

## Articles

# **The Myth of the Crocodile Dundee: The “White Australian” and the Racialization of Australian Citizenship from 1901-1958**

Ariel Norris  
Liberty University

2022 Winner of the James Madison Award for  
Excellence in Historical Scholarship

Nestled in the geographical region of Oceania, lies the nation of Australia, a country whose history is as rich and complex as its wildlife, ecosystems, and natural resources. Today, one cannot think about Australian culture and identity without subsequently picturing classic icons such as actor Paul Hogan’s beloved character, Crocodile Dundee, of the 1986 film, *Crocodile Dundee*.<sup>1</sup> When *Crocodile Dundee* was released, the film became an instant classic and Hogan became an “international Australian icon, due to his embodiment of this idealized Aussie bloke.” Describing such a ‘bloke,’ Andrea Waling of La Trobe University writes, “He is white, straight, able-

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Waling, “The Myth of the White Aussie Bloke,” La Trobe University, February 10, 2019, <https://www.latrobe.edu.au/news/articles/2018/opinion/t-he-myth-of-the-white-aussie-bloke>.

bodied, and good for a laugh. He is practical and good in a crisis, but generally laid back. He rejects individualism in favour of loyalty to his mates. He is a larrikin and a hater of authority.”<sup>2</sup> Though Crocodile Dundee is a fictional character, the national image he represents portrays a much darker history. Key cultural constructs fed into a misleading national identity known as the myth of the “white Australian” citizen. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Australian government systematically excluded non-white participants from Australian society, culture, and national identity by denying “undesirable” immigrants entry to the country, excluding migrants and Aboriginal populations from the benefits of citizenship, and ignoring the issues minorities faced within the nation.

Simply explained, the myth of the “white Australian” is a constructed cultural identity that embodies Australia’s historical national telos, or societal end goal. However, this national personality excluded Indigenous peoples and non-white immigrants. Reiterating this, in *From White Australia to Woomera*, James Jupp argues that Australian culture is the product of “conscious social engineering to create a particular kind of society.”<sup>3</sup> This “particular kind of society” is exemplified by the myth of the “white Australian,” an ideology that significantly influenced the nascent country’s domestic policies regarding the benefits of citizenship and those deemed worthy of receiving them. Additionally, the “conscious social engineering” refers to White Australia Policy, a series of legislative decisions directly designed to restrict and restrain non-white inhabitants of the country from

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<sup>2</sup> Waling, “The Myth of the White Aussie.”

<sup>3</sup> James Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera: The Story of Australian Immigration*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 5.

entering or becoming citizens.<sup>4</sup> Before one can begin to survey the ways in which the myth of the “white Australian” became legalized through White Australia Policy, one must first comprehend the myth within the abstract, by briefly discussing the country’s historical ethnic composition and cultural identity.

The British migrants to Australia in the 1880s wanted to create a “new colony for Britain” and believed that their “relationship to Australia was as a resource for the empire.”<sup>5</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that “They saw themselves as the first to take control of and manage the land... [they believed] it was the hard work and determination of these early migrants that developed the nation.”<sup>6</sup> This belief was further solidified by the initial lack of ethnically diverse migrants. Despite the fact that Australia was surrounded by non-European settlers, in the territory’s early years, immigration from Indonesia was rare and traffic from India was primarily for “imperialist purposes to plantation economies.”<sup>7</sup> When Britain established a trade colony in Hong Kong in the 1840s, fears of mass Chinese migration to the Australian colonies perforated society and “picked up” clout in the 1850s, when gold fever compelled thousands of Chinese migrants to seek their fortunes in the Victorian goldfields.<sup>8</sup> By the time Australia became a federation in 1901, 20% of its inhabitants had been born overseas, and a significant

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<sup>4</sup> National Museum of Australia, “White Australia Policy,” <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/white-australia-policy>.

<sup>5</sup> Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>6</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 5.

<sup>7</sup> Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Jupp, 7.

minority of these were German and Chinese.<sup>9</sup> However, reflecting efforts to maintain its status as one of the “most British” societies outside of the United Kingdom, Australian social identity became an “Aussie” version of a white British citizen.

There are several key archetypes to highlight when surveying the myth of the “white Australian.” First, “the battler,” an Australian pioneer conquering *terra nullius* and the harsh circumstances faced on the frontier.<sup>10</sup> The second term, the “larrikin,” a mischievous individual that disregards social conventions and authority, but overall has a good heart.<sup>11</sup> Third is the “ocker,” an uncultured or uncouth Australian male. Fourth, the “Aussie bloke:” an ordinary, Australian man, who embodies the true “bushmen” national spirit of hardiness and resourcefulness.<sup>12</sup> These figures are vital to this study, because they characterize the perceived (or constructed) identity of the historical Australian citizen. Furthermore, legends such as “the battler” were perpetuated throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, and receive a reinvigoration after World War II, due to the differentiation it provided in relation to other similar English-speaking nations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jupp, 5.

<sup>10</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 3-4.

<sup>11</sup> L, “Meanings and Origins of Australian Words and Idioms,” Australian National University, <https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/andc/meanings-origins/l>.

<sup>12</sup> O, “Meanings and Origins of Australian Words and Idioms,” Australian National University, <https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/andc/meanings-origins/o>; A, “Meanings and Origins of Australian Words and Idioms,” Australian National University, <https://slll.cass.anu.edu.au/centres/andc/meanings-origins/a>; and “Dawn Of: The Legend,” Australian War Memorial, 2021, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/legend>.

<sup>13</sup> Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive*, 6.

Though national identity in and of itself is not a negative entity; the description of what “this” is and the limitation of what “this” is not, leads to the disassociation and exclusion of traits, peoples, and practices deemed disconnected or ill-fitted to that narrative. By very definition, the pervading myth of the “white Australian” citizen excludes the country’s non-white participants, such as, but not limited to, First Nations peoples; a culture that has lived and thrived in Australia long before white settlement, and Asian immigrants; a group that helped build the nation seen today.

It is tempting to imagine all Australian citizens as the fictionalized knife-wielding, crocodile-rassling “Aussie blokes.” However, that stereotype is unrealistic, homogenous, and represents a history of national oppression for Aboriginal peoples and non-white immigrants. Furthermore, terminology surrounding the “white Australian” image suggests positive ideals of trial-hardened individuals battling the odds, shirking authority, paying no mind to social conventions, all the while having a good laugh with their ‘mates,’ whereas in reality, these ideologies are highly simplified and more accurately represent what the Australian nation *desired* to be, rather than what it truly consisted of.

Though terms and constructed ideas are helpful when attempting to comprehend the larger framework of the narrative, the development of the myth of the “white Australian” as an *idea* is a complex ideology. However, the concept as a *practice* can be clearly traced throughout Australian political history by surveying five pivotal legislative decisions and influential eras: the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, World War I, the Native Administration Act of 1936, World War II, and the Migration Act of 1958. To do so, the study must begin by surveying the relationship between the first inhabitants of

Australia and the individuals that colonized the land.

Long before white settlement, Aboriginal communities have lived and thrived throughout the continent of Australia, celebrating over five hundred different tribes, each with their own language, culture, traditions, and beliefs. Some estimates place the Aboriginal population from anywhere between 300,000 to one million at the arrival of the First Fleet in Botany Bay. However, those numbers plummeted to a mere 40,000 by the 1901 State census and dropped to 20,000 by the first Commonwealth census in 1911.<sup>14</sup> Bruce Elder writes that “it is popular mythology that white Australia is an egalitarian society. It is argued that if Australians occasionally stray from this egalitarianism, it is always to support the underdog... For over 200 years Aboriginal people have been underdogs and battlers yet not once have the white public consciousness been touched by their unhappy position.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, James Jupp argues that not only is the image of Australia a constructed identity, but the country itself is an immigrant society. Jupp claims that without the “continual immigration” present throughout the country’s history, contemporary Australia would look drastically different.<sup>16</sup>

1901 marked a significant year for Australia in several regards. To begin, on January 1, 1901, the territory’s six colonies joined together to create the Commonwealth of Australia. Though still under the British government, with this union Australia was now a self-governing Dominion in the British Empire, with autonomous control of its domestic affairs.<sup>17</sup> Additionally,

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<sup>14</sup> Elder, *Blood on the Wattle*, 256.

<sup>15</sup> Elder, 248.

<sup>16</sup> Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> “A Guide to the United States’ History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, Since 1776: Australia,” Office of

Australia passed the Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act, in an effort to minimize the harmful effects colonization had upon Aboriginal people.<sup>18</sup> Another key development was the passage of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, one of the first legislative publications that legally sanctioned the creation of the “white Australian” identity.

Unfortunately, during this time, Aboriginal Australians were not the only people group to have been left out of the national image of Australian society. In the mid-1800s, white Australians grew bitter over the influx of Chinese immigrants pouring into the country to earn their fortunes in the Australian goldfields.<sup>19</sup> During the gold rush era, the population of Chinese immigrants in New South Wales and Victoria was around 60,000, and, in some areas, comprised a quarter of the local population. By 1861, 3.3% of the Australian colonists had migrated from China.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1855 and 1877, the Australian states of Victoria, South Australia, New South Wales, and Queensland all introduced immigration legislation that discriminated against Chinese migrants.<sup>21</sup> Though the origins of the white Australia policy are long and complex, dating back as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century, in 1901 the first Australian Federal Parliament implemented a national

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the Historian, <https://history.state.gov/countries/australia>.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation: Australia, Canada, and New Zealand* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1995), 18.

<sup>19</sup> A. Dirk Moses, ed. *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004), 104.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Jones, “Chinese-Australian Journeys: Records on Travel, Migration, and Settlement, 1860-1975,” (National Archived of Australia, 2005), [https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/research-guide-chinese-australian-journeys\\_1.pdf](https://www.naa.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-06/research-guide-chinese-australian-journeys_1.pdf), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, “Chinese-Australian Journeys,” 14.

policy that covertly limited non-white migrations to the country to keep Australia “British.” Additionally, in 1901, the government, under first Prime Minister Edmund Barton, passed the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901, which excluded

- (a) Any person who when asked to do so by an officer fails to write out a dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of fifty words in length in any European language directed by the officer;
- (b) any person likely in the opinion of the Minister or of an officer to become a charge upon the public or upon any public or charitable institution;
- (c) any idiot or insane person;
- (d) any person suffering from an infectious or contagious disease of a loathsome or dangerous character...<sup>22</sup>

The law’s stipulations required all immigrants entering the country to pass a dictation test. To succeed in this examination, the immigrant needed to write fifty words in a European language, which was determined at “random” by the immigration officer. After 1905, this legislation was expanded to include all languages, European or not. The primary purpose of this stipulation

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<sup>22</sup> Federal Register of Legislation. *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901*, (Dec 23, 1901), <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C1901A00017>.

was to allow immigration officers to stop people deemed “undesirable” by the Australian government, such as non-white immigrants, and those with a criminal record, with medical issues, or deemed “morally unfit,” to enter the country. If immigrants failed their subsequent test, they were likely to be deported.<sup>23</sup> However, if the immigrant did not pass the dictation test but was deemed “fit” by an officer, they would be permitted to enter the Commonwealth, pending a fine of one hundred pounds and the securing of a certificate of exemption from the Minister, within thirty days.<sup>24</sup>

The Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 was enforced alongside other discriminatory policies such as the practice of registering non-British immigrants as “aliens.” Though the 1901 act was replaced in 1958, the alien registration practice continued until the Racial Discriminatory Act of 1975 banned the discrimination of migrants based on racial grounds.<sup>25</sup> However, more than simply denying immigrants the right to enter the country, migrants within Australia could also be denied citizenship, the right to vote, health and welfare rights, employment opportunities, desirable working conditions, land ownership, and mining licenses.<sup>26</sup> Though these policies kept the “other” out of the country, Australia would not have a clear cohesive national identity until the trials of war established their burgeoning international ranking.

When World War I broke out, Australia had no international procedures. However, their loyalty to the

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<sup>23</sup> “The Immigration Restriction Act 1901,” The National Archives of Australia, <https://www.naa.gov.au/explore-collection/immigration-and-citizenship/immigration-restriction-act-1901>.

<sup>24</sup> Federal Register of Legislation, *The Immigration Restriction Act 1901*.

<sup>25</sup> “The Immigration Restriction Act 1901,” The National Archives of Australia.

<sup>26</sup> Moses, *Genocide and Settler Society*, 105.

Commonwealth pulled them into the conflict, and they allowed Britain to dictate formal foreign policy. C. Hartley Grattan writes that, “While policies had been developed which had international implications, it was not considered that Australia had a foreign policy peculiarly her own; it was rather considered that the Australian policies were in harmony with the larger Imperial interest and as such, their support was part of the general Imperial task, not a unique and separate duty of Australia.”<sup>27</sup> Despite this “hands-off” approach to global affairs, internally, Australia was preparing for the worst-case scenario.<sup>28</sup>

During the early 1910s, fears of the “Yellow Peril” emphasized anti-Asian sentiments, stereotypes, and misconceptions, and permeated Australian parliamentary decisions.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, fears of both external and internal invasion from “enemies of the Empire” – including not only people of Asian descent, but also French, Russian, and German heightened the country’s alarmist tendencies and added greater need for Australia to formulate its own defense force to protect both its own interests and the interests of the Commonwealth.<sup>30</sup> Political theorist Anthony Burke argues that World War I represented a “dark milestone in the imagination of a modern Australian identity.”<sup>31</sup> Additionally, their losses of almost 60,000 men, 65% of their total numbers involved, the highest rate of any Allied nation, convinced the country of its role in the Commonwealth but divided its political leaders. While some wanted to send more men into battle, other leaders became increasingly concerned over the possibility of an

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<sup>27</sup> C. Hartley Grattan, *Introducing Australia* (Sydney: Halstead Press Pty Ltd, 1944), 196.

<sup>28</sup> Hartley Grattan, *Introducing Australia*, 193.

<sup>29</sup> Moses, ed. *Genocide and Settler Society* 106; Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 39.

<sup>30</sup> Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 39.

<sup>31</sup> Jupp, 42.

Asian army waiting to pounce on a war-weakened Australia.<sup>32</sup> However, more important than the divisions in leadership the war created, was the unified militaristic heritage it inspired; the Anzac tradition.

Though Australia began the war as a protector of the Commonwealth's interests, as the conflict progressed, the nation's sacrifices solidified the country's international ranking and societal personality. The Gallipoli landing is one of the most defining moments in Australian history and identity, an image that remains a vital part of contemporary Australian collective memory. From the start of the war, Australians were anxious to earn their position as a global power. This opportunity came on April 25, 1915, when Australian troops landed on the Turkish Peninsula of Gallipoli, obtaining their place in history through a "baptism of fire."<sup>33</sup> Here, troops endured swarms of flies that bred in decaying casualties, ate minimal, unappetizing rations, endured strict water limitations and basic latrines, and battled extreme weather, bouts of lice, dysentery, and inhospitable terrain, all while enduring losses of 44,000 Allied soldiers; 8,700 of who were Australian Anzacs (Anzac being an acronym for the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps).<sup>34</sup> Though the landing was not a resounding victory for Australian troops (or a victory at all for that matter), the event became engrained within Australian memory as the embodiment of the nation's

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<sup>32</sup> Jupp, 43.

<sup>33</sup> "Dawn of the Legend: 25 April 1915," Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn>.

<sup>34</sup> Imperial War Memorial, "Nine Reasons Why Gallipoli Was One of the Worst Fronts of the First World War,"

<https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/9-reasons-why-gallipoli-was-one-of-the-worst-fighting-fronts-of-the-first-world-war>; NZ History, "The Gallipoli Campaign," <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/the-gallipoli-campaign/introduction>.

“courage, endurance, and initiative.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to solidifying the ‘mettle’ of Australian troops, the battle gave birth to the legend of the Anzac. The Australian War Memorial argues that “Many saw the Anzac spirit as having been born of egalitarianism and mutual support. According to the stereotype, the Anzac rejected unnecessary restrictions, possessed a sardonic sense of humour, was contemptuous of danger, and proved himself the equal of anyone on the battlefield.”<sup>36</sup> The Anzac, also known as the “digger,” showed the “bushmen” spirit of a true “Aussie bloke.”<sup>37</sup>

After the bloody landing at Gallipoli and the subsequent eight-month campaign that followed, “Australian” became a cohesive national identity. Exemplified by Australian poet Banjo Paterson’s 1915 work “We’re All Australians Now,” he writes, “The old state jealousies of yore/  
Are dead as Pharaoh’s sow,  
We’re not State children any more —/  
We’re all Australians now!.../  
The mettle that a race can show/  
Is proved with shot and steel,  
And now we know what nations know/  
And feel what nations feel.../  
Our old world differences are dead,  
Like weeds beneath the plough,  
For English, Scotch, and Irish-bred,  
They’re all Australians now!”<sup>38</sup> These lines, embodying the country’s increasing collective personality and national pride, also demonstrate the continuity of the “white Australian” citizen, excluding non-white immigrants and Aboriginal peoples, a trend that would perpetuate for decades to come.

Though World War I solidified the perception of

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<sup>35</sup> “Dawn of the Legend: ‘Worthy Sons of the Empire,’” Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/empire>.

<sup>36</sup> “Dawn of the Legend: The Anzac Spirit,” Australian War Memorial, <https://www.awm.gov.au/visit/exhibitions/dawn/spirit>.

<sup>37</sup> “Dawn of the Legend: 25 April 1915,” Australian War Memorial.

<sup>38</sup> A. B. Banjo Paterson, “We’re All Australians Now,” All Poetry, <https://allpoetry.com/We're-All-Australians-Now>.

Australia as a nation, not all Australians were afforded natural rights of citizenship. Legislation regarding Aboriginal peoples severely limited Indigenous personal autonomy by consolidating Indigenous peoples to settlements and classifying them as wards of the government. In *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation*, Andrew Armitage argues that “Aboriginals were brought to, and effectively confined in, the settlements because they had no other place to live. The expectation of the time was that the original Aboriginal population would eventually die out, and that the settlements would provide a ‘pillow for a dying race.’”<sup>39</sup> Exemplifying this, the Native Administration Act of 1936 stipulated that “Any person who without the authority, in writing, of a protector, removes or causes any native to be removed from one district to another, or to any place beyond the State, shall be guilty of an offense against this Act.”<sup>40</sup> However, this rule did not apply to men over twenty-one that were biracial or less or did not “live after the manner of the original full blood inhabitants of their full blood descendants.” This act also placed orphaned Aboriginal children in the hands of the Commissioner until twenty-one years of age and gave the Minister the right to restrict any native to their reservation, district, institution, or hospital, unless lawfully employed, holding a permit of absence, a female married to a non-native, or deemed “satisfactory” by the Minister.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, this law also restricted non-natives from entering or remaining on Aboriginal reserves (unless given permission), gave the Commissioner power to authorize an examination of

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<sup>39</sup> Armitage, *Comparing the Policy of Aboriginal Assimilation*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Native Administration Act 1905-1936*, National Library of Australia. <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-55208730/view?sectionId=nla.obj-507973199&partId=nla.obj-507430962#page/n0/mode/1up>, 5.

<sup>41</sup> *Native Administration Act*, 5.

Aboriginal people to ascertain if they carried a disease, and, if found infected, gave leaders the power to enforce treatment. Additionally, it dictated the governor could, at any time, “declare any municipal district or town or any other place to be an area in which it shall be unlawful for a native, not in lawful employment, to be or remain...”<sup>42</sup>

In 1942, Paul Hasluck, a historian and politician, compared the rights afforded to Aboriginal people under this law as being closer to a “born idiot than any other class of British subject.”<sup>43</sup> After the Native Administration Act of 1936 was legalized, Aboriginal people could apply for a “Certificate of Exemption” that allowed Native peoples to live among white citizens, move freely throughout the town, and drink at public bars. However, this certificate effectively stripped the holder of their traditional culture and heritage. As part of ABC Open’s Object Stories project, Aunty Dorrie Moore shared her own father’s Certificate of Exemption, issued to him in 1957. The certificate states that:

NEW SOUTH WALES GOVERNMENT ABORIGINES  
PROTECTION ACT, 1909-1943, SECTION 18c.  
[REGULATION 56]  
**CERTIFICATE OF EXEMPTION**  
From Provisions of the Act and  
Regulations

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that [Walter Davis]  
[Half] (caste) Aborigine, aged [42] years,  
residing at [Mantle Hill, Moruya] is a  
person who is in the opinion of the

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<sup>42</sup> *Native Administration Act*, 6-18.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Hasluck, *Black Australians* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1942), 160; and Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians Since 1788* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2020), 259.

Aborigines Welfare Board, ought no longer be subject to the ~~following provisions~~ provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act and Regulations, or any of such provisions, and he/~~she~~ is accordingly exempted from such provisions.

Issued in compliance with the Resolution of the Aborigines Welfare Board and dated the [Twenty-first] day of [May], 195[7].<sup>44</sup>

Though the “Certificate of Exemption,” more commonly referred to as a “dog license,” gave its holder certain rights that were not privilege to many Indigenous peoples, it also stripped the holder of their traditional identity. Dorrie Moore recalls that she was working at the Adelaide Hotel in Moruya, a place where her family was banned without a “dog license,” when her father was awarded the certificate. Moore’s niece, Maureen Davis, stated that “Because once this licence was issued, you couldn’t visit your family who remained on Wallaga Lake Mission. You couldn’t speak the language or practice the culture. Our elders did practice the culture, but it was all kept under lock and key with these licences.”<sup>45</sup> Documents such as the “Certificate of Exemption” reveal Australia’s utter exclusion of Aboriginal peoples as equal participants in the country throughout the mid-1900s. Despite this deeply engrained othering, key events, such as the brewing global conflict, caused a notable shift in the country’s

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<sup>44</sup> Vanessa Milton, “Remembering the Days of the ‘Dog Licence’,” ABC Local, February 5, 2014, <https://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2014/01/31/3935994.htm>; The author has chosen to retain amended words and use brackets to connote the blank fields filled in by the board.

<sup>45</sup> Milton, “Remembering the Days.”

legislation. Whereas World War I inspired the solidification of Australian identity, World War II challenged the limitations of “white Australian” citizenship and aided the eventual broadening of the scope of Australian cultural identity.

When Australia declared war on Nazi Germany in 1939, the country did so as both a separate country and an affiliate of Britain. In 1942, the same year that Paul Hasluck compared Aboriginal rights to those of a “born idiot.” C. Hartley Grattan published *Introducing Australia*, wherein he describes a conversation he conducted with an Australian poet. Regarding the war, the poet stated that,

Australia remains at the core self-reliant, forward-looking, convinced that she has an individual contribution to make to the world future. The present desperate crisis has some extent stimulated her. She knows she cannot go back to the old idea of isolation, the dream of a utopia removed from the world, that nursed her infancy, but, on the other hand, she will not be inhibited by the idea of dependence that paralyzed her in later years.<sup>46</sup>

Whereas in the First World War Australians joined the conflict to aid the defense of the Commonwealth, in the second global conflict, the prime minister stated that the defense of Australia, *by Australians*, would be their primary duty.<sup>47</sup> Though Australia was not prepared for a fight in 1939, throughout the course of the war, the country raised four infantry divisions and corps, in addition to army troops. Some forces were deployed overseas, three army troops to the Middle East, and one split between Malaysia and the islands north of the continent, others were

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<sup>46</sup> Grattan, *Introducing Australia*, 9.

<sup>47</sup> Grattan, 208.

‘surrendered’ to the Royal Air Force to fly against Germany, and some battled in the Atlantic and Mediterranean in tandem with the Royal Australian Navy and the Royal Navy.<sup>48</sup> However, among the men conscripted for battle, some that fought for the freedom of Australia were not free citizens themselves.

When Australia entered World War II, the country’s population held approximately seven million white citizens, 80,000 Aboriginals, and 5,000 Torres Strait Islanders (Aboriginal people of a culturally distinctive region in northern Australia, known as the Torres Strait Islands). Throughout the war, over 850,000 Australians served in the military, including 3,000-8,000 Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders.<sup>49</sup> Because Aboriginal people were not citizens, in most states and under most circumstances, they had no voting rights, and their affairs were decided by State and Federal governments.<sup>50</sup> Whereas regular citizens were subject to compulsory conscription due to the Defence Act of 1909, Aboriginal men, unless culturally disassociated with the Aboriginal community, were not required to

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<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 140.

<sup>49</sup> Until the 1990s, no records were kept to identify Indigenous soldiers in the Australian Defense Force. However, some estimates believe that at least 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders served in World War I and as many as 8,000 during World War II. Additionally, photographic evidence suggests that Aboriginal peoples enlisted in every conflict Australia was involved in, from the Boer War to contemporary battles; Robert G Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe: Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders Recall the Second World War*, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1995), 1; and Bridget Brennan, “Anzac Day: Indigenous Soldiers Thought ‘When we got back we’d be treated differently,’” (ABC News, April 25, 2017), <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-04-25/anzac-day-indigenous-soldiers-shunned-by-society/8468364?nw=0>.

<sup>50</sup> Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe*, 4.

enlist.<sup>51</sup> Despite this, the day after Australia declared war, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders began to volunteer, and throughout the war, thousands of Aboriginal people served in the Australian forces in different capacities, embodying the Australian “digger” spirit.<sup>52</sup> Gary Oakley, the president of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association, argues that whereas non-Indigenous soldiers were fighting for their “King and country,” Aboriginal soldiers were fighting for their homeland.<sup>53</sup>

During the early years of the war, fears that Aboriginal people along the vulnerable northern border would give in to Japanese or Nazi propaganda became commonplace. Historian Kay Saunders argues that throughout the continent, German-born pastors of Lutheran Churches, along with Japanese pearl divers and fishermen in the northern territory, were particularly concerning to white citizens. One report, published in 1943, notes that “On these reserves the Aboriginals... have been in touch with indent [sic] Japanese fishermen from Thursday Island for at least two generations... The Aboriginal on the Peninsula is not aggressive and he would consider the Japanese his temporary master and try to get the best terms he could for himself and his family.”<sup>54</sup> Though these alarmist tendencies were an overreaction, Saunders points out that the reaction itself poses a “semi-humorous” conundrum.<sup>55</sup> Saunders argues that by demanding loyalty

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<sup>51</sup> Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Hall, vi, 4.

<sup>53</sup> Brennan, “Anzac Day.”

<sup>54</sup> Security Report on Cape York Aborigines, 24 March 1943. AA, Canberra, Attorney General's Dept., A 373 file 5903, in Kay Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labour in Northern Australia During the Second World War,” *Labour History* 69 (Nov. 1995).

<sup>55</sup> Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice,” 133.

from Aboriginal peoples and offering no legal grounding for that loyalty through the bonds of citizenship, Aboriginals were asked to “[undertake] obligations bestowed as subjects without any benefits incurred as citizens.”<sup>56</sup> Despite these alarmist fears, Aboriginal men and women did receive the chance to ‘prove their mettle’ in the war.

In April of 1942, anthropologist A.P. Elkin wrote to Prime Minister Curtin that “I think at this juncture we should take every opportunity we can for giving the Aborigines a chance of helping their country, either in the fighting services or as auxiliaries to these services or in factories.”<sup>57</sup> In World War I, hundreds of Aboriginal soldiers volunteered to protect their country. However, in 1939, Aboriginal participation was initially discouraged, out of fear that they might have used their enlistment to apply pressure for rights of citizenship.<sup>58</sup> In June 1941, the head of the Northern Territory Special Operations Section, Lieutenant-Colonel Scott, argued that an Aboriginal unit should be used to guard the Royal Australian Air Force bases on select islands in Arnhem Land, and local people should be mobilized to act as guerilla defense units and coast guards. In the Northern Territory, Aboriginal men patrolled key coastal stretches by boat and on foot but were paid nothing for their services.<sup>59</sup> Despite initial hesitation, Indigenous peoples were gradually implemented into defense forces and Torres Strait Islanders served in the Northern Territory Special Reconnaissance Unit (NTSRU). Additionally, fifty-nine Torres Strait Islanders were used in

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<sup>56</sup> Saunders, 133.

<sup>57</sup> A.P. Elkin to Prime Minister, 2 April 1942. AA, Melbourne, Dept of Army, General Correspondence series, Series MP 508 file 240/701/217, in Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice,” 134.

<sup>58</sup> Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice,” 134; Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Hall, *Fighters from the Fringe*, 11.

the North Australia Observer Unit as horse breakers, airstrip markers, general laborers, and guides, some of whom were paid solely in cheap tobacco, a product nicknamed “Nigger Twist.”<sup>60</sup> Noel Collins, a member of the North Australia Observer Unit, recalls that,

They were trying to do the right thing by us and we tried to treat them as equals but that was hard to do, because in that country they'd lived their lives apart from the white man ... The manager of McArthur River Station was a bit savage on us because he reckoned that we were treating the blacks too well - that we were spoiling them. This manager was the only white man in that district [90 km sw of Borrooloola] and one day he said to us, 'When you fellas move out, we're stuck with the blacks!' In those days then in the Territory, it was nothing to shoot a black if he didn't do the right thing!<sup>61</sup>

Despite the unfair treatment and racial division experienced during the war, Aboriginal people continued to fight for their country.<sup>62</sup>

Well after the close of World War II, Aboriginal Australians were not afforded equal rights as citizens (as exemplified in Walter Davis' 1957 “Certificate of Exemption”). In an interview with ABC news, Garth O’Connell, the secretary of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Veterans and Services Association, recalls that, despite the fact that the Aboriginal Defense Force had equal pay and conditions during the war, when they returned

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<sup>60</sup> Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice,” 135.

<sup>61</sup> Collins, found in Saunders, “Inequalities of Sacrifice,” 135.

<sup>62</sup> Noah Riseman, *Defending Whose Country?: Indigenous Soldiers in the Pacific War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2012), 40.

“they [had] to go back to being just another blackfella back in their communities.”<sup>63</sup> Others interviewed recalled that “If you can imagine my dad [Gunner Suey of the Australian Imperial Force] coming home, serving three years in a Malaysian prison, and his children aren’t allowed to go in the Moree swimming pool.”<sup>64</sup> Though additional legislation giving all Aboriginal people equal rights and the privilege to vote would need longer to take place (1967), the “injustice of permitting an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander man to fight – and possibly die – for his country, but not to vote, was clear to many.”<sup>65</sup> For this reason, in 1949, Prime Minister Ben Chifley amended the Commonwealth Electoral Act of 1918, to allow Indigenous ex-servicemen and women the right to vote in federal elections.

In addition to the small step forward World War II offered to Aboriginal ex-defense forces, in the aftermath of the conflict, pure pragmatism motivated the Australian government to reduce its citizenship limitations to allow diverse migrants and refugees into the country. After the war, the term “populate or perish,” first coined in 1937 by Billy Hughs, was reinvigorated due to the country’s significant losses.<sup>66</sup> Nations with modest populations that suffered from heavy casualty rates realized that migration would be a vital part of their effort to rebuild infrastructure and increase populations. To reinvigorate its national demographics, Australia revisited the nation’s immigration

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<sup>63</sup> Brennan, “Anzac Day.”

<sup>64</sup> Linda Boney, in Brennan, “Anzac Day.”

<sup>65</sup> “Indigenous Australians’ Right to Vote,” National Museum of Australia, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/indigenous-australians-right-to-vote>; “1967 Referendum,” Parliament of Australia, [https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2017/May/The\\_1967\\_Referendum](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2017/May/The_1967_Referendum).

<sup>66</sup> Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 11.

programs. From 1788 to 1996, Britain provided the largest single group of immigrants to Australia, later to be surpassed by New Zealand. However, after World War II, it composed only 32% of the country's total immigration.<sup>67</sup>

Both during and after the war, Australia experienced a significant influx of diverse immigrant populations attempting to flee their war-torn countries. In order to compete with other popular immigration hubs such as Canada and the United States, the Minister for Immigration, Arthur Calwell, approved the admittance of 170,000 displaced persons to Australia, representing the largest number of non-British populations to be accepted at a single time.<sup>68</sup> Additionally, the Parliament of Australia passed the Migration Act of 1958, which replaced the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901 and effectively terminated the dictation test requirement for migrants.<sup>69</sup> Though this legislation presented a significant milestone in regard to dismantling White Australia Policy within the nation, the stipulations under this act were vague and gave little instruction to legislative officials.<sup>70</sup> However, this act established Australia's visa system for migrants entering the country, a system that is still partially in effect. Reflecting this decision, statistics published by the Parliament of Australia reveal that the nation's average annual growth increased from 3.4 percent between 1949-1950 to 4.5 percent in 1971.<sup>71</sup> Though "populate or perish"

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<sup>67</sup> Jupp, *From White Australia to Woomera*, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Jupp, 12.

<sup>69</sup> "Migration Act 1958," Federal Register of Legislation, <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2021C00156>.

<sup>70</sup> "Administrative Decision Making under the Migration Act 1958," Australian National University, <http://press-files.anu.edu.au/downloads/press/p318861/pdf/ch02.pdf>.

<sup>71</sup> Joanne Simon-Davies, "Population and Migration Statistics in Australia," Parliament of Australia, Dec 7, 2018.

promoted pragmatic attitudes towards revising immigrant restrictions, the rise of Australian internationalism was met with severe hostility.<sup>72</sup>

Between 1890 and 1945, the Australian ethnic composition was *perceived* to be 98% British.<sup>73</sup> However, after World War II, the influx of non-British migrants entering the country (52.1% of over 1.2 million migrants),<sup>74</sup> combined with Australia's fading ties to the British empire, led to a rise of 'new nationalism,' a movement in which "Australian" identity a distinct entity, separate from Britain was reimagined to promote *Australian* history, *Australian* film, an *Australian* national anthem, an *Australian* flag, and an *Australian* republic.<sup>75</sup> However, the downfall of British culture created a "vacuum of identity" within Australian society and divided the country between those that embraced its new multicultural composition and those who longed to retain past identities.<sup>76</sup> Reflecting on this era, in 2004 the *Sydney Morning Herald* published an article that said,

For much of [the] last century, this debate was conducted from a position of weakness. We were never too sure of our place in the world. And never too confident about Australia's role and identity...

Until the 1970s, we suffered from the cultural cringe an assumption that our institutions and

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[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/pubs/rp/rp1819/Quick\\_Guides/PopulationStatistics](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1819/Quick_Guides/PopulationStatistics).

<sup>72</sup> Greg Melleuish, "Australian Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," Parliament of Australia, 1.

<sup>73</sup> Melleuish, "Australian Identity."

<sup>74</sup> Simon-Davies, "Population and Migration Statistics in Australia."

<sup>75</sup> Melleuish, "Australian Identity in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," 2.

<sup>76</sup> Melleuish, 2.

culture could never be as good as Europe or North America...

It also took us a long time to come to terms with our history, the good and the bad of white settlement and our relationship with Indigenous Australians... After the progressive economic, social and cultural changes of the last 30 years, Australians have a renewed faith in our national identity. We have a renewed confidence in being Australian, drawing strength from the modern Australian story... A nation agonizing about itself is a nation held back by the weight of insecurity and uncertainty. Rare among the nations of the world, the Australian character is outward-going and confident, a larrikin streak among the conservatism of the international community.<sup>77</sup>

Though this publication sheds light on the nation's progression towards an encompassing national identity, it also reiterates engrained national images such as the "larrikin," that still permeated Australian society into the twenty-first century.<sup>78</sup> Despite the persisting presence of Aboriginal Australian and non-white migrants within the nation, Australian legislature systematically separated Australian and Aboriginal culture, segregated Indigenous populations from Western society, and disallowed "unfit" immigrants to enter the nation. Spurred by racialized stereotypes, disputes for land, and the persisting thought that the Australian Aboriginal would eventually dissipate,

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<sup>77</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, "A big country: Australia's National Identity," April 20, 2004. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/a-big-country-australias-national-identity-20040420-gdisby.html>.

<sup>78</sup> Simon-Davies, "Population and Migration Statistics in Australia."

the Australian government attempted to solve the “Aboriginal problem” and promote white Australian citizenship by limiting Aboriginal autonomy, consolidating groups to reservations, promoting the eradication of Aboriginal culture and identity, and limiting the ethnic composure of the country through restrictive immigration policies.<sup>79</sup> However, despite these actions, Aboriginal people continued to overcome unjust circumstances and non-white migrants continued to reinvent their lives in the Australian nation. Proving this, in May of 1967, over 90 percent of Australians voted ‘yes’ to making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Australian citizens, thereby taking the first step towards true national equality.<sup>80</sup> For hundreds of years, harmful collective ideals, such as the myth of the “white Australian,” have corrupted political legislation and social relations, and have caused more harm to Australian minorities than any war. Wars can be ended with peace treaties or compromises, whereas misguided beliefs can persist within the shadows of a society, causing unfathomable devastation to peoples’ lives, cultures, autonomy, and wellbeing.

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<sup>79</sup> Brennan, “Anzac Day.”

<sup>80</sup> Brennan, Elliot, “On this Day: Indigenous People Get Citizenship.” *Australian Geographic*, Nov 7, 2013. <https://www.australiangeographic.com.au/blogs/on-this-day/2013/11/on-this-day-indigenous-people-get-citizenship/>.