the Rejected Pots: Eugenic Legislation in Victoria, 1918–1939.” 340.

the near absence of the eugenics movement in Queensland. Here, the Catholic Church held political control for the first half of the twentieth century in the form of a strongly Catholic Labor government.¹⁷¹ The influence of the Catholic Church is shown in the lack of any mainline eugenics legislation or organized eugenics societies in Queensland.

The Decline of Mental Defectiveness Legislation

The ineffectiveness of reform institutions at identifying the feeble-minded alongside reports of Nazi sterilizations in the 1930s led to a mistrust of institutionalization.¹⁷² Offenders who were highly intelligent but could not be reformed and showed no remorse for their crimes cast doubt about ideas equating feeble-mindedness with criminality.¹⁷³ Additionally, advancements in psychology, sociology, and human genetics undermined the simple hereditary model that had been used when determining the goodness of these policies, forcing many advocates to backtrack and admit that not enough was known about intelligence or mental disorders to permanently institutionalize people for vague traits like feeble-mindedness. By the 1930's, eugenics was largely seen as a crude system for the examination of social problems that could not address the non-hereditary causes that became increasingly evident.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ Emily Wilson, "Eugenic Ideology and Racial Fitness in Queensland, 1900-1950" (University of Queensland, 2003). 70.

¹⁷² Garton. 254.

¹⁷³ Garton. 252.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

Chapter 7: Indigenous Australians and Child Removal

The subjects of education and mental defectiveness were generally believed to be within the traditional realm of eugenics. The policies implemented in these two fields were built upon the idea that those of different inherent fitnesses should be treated differently with preferable treatment given to the most fit. In both education and mental defectiveness, there was a preoccupation in determining how fit an individual was on a continuum and to use this information to encourage a shift in the fitness of the entire population. In education, this manifested in the creation of trade schools and extensive standardized testing. With mental defectiveness, eugenicists championed policies that would prevent the reproduction of those deemed feeble-minded on criteria such as intelligence testing or cranial measurements. In both these fields, eugenics was the primary concern of the majority of those advocating for changes.

However, this was not the case in all subjects. Advocacy relating to the treatment of indigenous peoples tended to be outside the interests of pure eugenicists. When it came to indigenous peoples, discussion did not revolve around the improvement of their fitness or their threat to the average Australian's fitness but how to handle their very presence. While eugenics was brought in to justify some of the policies implemented in the attempt to 'breed out' indigenous peoples, the policies were absorptions in nature and ran directly in opposition to the goals of eugenics.

In this case, the language of eugenics was adopted to give a scientific bent to problems otherwise informed by non-scientific approaches. This haphazard and secondary application of eugenic ideology complicates the study of its history because it obfuscates the true goals of eugenics and requires us to ask what should be considered eugenics. Because eugenics was invoked in advocacy relating to the treatment of indigenous peoples, suitably or not, it would be

incorrect to say unequivocally that the Australian eugenics movement had no hand in policy outcomes.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the methods with which Australia addressed this subject and attempt to dissect the faddist use of eugenic language from legitimate eugenic concerns that may have contributed to public opinion or policy creation

The Case for Aboriginal Protection

By the time transport ships first began landing at Sydney, the Colonial Office in London had repeatedly warned the colony's government officials to avoid conflict with the Aborigines.¹⁷⁵ Arthur Phillip, the first governor of Sydney, had been told to “'conciliate their affections’, to enjoin everyone to ‘live in kindness with them’, and to punish those who would ‘wantonly destroy them’.”¹⁷⁶ However, pastoralism created conflict between the two cultures. The Aboriginal people regarded animals on their land as free for hunting and resisted newcomers claiming private property.¹⁷⁷ Deadly clashes arose under these circumstances that soured relations between the two groups. Additional deaths amongst the Aboriginal population were caused by the introduction of venereal disease and addictive substances such as alcohol, opium, and tobacco.¹⁷⁸

Further problems arose when a lack of available white women met with a sense of imperial superiority. White settlers saw Aboriginal women as an acceptable substitute for white women and began abusing, coercing, and raping aboriginal women.¹⁷⁹ Word of the treatment of the Aboriginal women made it back to a group of abolitionists who turned their attention to

¹⁷⁵ Els Preister-Tinkhof, “Australia, Building a ‘white’ Nation” (Erasmus University, 2015). 29

¹⁷⁶ 93 Dirk Moses

¹⁷⁷ Preister-Tinkhof. 23

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ Preister-Tinkhof. 25

Aboriginal people after the British implemented the Slavery Abolition Act in 1837.¹⁸⁰

Disconcerted by the mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples by white settlers, they established the Aborigines' Protection Society (APS) and successfully lobbied Parliament for the creation of a select committee for Aboriginal affairs. That same year, the Parliamentary Select Committee on Aboriginal Tribes (British Settlements) determined that European influences on the Aboriginal peoples had caused devastating population declines and moral corruption.¹⁸¹ Their official report stipulated the establishment of missions and regional Aboriginal protectors who would provide them with medicine and provisions as well as protect them from abuses. However, no formal power was given to the protectors and the position was ultimately ineffectual.¹⁸²

Following the APS' early advocacy, individual colonies began establishing their own formalized Aboriginal protection legislation. Victoria, Western Australia, and Queensland were the first colonies to adopt "Protection Acts" in 1869, 1886, and 1897 respectively.¹⁸³ In Queensland, the Aboriginals Protection and Restrictions of the Sale of Opium Act was something of an oddity. As its name suggests, the Act restricted the sale and distribution of opium to both the Aboriginal population and the white settlers. However, it also had a secondary purpose in establishing reserves where Aboriginals could be forced to live and defined Aboriginal as every full-blooded Aboriginal inhabitant and all half-castes associating with other Aboriginals.¹⁸⁴ The Queensland Act became the model for similar protective legislation in all other colonies.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ Preister-Tinkhof. 28

¹⁸¹ Preister-Tinkhof. 30

¹⁸² *ibid.*

¹⁸³ Preister-Tinkhof. 31

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Preister-Tinkhof. 32

The Legalization of Child Removal

In 1905, the Aborigines Act of Western Australia established the first Chief Protector of Aborigines who was legally the guardian of every aboriginal and half-caste child under the age of 16. The Chief Protector would then appoint regional protectors who would have similar control in their region. No one was allowed to remove an aboriginal or half-caste child from their reserve or district without written permission of a protector and the marriage of an aboriginal woman to a non-aboriginal man also required the permission of the Chief Protector. Aboriginal men could not marry non-aboriginal women. Finally, the Act allowed the Chief Protector to make policies enabling ‘any aboriginal or half-caste child to be sent to and detained in an aboriginal institution, industrial school or orphanage.’¹⁸⁶

In 1909, an Aborigines Protection Act was passed in NSW that gave the NSW Aborigines Protection Board legal powers to distribute blankets, clothes, and Parliamentary relief funds, provide for the maintenance and education of Aboriginal minors, manage the use of reserves, police the sale of alcohol on reserves, and remove children from their homes for work placements or institutionalization.¹⁸⁷ In 1915, the Act was amended so that children could be removed without a court order or the consent of a guardian.¹⁸⁸

In the Northern Territory from 1911 to 1957 and from 1957 to 1964, full-blooded Aborigines were declared wards of the state and required permits to leave reserves or to have an inter-racial marriage.¹⁸⁹ The Aboriginal people were also prohibited from drinking alcohol, voting, and receiving social security benefits and were not entitled to minimum wages.¹⁹⁰ Similar

¹⁸⁶ Western Australia, “Act No. 14, Aborigines Act of 1905” (1905).

¹⁸⁷ New South Wales, “Act No. 25, Aborigines Protection” (1909).

¹⁸⁸ Elisabeth Wale, “Track the History Timeline: The Stolen Generation,” Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015, <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/track-history-timeline-stolen-generations>.

¹⁸⁹ Russell McGregor, “‘Breed out the Colour’ or the Importance of Being White.,” *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 120 (2002): <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610208596220>. 328

¹⁹⁰ McGregor. 328

policies were held in Queensland, where there was a particular focus on preventing miscegenation, or race mixing.¹⁹¹

With the removal of Aboriginal children legalized, the creation of the “stolen generations” began. The “stolen generations” refers to Aboriginal people who were removed from their families by the Australian government for the sake of assimilation and absorption.¹⁹² Assimilation policies specifically targeted half-castes, or children of mixed decent, with the intention of “breeding out the black”. The theory behind these policies held that full-blooded Aborigines would die out and the Aboriginal traits in the half-caste children “would be absorbed into the white gene pool”.¹⁹³

The Policy of Assimilation

The policy of assimilation was adopted as a national policy in 1937 at the first conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities and stated that “the destiny of the natives of Aboriginal origin but not of the full blood lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and all effort should be directed to that end.”¹⁹⁴ At the same conference, Western Australia’s Chief Protector, A.O. Neville, asked rhetorically “are we going to have a population of 1,000,000 blacks in the Commonwealth, or are we going to merge them into our white community and eventually forget that there ever were any aborigines in Australia?”¹⁹⁵ Final statistics published in the *Bringing Them Home* report conclude that between “one in three and one in ten indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities

¹⁹¹ McGregor. 328

¹⁹² J Faulkner, “Stolen Generations,” Eugenics Archive, 2014, <http://eugenicsarchive.ca/discover/connections/53d8321a4c879d0000000012>.

¹⁹³ Faulkner.

¹⁹⁴ Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, “Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families” (Sydney: The Commonwealth of Australia, 1997). 26

¹⁹⁵ Russell McGregor, “‘Breed out the Colour’ or the Importance of Being White.,” *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 120 (2002): <https://doi.org/10.1080/10314610208596220>. 311

in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970”¹⁹⁶. The policy of assimilation would formally remain in place until 1967 in most states and 1972 in Canberra.¹⁹⁷

Children forcibly removed from their parents were either sent to live with white families or were sent to residential schools where their white blood was their “springboard to civilization and Christendom.”¹⁹⁸ The vast majority of these residential schools were remote and rural, far away from the white people they would be expected to assimilate with. Despite the name residential “school”, very little teaching beyond elementary reading, writing, and arithmetic was done. Most of the days were instead passed away with Christian education and bible study along with menial tasks and chores. In this way, residential schools sought to educate young Aboriginal children to be domiciles whites could approve of. W.E. Stanner, an anthropologist, best enunciated this sentiment when he said that white Australians were using 'education' to bridge the gap between the old way of life and a new way independent of it... The Aboriginal future was to be one of 'development through individualism'.”¹⁹⁹ While the idea may have sounded empowering to the people implementing it, Aboriginal society was, and is, fundamentally communal.

A Eugenic Connection?

Reasoning for this policy changed over the years and by which politician was providing it. The justification that ties eugenics to the Stolen Generations is the theory of race-relatedness. Race-relatedness stated that, contrary to initial beliefs, the Aboriginal people were not a separate race but a primitive stem of the Caucasian race. Under this assumption, Adelaide anthropologist

¹⁹⁶ Commission, “Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families.” 31

¹⁹⁷ Gary Foley, “1930s: Era of Assimilation and Activism,” *Tracker Magazine*, 2011, <http://www.kooriweb.org/foley/essays/tracker/tracker5.html>.

¹⁹⁸ McGregor, “‘Breed out the Colour’ or the Importance of Being White.” 331

¹⁹⁹ Gary Foley, “1950s - Peak of the Assimilation Era,” *Tracker Magazine* (Parramatta, September 2011).

Herbert Basedow suggested that “that because of the close affinity of Aboriginal and Caucasian races, their mixed progeny could be rapidly whitened through successive accessions of white 'blood', without danger of Aboriginal characteristics reasserting themselves in later generations.”²⁰⁰ With this theory, scientists and politicians could support the desire to absorb the Aboriginal population without addressing any possible racial degeneracy that would occur if a white and Aboriginal person produced offspring. This convenient theory ignored all previous eugenic ideology, but kept the scientific tone.

My introduction to this topic occurred in Australia where, on the screen in class on Aboriginal health discrepancies, the professor had pulled up a Punnett square depicting crosses between Aboriginal and white people in an attempt to literally “breed out the black”. The Chief Protector of Western Australia, A.O. Neville, leaned heavily upon the theory of race-relatedness. Like many in his time, he believed that full-blooded aboriginals would die out over time and that they were a ‘doomed race’. For Neville, the theory of race-relatedness provided a solution for what to do with the half-castes that would be left over. For Neville, “complete exclusion was the means for dealing with external threats to the national-ethnic character; radical inclusion provided the solution to internal threats.”²⁰¹ With half-castes and full-blooded Aboriginals visibly eradicated, Australians could forget they ever existed.

²⁰⁰ McGregor. 290.

²⁰¹ McGregor. 295.



A newspaper's report on miscegenation's role in the assimilation policy.²⁰²

The theory of race-relatedness provides a very weak connection to eugenics. The theory itself was contentious and was invoked very rarely by individual besides Neville. Those who supported absorption never argued that “continual accessions of White 'blood' would improve the physical, moral and mental constitution of part-Aborigines in any respect save one - it would make the whiter.”²⁰³ Here, there is no language of ‘fitness’, because the threat that was perceived by Australians was a cultural one. Underneath the scientific language used to justify absorption in the 1920s and 1930s, there was an annoyance that Aboriginal people took up space on a continent ‘owned’ by white people and, if not confined to reservations, could ruin the country’s vision of a ‘White Australia’.

²⁰²“Breeding Out Black Blood,” *The Advertiser*, March 29, 1934. <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article47547227>

²⁰³ McGregor. 299.

After the 1930s, the language used to discuss child removal became focused on cultural assimilation and the usefulness of the Aborigine replaced any aspect of biological absorption. The continuation of the policy under cultural terminology further distances eugenics because it demonstrates that genetic improvement was not a foundational goal of child removal. The Australian National Missionary Conference's (1937) opposition to 'breeding out the color' paired with the continued operation of residential schools by missionaries and church organizations shows that support of child removal did not necessitate support of eugenics.²⁰⁴ The claim by one unnamed Catholic Brother that "our belief was that we were doing something wonderful for these children by providing them with a home" explains the salvation perspective of those actually implemented the policy.²⁰⁵ Overall, very little about the Stolen Generations was a direct effect of eugenic beliefs but was, instead, based on the same racial anxieties that eugenics found its popularity in soothing.

By the end of the government sanctioned child removal policy in 1969, Australia's stolen generation saw at least 10,500 children forcibly removed and placed on missions to be trained as domestic servants.²⁰⁶ On February 13th 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made an official apology on behalf of the Australian government for the policy of child removal.

²⁰⁴ McGregor. 289.

²⁰⁵ C M Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy: Reflecting on Genocide*, Armenian Research Center Collection (New York: Verso, 2003). 93.

²⁰⁶ Calla Wahlquist, "It's the Same Story': How Australia and Canada Are Twinning on Bad Outcomes for Indigenous People," *The Guardian*, February 24, 2016.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

Through the information synthesized throughout this thesis, it has become clear that Australia's eugenics movement was seriously impeded by eugenic pressures unique to its settlement and geography. An analysis of higher education in Australia showcased how eugenics has developed separately in Sydney and Melbourne because of the country's isolated population centers creating a lack of a cohesive eugenics movement. In Sydney, mainline eugenics did not have nearly as much influence as in Melbourne and that work was much more grassroots and environmentally based. The policies and attitudes surrounding mental defectiveness in Australia were less divided – in general, eugenicists tended to agree that mental defectiveness was a national threat. In general, Victorian eugenicists were more radical in approach and proposed sterilization more frequently than any other state in Australia. The influence of the Catholic Church, relatively more dominant in Australia than in Britain due to the large number of Irish convicts sent to Australia, served as an obstacle to passing mental deficiency legislation. The Church did not agree with the genetic inheritance theory eugenics was based upon nor in the dictation of who can or cannot marry or reproduce. The discussion of forced segregation and sterilization in relation to mental defectiveness also brings up Australia's particularly strong commitment to civil liberties and the population's general unwillingness to restrict an individual's freedoms for an abstract whole. An analysis of the child removal policy that targeted Aboriginal children throughout most of the 20th century shows that the policy was quite sinister but only vaguely eugenics. Unfortunately, eugenics lent the policy scientific legitimacy while it was still young and the policy only continued to grow until it abandoned the language of eugenics but not the practice of child removal. In all of these, women played an important role in eugenic advocacy, particularly through the advocacy of the RHA founded by the determined

eugenicist Marion Piddington. The RHA and its supporter, largely women, were very reform minded and focused on racial hygiene, sexual hygiene, and maternal and neo-natal care over any mainline eugenics policies.

All of these groups and issues were legitimized by the Australian settler's concerns about an Asian invasion from the north and their fear that their convict heritage might mean they are genetically inferior. To address these fears, Australian's adopted a strong sense of nativism and cultural identity as being 'white'. Altogether, these factors made Australia's eugenic movement was mostly reform minded with Melbourne, an enclave of mainline eugenics, having very little legislative success. Still, the legacy of eugenics in Australia can be seen the education system throughout Victoria, in both the structure of schooling and in the names that adorn its university buildings.

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