

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EMPIRE

# Drawing the Global Colour Line

White Men's Countries and the  
International Challenge of Racial Equality



MARILYN LAKE  
and  
HENRY REYNOLDS

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## Drawing the Global Colour Line

In 1900 W. E. B. DuBois prophesied that the colour line would be the key problem of the twentieth-century and he later identified one of its major dynamics: the new religion of whiteness that was sweeping the world. Whereas most historians have confined their studies of race-relations to a national framework, this book offers a pioneering study of the transnational circulation of people and ideas, racial knowledge and technologies that underpinned the construction of self-styled white men's countries from South Africa to North America and Australasia. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds show how in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century these countries worked in solidarity to exclude those they defined as not-white, actions that provoked a long international struggle for racial equality. Their findings make clear the centrality of struggles around mobility and sovereignty to modern formulations of both race and human rights.

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*Critical Perspectives on Empire*

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# Drawing the Global Colour Line

*White Men's Countries and the International  
Challenge of Racial Equality*

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Marilyn Lake

*LaTrobe University, Melbourne*

and

Henry Reynolds

*University of Tasmania*



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For our children:

Katherine and Jessica

and

John, Anna and Rebecca





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### Henry Reynolds

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## Introduction

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In 1910, in an article published in a New York journal, the *Independent*, called 'The Souls of White Folk', W. E. B. DuBois, the distinguished black American historian and activist, wrote about his perception of a sudden change of consciousness sweeping the world: 'the world, in a sudden emotional conversion, has discovered that it is white, and, by that token, wonderful'. Suddenly, white folks had become 'painfully conscious of their whiteness', 'the paleness of their bodily skins . . . fraught with tremendous and eternal significance'.<sup>1</sup>

At the meeting of the Pan-African Congress, in London, in 1900, DuBois had memorably declared that the problem of the twentieth century was the 'problem of the color line', an observation that he elaborated in the path-breaking collection of essays called *The Souls of Black Folk*, published in 1903. In the best-known essay, first printed in *Atlantic Monthly* as 'Strivings of the Negro People', DuBois famously defined the condition of the African-American in terms of 'his two-ness – an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings'.<sup>2</sup> White America, he insisted, had a black history of injustice, struggle and unmet longing: 'The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self'.<sup>3</sup>

*The Souls of Black Folk* has been described by an American historian, David Blight, as 'an extended meditation on racial prejudice, political leadership, the economic oppression of black labourers in the South, and the development of African American culture both before and after emancipation'.<sup>4</sup> Historians of the United States now rightly recognise

<sup>1</sup> W. E. B. DuBois, 'The Souls of White Folk', *Independent* (18 August 1910) p.339; this essay was re-published in a revised form in W. E. B. DuBois, *Darkwater, Voices from within the Veil* (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920).

<sup>2</sup> David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois: Biography of a Race 1868–1919* (New York, Henry Holt, 1994) vol.1, pp.279–382.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.281.

<sup>4</sup> David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Belknap, 2001), p.251.

this to be a work of key significance in their national history, but DuBois was also, already, keenly aware of the global dimension of the colour line, which he had defined, in 1900, as ‘the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea’.<sup>5</sup> By 1910, it was also clear to DuBois that the problem of the colour line was the problem of what he called ‘whiteness’, which had recently acquired the force of a charismatic religion: ‘Wave upon wave, each with increasing virulence, is dashing this new religion of whiteness on the shores of our time.’<sup>6</sup>

DuBois saw in this tidal wave of whiteness a new, modern, phenomenon. To be sure, colour consciousness had been present in earlier ages, but ‘the discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing – a nineteenth and twentieth century matter, indeed’. Whiteness provided a mode of subjective identification that crossed national borders and shaped global politics. ‘What is whiteness’, DuBois wondered, ‘that one should so desire it?’ Whiteness, he realised, was fundamentally proprietorial: ‘Whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen.’<sup>7</sup>

This book argues, following DuBois, that the assertion of whiteness was born in the apprehension of imminent loss. Seeking a reason for white folks’ sudden stridency, DuBois noted that around the world, colonised and coloured peoples were everywhere in revolt: ‘Do we sense somnolent writhings in black Africa, or angry groans in India, or triumphant “Banzais” in Japan? “To your tents, O Israel!” these nations are not white. Build warships and heft the “Big Stick”’.<sup>8</sup>

It was the United States president, Theodore Roosevelt, who had advocated the diplomacy of speaking softly and carrying a big stick in response to the triumphant Japanese, whose spectacular naval victory over Russia, in 1905, had deeply dismayed white men, but galvanised colonised peoples everywhere, from Africa, to Asia, to the Americas. In a bid to intimidate Japan, Roosevelt had despatched the United States fleet on a tour of the Pacific Ocean. Its rapturous reception by Australians, in Sydney and Melbourne, was reported in a long article in the New York *Independent*, the same journal that would publish ‘The Souls of White Folk’. ‘It is delightful to us to say’, an Australian journalist, W. R. Charlton, told his New York readers, ‘whether it be delusion, half-truth or the truth-absolute – that the Americans are our kinsmen, blood of our blood, bone of our bone, and one with us in our ideals of the brotherhood of man.’<sup>9</sup> We can probably assume that DuBois, by then living in

<sup>5</sup> Lewis, *W. E. B. DuBois*, p.283.

<sup>6</sup> DuBois, ‘The Souls of White Folk’, p.339.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* p.339.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p.340.

<sup>9</sup> W. R. Charlton, ‘The Australian Welcome to the Fleet’, *Independent* (8 October 1908) p.815.

New York, was one of Charlton's readers. Perhaps he also read reports of the press luncheon in Sydney, where Rear Admiral Sperry had greeted his gratified hosts as a 'white man to white men, and may I add, very white men'.<sup>10</sup>

This book charts the spread of 'whiteness' as a transnational form of racial identification, that was, as DuBois noticed, at once global in its power and personal in its meaning, the basis of geo-political alliances and a subjective sense of self. The emergence of self-styled 'white men's countries' represented whiteness in defensive, but defiant, mode, a response to the rising power of what Charles Pearson, a Liberal politician in the colonial parliament of Victoria, had named, in *National Life and Character: A Forecast*, 'the black and yellow races'.<sup>11</sup> Pearson's prophecy challenged imperial complacency, but as one of his London reviewers noted, Pearson wrote from a different vantage point in the world:

The reader can indeed discern that Mr Pearson's point of view is not London or Paris, but Melbourne. He regards the march of affairs from the Australian point of view, and next to Australia what he seems to see most clearly is the growth of Chinese power and of the native populations of Africa. In this forecast, in fact, Europe loses altogether the precedence it has always enjoyed. It appears here as not only the smallest, but as the least important continent.<sup>12</sup>

In his arresting commentary on changing world forces, Pearson was indeed, to use Dipesh Chakrabarty's phrase, 'provincialising Europe'.<sup>13</sup>

Pearson's apprehension of a postcolonial world in which white men would be 'elbowed and hustled, and perhaps even thrust aside' by peoples whom they looked down upon as servile, set alarm bells ringing around the globe. In his own alarmist tract, *The Rising Tide of Color*, published nearly two decades later, an American, Lothrop Stoddard, paid tribute to Pearson's book as 'epoch-making' and hailed the 'lusty young Anglo-Saxon communities bordering the Pacific – Australia, New Zealand, British Columbia, and our own "coast" as pace-setters in declaring themselves "All White"'. Nor were their policies separate developments. 'Nothing was more striking', Stoddard noted, 'than the instinctive and instantaneous solidarity which binds together Australians and Afrikanders, Californians and Canadians, into a "sacred Union" at the mere whisper of Asiatic immigration'.<sup>14</sup> Stoddard was lobbying for what would become the Johnson Act of 1924, which has usually been

<sup>10</sup> *Age* (27 August 1908).

<sup>11</sup> Charles Pearson, *National Life and Character: A Forecast* (London, Macmillan, 1893).

<sup>12</sup> *Athenaeum* (4 March 1893).

<sup>13</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincialising Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Lothrop Stoddard, *The Rising Tide of Color: Against White World Supremacy* (New York, Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923) p.281.

understood within the framework of US national history, but is better illuminated when placed in the larger frame of the transnational solidarities of which Stoddard himself wrote.

In recent scholarship, 'whiteness studies' have emerged as a productive new field of historical enquiry, but most investigations have conceptualised their subject within a national frame of analysis, identifying local dynamics at work within histories deemed distinctive or even exceptional.<sup>15</sup> Studies that now acknowledge the necessity for a global context still confine their own analyses within a national interpretative frame and that has been especially the case with United States scholarship.<sup>16</sup> But, as DuBois and contemporaries on the other side of the colour line saw clearly, the emergence of the 'new religion' of whiteness was a transnational phenomenon and all the more powerful for that, inspiring in turn the formation of international movements of resistance, such as the pan-African and pan-Asian alliances that threatened to bring about the very challenge to their world dominion that white men feared.<sup>17</sup>

In *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, we trace the transnational circulation of emotions and ideas, people and publications, racial knowledge and technologies that animated white men's countries and their strategies of exclusion, deportation and segregation, in particular, the deployment of those state-based instruments of surveillance, the census, the passport and the literacy test. The project of whiteness was thus a paradoxical politics, at once transnational in its inspiration and identifications but nationalist in its methods and goals. The imagined community of white men was transnational in its reach, but nationalist in its outcomes, bolstering regimes of border protection and national sovereignty. A project that took shape in international conversations about inter-racial encounters increased isolationism. Thus one somewhat dismayed observer was moved to describe the Commonwealth of Australia as a 'Hermit Democracy', cutting itself off from all international intercourse.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> On 'whiteness' see, for example, Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993); David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, Verso, 1991); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1999); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (St Lucia, University of Queensland Press, 2000). On the influence of external ideas on national formations see, for example, Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Mae N. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Viator, 'Asia Contra Mundum', *Fortnightly Review* (1 February 1908) p.200.

<sup>18</sup> 'Australian Ideals', *The Times* (5 September 1908), Deakin papers 1540/15/2567 National Library of Australia (NLA).



In drawing the global colour line, immigration restriction became a version of racial segregation on an international scale, as Lothrop Stoddard memorably stated. Not surprisingly, the education or literacy test, first used to disenfranchise black voters in Mississippi in 1890, also became the basis of United States immigration restriction laws, promoted by Anglo-Saxonists such as Henry Cabot Lodge and the members of the Boston-based Immigration Restriction League, legislation which served in turn as a model for Natal and the other British Dominions. The republican origins of the literacy test as an instrument of racial exclusion were significant. In dividing the world into white and not-white it helped render the imperial non-racial status of British subjects increasingly irrelevant and provided a direct challenge to the imperial assertion that the Empire recognised no distinction on the basis of colour or race, that all subjects were alike subjects of the Crown. This book is also, then, about the British betrayal of the idea of imperial citizenship.

Histories of immigration policy, like studies of whiteness, have usually been told as self-contained national stories, their dynamics located in distinctive local reactions against particular groups of foreign immigrants – whether Chinese, Indian, Islanders, Japanese, Jews or southern Europeans. Some historical studies have, to be sure, identified parallel developments in Australasia, British Columbia and New Zealand and on the west coast of the United States.<sup>19</sup> Usually, however, their stories have remained parallel, rather than dynamically inter-connected and thus mutually formative. What most histories have tended to miss is what DuBois could see clearly, that is, the significance of racial identifications to the constitution of modern political subjectivities and ways of being in the world, in a process that shaped white men's sense of collective belonging to a larger community, joined together by what Theodore Roosevelt always liked to call 'fellow feeling'.<sup>20</sup>

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

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Charles Price, *The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836–1888* (Canberra, ANU Press, 1974); Robert A. Huttenback, *Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Coloured Immigrants in the British Self-Governing Colonies 1830–1910* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976); Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred: Purifying Australia and California 1850–1901* (Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> See Theodore Roosevelt, 'Fellow Feeling as a Political Factor', in Theodore Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life: Essays and Addresses* (London, Grant Richards, 1902) pp.71–87.

instruments the novel and newspaper. Anderson stressed the affective, as well as the imaginary, dimension of national identification, which he imagined, significantly, as 'fraternal'.<sup>21</sup> Paradoxically, one outcome of Anderson's argument has been to naturalise the nation as *the* imagined community of modern times, an effect that has obscured the ascendancy of transnational racial identifications and their potency in shaping both personal identity and global politics. This book seeks to elucidate the dynamics and effects of a transnational project that sought, in effect, dominance over four continents, an ambition that led one commentator to warn that the new solidarity of white men would drive Chinese and Indians into an unprecedented pan-Asiatic alliance, led by Japan, that would ultimately see the eclipse of Western civilisation.<sup>22</sup>

The idea of the 'white man's country' emerged in the context of nineteenth-century imperialisms and the great modern migrations that saw some 50 million Chinese, the same number of Europeans and about 30 million Indians migrate to new homes around the world. A large proportion of these voyagers went to South Africa, the Americas and Australasia, to lands taken by force from their Indigenous inhabitants, who were systematically displaced or destroyed. Migration rested on and required Aboriginal dispossession.

White men claimed a special right to lands in the 'temperate zone', claims made against their Indigenous inhabitants and all those peoples they would designate as 'not-white', including Afghans, Chinese, Indians, Japanese, Syrians and Pacific Islanders. Though recently established, white men's countries sought legitimacy through locating themselves in the long tradition of Anglo-Saxon race history that dated back to the mythic glories of Hengist and Horsa. They shared an English-speaking culture and newly ascendant democratic politics, priding themselves, as Anglo-Saxons, on a distinctive capacity, indeed a genius, for self-government. It was their commitment to democratic equality that made racial homogeneity seem imperative. In the tradition of J. S. Mill, they argued that democracy could only survive in the absence of distinctions of caste and colour.

White men's countries rested on the premise that multiracial democracy was an impossibility: this was the key history lesson learnt from the great tragedy of Radical Reconstruction in the United States, propounded by numerous writers including the British Liberal politician and historian, James Bryce, whose *American Commonwealth* was taken up as

<sup>21</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (revised edition, London, Verso, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> Viator, 'Asia Contra Mundum', p.200.

a 'Bible' by white nation-builders in Australia and South Africa.<sup>23</sup> Bryce also wrote about the countries of Latin America, which were ineligible for membership of the white men's club: their Spanish or Portuguese ancestry, their mixed-coloured populations and political instability were regarded as regrettable, but related, disqualifications, regardless of their own aspirations.

White men's countries emerged in the radical challenge posed by democracy and trade unionism to hereditary aristocratic privilege. This was an age when 'glorious manhood asserts its elevation', in the words of New South Wales republican poet, Daniel Deniehy, when pride of manhood found expression in pride of race to enshrine the white man as the model democrat. In the New World encounters of diverse peoples, the masculine democracies of North America and Australasia defined their identity and rights in racial terms: the right of Anglo-Saxons to self-government and the commitment of white workers to high wages and conditions, against those they saw as undermining their new-found status, whether they be aristocrats or 'coolies'. In their social and political experiments in equality – and with 'state socialism' in Australasia – they were utopian in their modernist vision.

When glorious manhood asserted its elevation, white men monopolised the status of manhood itself. Coolies, Islanders, Asiatics and Blacks were cast as not simply deficient as workers, colonists and citizens, but also as men. They were docile, servile, dependent, unfree. Hence, the struggles of coloured and colonised men to achieve recognition, or restitution, of their manhood as well as national independence. For example, Indian nationalists, such as Lajpat Rai, frequently charged that British rule was 'sapping our manhood . . . polluting the very foundations of our manhood', while DuBois told the Universal Races Congress, in 1911, that 'the present Negro problem of America' was 'whether at last the Negro will gain full recognition as a man'.<sup>24</sup>

Chinese and Japanese campaigns for an end to racial discrimination were, on the other hand, more likely to invoke the equality of nations enshrined in international law. When Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, the authors of *The Chinese Question in Australia*, cited the 'illustrious Vattel' and other authorities on the equality of

<sup>23</sup> James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (New York, Macmillan, 1888).

<sup>24</sup> *Nationalities and Subject Races Conference Report* (London, King and Son, 1910) pp.27–8; W. E. B. DuBois, 'The Negro Race in the United States of America', in G. Spiller (ed.), *Inter-Racial Problems* (London, King and Son, 1911) p.364. See also Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali' in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Manchester and New York, Manchester University Press, 1995); Radhika Mongia, 'Gender and the Historiography of Gandhian Satyagraha in South Africa', *Gender and History* (vol.18, 1, April 2006).

sovereign nations and their obligations of reciprocity under international law, local Australian democrats responded by insisting on their sovereign right to self-government, to say who could or couldn't join their political community.<sup>25</sup> Against the sovereignty of nations, or emperors, white men invoked the status of the elevated sovereign masculine subject.<sup>26</sup> International treaties, guaranteeing freedom of movement, were attacked precisely for detracting from the sovereignty of autonomous self-governing men.

Immigration restriction became the quintessential expression of the masculine sovereignty of 'self-governing communities', a popular formulation that worked to collapse the distinction between independent republics and British colonies, thereby recasting the meaning of sovereignty itself. 'It should be stated', the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* advised its readers, 'that the six separate Australian colonies, though nominally under British rule, are practically, each of them, separate republics, electing their own legislatures by universal suffrage, levying and expending their own revenues, and each one of them separately making their own laws'. In aristocratic societies, such as China, treaties might be maintained against popular wishes, advised the editor, but not so in Australia or America, where 'the power of the people' was supreme.<sup>27</sup>

In Australia, Alfred Deakin constantly intoned the mantra of Victorian and later, Australian self-government against Colonial Office interference and presumption. In 1908, he provocatively praised Theodore Roosevelt's leadership in discharging his responsibilities 'to the lasting benefit of your fellow citizens of the United States and of all self-governing people, especially this new Commonwealth of Australia', the national name chosen precisely for its American republican resonances.<sup>28</sup> The figure of the 'white man', in whose name white men's countries were forged, was produced in a convergence of imperial and republican discourse that found political expression in the late nineteenth century in talk of an Anglo-American alliance. Previous studies have charted racial discourse across the British Empire or drawn attention to the links between the anti-Chinese policies of California and the Australian colonies, but few have analysed the inter-relationship of British and American racial regimes in

<sup>25</sup> Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, *The Chinese Question in Australia 1878-79* (Melbourne, F. F. Bailliere, 1879) p.28.

<sup>26</sup> See James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, Duke University Press, 2004) p.103.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Evening Bulletin* (10 April, 29 July 1878).

<sup>28</sup> Deakin to Roosevelt, Deakin papers, NLA, MS 1540/15/3909). For the American associations of 'Commonwealth', see Marilyn Lake "'The Brightness of Eyes and Quiet Assurance Which Seem to Say American"', Alfred Deakin's Identification with Republican Manhood', *Australian Historical Studies*, 129 (April 2007).

the same analytical frame.<sup>29</sup> Yet, crucially, the idea of the ‘white man’s country’ crossed and collapsed the imperial/republican divide, drawing on the discursive resources of both traditions to enshrine the dichotomy of white and not-white. The British Empire drew a distinction between ruling and ruled races; republican ideology drew a distinction between races fit and not fit for self-government. United States naturalisation law rested on the dichotomy of white and not-white.

In the figure of the white man, the imperialist became a democrat and the democrat an imperialist. The Australian prime minister, Alfred Deakin, commended the statement of the New Zealand prime minister, Richard Seddon, about the British Empire:

though united in the whole, [the Empire] is, nevertheless, divided broadly in to two parts, one occupied wholly or mainly by a white ruling race, the other principally occupied by coloured races who are ruled. Australia and New Zealand are determined to keep their place in the first class.<sup>30</sup>

When writing about the necessity of American rule in the Philippines in *The Strenuous Life*, Theodore Roosevelt pointed to the composition of the population: ‘half-caste and native Christians, warlike Moslems, and wild pagans. Many of their people are utterly unfit for self-government, and show no signs of becoming fit. Others may in time become fit, but at present can only take part in self-government under a wise supervision, at once firm and beneficent.’<sup>31</sup>

One indicator of the global ascendancy of the politics of whiteness was its ability to recast the previous multiplicity of nations, races and religions – Aryan, Caucasian, Chinese, Hindus, Kanakas, Islanders, Malays, Blacks, Lascars, Moslems, Japanese – in binary terms as ‘white’ or ‘not-white’. English-speaking countries were pace-setters in this regard. Thus, in 1902, the French government wrote to the British Foreign Office to enquire whether the Japanese should be categorised as white or not-white.<sup>32</sup> Japan considered their categorisation as not-white a grievous injury: ‘The Japanese belong to an Empire whose standard of civilization is so much higher than that of Kanakas, Negroes, Pacific Islanders, Indians or other Eastern peoples, that to refer to them in the same terms cannot but be regarded in the light of a reproach, which is hardly warranted by the fact of the shade of the national complexion’, wrote the

<sup>29</sup> For a recent exception see Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States and the Philippines* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

<sup>30</sup> *Morning Post* (28 May 1906), in J. A. LaNauze (ed.), *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900-1910* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1968).

<sup>31</sup> Roosevelt, *The Strenuous Life*, p.9.

<sup>32</sup> Foreign Office to Colonial Office, Enclosure, M. Cambon to Lansdowne, 24 September 1902. CO 885/8/1.

Japanese consul in Sydney to the Australian government in 1901.<sup>33</sup> Again, as DuBois noted, the effect of the dichotomy of white and not-white was to say that not-white was ‘nothing’.<sup>34</sup>

Recent postcolonial scholarship has established the importance of viewing metropolitan and colonial formations within the same analytical frame. In our study, the binary of metropole and colony – like Europe itself – loses its analytical primacy, as we trace the circulation of knowledges and the production of identities in formative encounters in New World communities bordering the Indian and Pacific oceans, in relations between Asian powers and white men’s governments, between Indian and South African imperial subjects, in Durban and London, between an American philosopher and an Australian political leader in the Blue Mountains in New South Wales, between republican citizens and British colonists in Vancouver, Seattle and Washington. Our book explores the influence of key thinkers and political leaders, such as Charles Pearson, James Bryce, Lowe Kong Meng, Theodore Roosevelt, W. E. B. DuBois, M. K. Gandhi, Tokutomi Soho, W. M. Hughes and Jan Smuts. We look at the discursive frameworks that shaped race thinking and justified racial exclusion, as well as the diverse ways in which the peoples thus excluded argued the injustice of what one Chinese diplomat at the Universal Races Congress in 1911 called the ‘White Policy’.

White racism was attacked on different grounds, from different vantage points, with critics drawing on different discursive resources. They variously quoted international law, cited the equality of imperial subjects, the principle of racial equality, the rights of man(hood) and the idea of non-discrimination. They organised international conferences, such as the Universal Races Congress, formed pan-African and pan-Asian movements and called for international covenants on racial equality and human rights. Importantly, international campaigns for racial equality and human rights often began as a response to the barriers to mobility and other racial discriminations enacted by New World democracies in the nineteenth century. In charting these demands our book suggests a new genealogy of human rights. It also points to the importance of the diasporic experience of Chinese and Indian colonists, patriots in exile such as Gandhi and Sun Yat Sen, in shaping nationalist agendas.

Nineteenth-century commentators were preoccupied with the implications and consequences of the unprecedented encounters of diverse peoples, made possible by new steam-powered transport technologies that,

<sup>33</sup> Eitaki to Prime Minister Edmund Barton, 3 May 1901, CO 418/10, UK National Archives.

<sup>34</sup> DuBois, ‘The Souls of White Folk’, p.339.

in James Bryce's words, had the effect of 'making the world small'.<sup>35</sup> In his influential Romanes lecture, published in 1902, Bryce argued that the far closer and more widespread contact of peoples in modern times, 'in particular of the more advanced and civilized races with the more backward', was so fraught with danger 'that it may be deemed to mark a crisis in the history of the world, which will profoundly affect the destiny of mankind'.<sup>36</sup> Writing from the other side of the colour line, DuBois shared this sense of urgency. In 1910, he joined other members of the newly established National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, to found a magazine they named *Crisis*. 'It takes its name', declared the first editorial, 'from the fact that it is a critical time in the history of the advancement of man.'<sup>37</sup> This book explains that sense of historical crisis and the political struggles that defined, or attempted to erase, the global colour line.

One outcome of the political mobilisation of white men was the increasing dissension within the British Empire between self-governing white Dominions and the imperial subjects of India, a conflict that ultimately forced British political leaders, threatened by the prospect of the United States assuming leadership of a new white men's alliance, to 'come out', as it were, as 'white'. By 1919, at the Paris Peace conference, the leaders of the British delegation, the aristocratic A. J. Balfour and Lord Robert Cecil, followed their fellow white men – the alliance of the United States, Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and Canada – in defeating Japan's bid to have a racial equality clause included in the Covenant of the League of Nations. In support of their position, Balfour declared that he did not believe in the eighteenth-century proposition that 'all men are created equal': 'He believed it was true in a certain sense that all men of a particular nation were created equal, but not that a man in Central Africa was created equal to a European.'<sup>38</sup>

Following the Second World War, in which Japan vanquished the British fortress at Singapore and sent bombing raids over Hawaii and Australia, the conferences called to establish the United Nations and draw up a Universal Declaration of Human Rights, chose to frame their conception of human rights, not in terms of the equality of nations or races, as Japan had proposed twenty years earlier, but in the French and

<sup>35</sup> James Bryce, 'The Relations of History and Geography', *Contemporary Review* (Jan-Jun 1886) p.442.

<sup>36</sup> James Bryce, *The Relations of the Advanced and the Backward Races of Mankind*, Romanes lectures (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1902) pp.6–7.

<sup>37</sup> Editorial, 'The Crisis: A Record of the Darker Races', *Crisis* (vol.1, 1910).

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*, cited in David Armitage, *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2007) p.276.

American traditions of the rights of individuals and the principle of non-discrimination, enunciated in 1929 by the Institut de Droit International. Still, two decades would pass before the erstwhile white men's countries moved, in response to concerted domestic and international pressure, to abolish racially discriminatory immigration policies and outlaw racial segregation within their borders. As the recent experience of asylum seekers and refugees attests, this process is not yet complete.

Old fears now return in new forms. James Bryce's anxiety about the 'world made small', about the consequences of mobility and the unprecedented encounters of different peoples, re-awakens. The United States plans to build a fence along its Mexican border, Australia imprisons asylum seekers on offshore islands and riots engulf French cities that are home to thousands of Muslim immigrants from Africa. As Europe is drawn into the New World so multiculturalism loses its appeal in countries with immigrant minorities; everywhere there is renewed talk about national values, social cohesion and the necessity of border protection. In Iraq, the United States, Britain and Australia fight together in a 'coalition of the willing' that recapitulates the Anglo-Saxon solidarity of earlier times with devastating consequences. This book charts the emergence of the transnational community of white men in the globalised world of the late nineteenth century.



*Part 1*

Modern mobilities



# 1      The coming man: Chinese migration to the goldfields

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## **Lowe Kong Meng arrives in Melbourne to find prosperity and prejudice**

In 1853, Lowe Kong Meng, a young Chinese merchant and master of his own ship, arrived in the port of Melbourne, in the British colony of Victoria, carrying cargo from Mauritius. Gold had been discovered in the colony just two years earlier and the rush to be rich had begun. Immigrants poured in from around the world. The area around Melbourne was the traditional country of the Kulin people, but British settlers arriving across Bass Strait in 1835, proceeded, on the basis of a dubious treaty with the traditional owners, to occupy the land along the Yarra River and the rich pastoral country that lay beyond.

Within a couple of decades, local Indigenous communities were overwhelmed by the disease, dispossession and violence that accompanied colonial settlement. Survivors living near Melbourne were forced to reside on the swampland on the outskirts of the bustling new city. The logic of settler colonialism invariably meant displacement, if not extermination, of Indigenous peoples.<sup>1</sup> British colonists assumed a right of entitlement secured by the imperial relations of racial domination.

Melbourne residents had celebrated their separation from New South Wales with the passage of the Australian Colonies Government Act in 1850; with extensive rolling pastures and fertile agricultural land the colony's future looked assured. Then the discovery of vast new mineral wealth attracted hundreds of thousands of fortune-seekers, including merchants and traders, like Lowe Kong Meng, who were keen to provide goods and services to the rapidly expanding market. In just three years, between 1850 and 1853, the Victorian population quadrupled, shipping increased sevenfold and the value of imports twentyfold.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4) (2006) pp.387–409.

<sup>2</sup> L. G. Churchward, *Australia and America: An Alternative History* (Sydney, Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1979) p.52.

The United States joined Great Britain as a major source of imports and immigrants. In the year Lowe Kong Meng sailed into the port of Melbourne, 143 American ships anchored in Hobson's Bay and 40 per cent of imports came from the United States. American merchants, including George Francis Train, formerly a Boston shipping agent, helped revive the ailing Chamber of Commerce. Melbourne, he declared, 'though situated so far out of the way, cannot fail to be a great city'.<sup>3</sup>

Lowe Kong Meng also saw great commercial opportunities in this southern outpost, and for Chinese merchants, Australia was not so far out of the way. Though only twenty two years of age, Lowe Kong Meng was already a successful businessman, trading between Mauritius and Calcutta (Kolkata) in the Indian Ocean and Singapore and Canton (Guangzhou) in the South China Sea. After a brief tour of inspection of the goldfields, he departed for India, returning the following year with fresh merchandise, with which he set up shop. Kong Meng & Co. sold tea and other provisions from a building in Little Bourke Street, in the heart of Melbourne's Chinatown. Like several thousand other Chinese who arrived in the Australian colonies that year, Lowe Kong Meng came and went freely; no-one asked for papers or passport or proof of naturalisation.

Born in the Straits Settlements to Lowe A Quee, a merchant, and his wife, Chew Tay, Lowe Kong Meng was a British subject whose forbears, like the majority of Chinese who would seek gold in Victoria, came from the Sze Yap district near the port of Canton, long a centre of Arab, Malay, Siamese and European shipping and trade. Educated in Penang and Mauritius, Lowe Kong Meng was well read in world literature and could speak English and French fluently. A loyal son of the Sze Yap district, he was also a man of the world and an exponent of what he would call 'cosmopolitan friendship and sympathy'.<sup>4</sup> His sympathies only stretched so far, however. Family legend had it that on one occasion, when accosted on the goldfields by a ruffian, who addressed him in pidgin, he explained that he would be very pleased to converse in French, Chinese or English, but that he did not understand his assailant's peculiar lingo.<sup>5</sup>

Many languages, dialects and accents could be heard among the 'colourful medley of polyglot nationalities' that mingled on the

<sup>3</sup> G. Francis Train, *An American Merchant in Europe, Asia and Australasia*, quoted in Norman Harper (ed.) *Australia and the United States* (Melbourne, Nelson, 1971) p.22.

<sup>4</sup> Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, *The Chinese Question in Australia 1878-79* (Melbourne, F. F. Bailliere, 1879) p.30.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Selby, *The Old Pioneer's Memorial History of Melbourne: From the Discovery of Port Phillip Down to the World War* (Melbourne, Old Pioneer Memorial Fund, 1924) p.147.

Victorian goldfields in the 1850s.<sup>6</sup> Hundreds of thousands of people arrived from all over the world. By the end of the decade, the population of the colony had increased fivefold. Most newcomers sailed from Europe, the majority from Britain and Ireland, but there were also large numbers of Germans at the diggings and smaller groups of French and Italians, including Carboni Raffaello, whose book, *The Eureka Stockade*, provided one of the most lively accounts of goldfields politics.<sup>7</sup> The Swiss miners concentrated at Daylesford, while Scandinavians supported their own club and newspaper at Ballarat. Several thousand goldseekers also crossed the Pacific from California, where gold had been discovered in 1849. Many Australian prospectors lured to the Californian goldfields now returned. These were mobile, multicultural and largely masculine communities.

The Victorian goldfields, like those on the west coast of the United States, New South Wales and, later, Queensland, also attracted thousands of Chinese fortune-seekers keen to share in the bonanza. By 1852, according to the United States census, there were 25,000 Chinese miners in California, and, as in the case of Victoria, nearly all came from Guangdong Province.<sup>8</sup> During 1852 and 1853, a few hundred arrived in Victoria, then the number quickly increased, with around 10,000 Chinese landing in Melbourne in 1854. Most of those who left Canton for Victoria in the early 1850s were farmers and traders, mostly literate and with some money of their own.<sup>9</sup> Others made use of the so-called credit-ticket system whereby Chinese bankers and merchants lent money for fares that had to be repaid. The 'Gold Mountain' of California and the 'New Gold Mountain' of Australia promised sudden fortunes.

### **Victoria looks to California, but leads the way in immigration restriction**

In both Victoria and California there had been protests in the late 1840s against the attempted landing of convicts, a presumed source of moral contamination. The sudden arrival of large numbers of Chinese prompted discussions of a different kind of threat, the danger posed by aliens or foreigners. A tax on alien miners was introduced by the

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851–1861* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, 1977) p.75.

<sup>7</sup> Carboni Raffaello, *The Eureka Stockade* (Melbourne, Melbourne University Press, [1855] 1969).

<sup>8</sup> Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1973, first published 1939), p.12.

<sup>9</sup> Lowe Kong Meng, Minutes of Evidence, *Report of the Select Committee on Chinese Immigration* (Legislative Council, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers* (VPP), 1857) p.10.

Californian legislature in 1850, disallowed the following year, and introduced again in 1852, the same year in which a landing tax was introduced, payable by the ship's master for each alien passenger.<sup>10</sup>

American miners also took direct action against the Chinese, forming numerous vigilante committees to drive the alien race away by force.<sup>11</sup> Possessed by 'a presumptuous spirit of monopoly', American miners were intent on clearing 'the entire mining region of Celestials' as one San Francisco newspaper noted.<sup>12</sup> As yields declined, Chinese labourers increasingly congregated in San Francisco, where they found success in the laundry and restaurant business. Anti-Chinese agitation began to centre on complaints of cheap labour, low wages and unfair competition.<sup>13</sup> Industrial employment as well as gold were claimed as the exclusive preserve of white men.

Agitation against the Chinese in Australia was frequently inspired by the example of California.<sup>14</sup> A significant proportion of the miners on the Victorian fields had come directly from the lawless districts of the Pacific Slope and they often carried their preference for direct action with them. The Americans were better armed than the majority of the diggers and more ready to use their guns to defend their property and interests. In Bendigo, in 1854, where 2,000 Chinese were digging among a group of 15,000 miners, agitators suggested that a mass action take place on American Independence Day: 'a general and unanimous uprising should take place in the various gullies of Bendigo the 4th July next ensuing, for the purpose of driving the Chinese population off the Bendigo gold-fields'.<sup>15</sup> Cooler heads prevailed and the demonstration was postponed, but hostility simmered. In Ballarat, the American propensity for guns was evident in the formation of the Independent Californian Rangers Rifle Brigade, about 200 strong, which was involved in organising military drill prior to the miners' revolt over licence fees, that culminated in the battle at the Eureka Stockade at the end of 1854.

On the Californian and Victorian goldfields, European miners criticised the Chinese because of their alien customs, clannishness, pagan

<sup>10</sup> Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, pp.41–2.

<sup>11</sup> Andrew Markus, *Fear and Hatred Purifying Australia and California 1850–1901* (Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1979) p.4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp.3–4.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Price, *The Great White Walls are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australasia, 1836–1888* (Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1974) p.62; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, ch.2.

<sup>14</sup> For pioneering studies of comparisons and connections between Australian and American responses to Chinese on the goldfields, see Price, *The Great White Walls are Built* and Markus, *Fear and Hatred*.

<sup>15</sup> Serle, *The Golden Age*, pp.322–3.

rituals, lack of women, labour competition and fast increasing numbers.<sup>16</sup> Increasingly, their objections were couched in the language of race and colour. In a significant move, in 1854, the Californian government introduced a new tax on alien miners, that in exempting those eligible for naturalisation, effectively classified and targetted the Chinese as non-white.<sup>17</sup> (Under the United States law of 1790, naturalisation was restricted to 'free white persons'.) Invoking the same binary logic of white and not-white, the Californian Supreme Court ruled that Chinese could not give evidence against a white man, because the legislation providing that 'no Black, or Mulatto person, or Indian, shall be allowed to give evidence' also applied to the Chinese, being of the same 'Mongolian type' as Indians.<sup>18</sup> In categorising blacks, Indians and Chinese as not-white, the Californians were also defining themselves, not just as Americans, but as 'white men', invoking a sense of self with which miners in the Australian colonies quickly identified.

At the end of 1854, in Victoria, following the Eureka uprising in which several miners and soldiers were killed, the Victorian government appointed a Commission of Enquiry to investigate the turbulent conditions of the goldfields. It emphasised the part played by foreign elements in fomenting the rebellion: 'The foreigners formed a larger proportion among the disaffected than among the miners generally. It seems certain that some of their number acted a very prominent part in regard particularly to the drilling with firearms – a lawless form of demonstration'. The main 'foreigners' the Commission had in mind here were Irish, Americans and Germans, but another group also came to the Commission's attention: 'large numbers of a pagan and inferior race'. By that time, the Chinese comprised about one-sixth of all gold-diggers, but the reported statement by one of their number that 'all' his fellow countrymen were coming to Australia pointed to 'an unpleasant possibility of the future', warned the Commission. A 'comparative handful of colonists' would be 'buried in a countless throng of Chinamen'.<sup>19</sup> The radical newspaper, the *Age*, similarly alarmist, suggested that colonists faced an 'invading army'.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See, for example, Anon, *The Chinese Question Analyzed; with a Full Statement of Facts: By One Who Knows* (Melbourne, Steam Press, Fairfax and Co., 1857).

<sup>17</sup> Price, *The Great White Walls are Built*, p.63.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*; Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, p.45; Charles J. McClain and Laurence Wu McClain, 'The Chinese Contribution to the Development of American Law', in Sucheng Chan (ed.) *Entry Denied: Exclusion and the Chinese Community in America, 1882-1943* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1991) p.4.

<sup>19</sup> Legislative Council, Commission to enquire into the conditions of the goldfields of Victoria (Official Reports and Documents, VPP, 1855) p.6.

<sup>20</sup> Markus, *Fear and Hatred*, p.23.

The Commission of Enquiry deplored the 'degrading customs' and 'vicious tendencies' of the Chinese, including their 'custom of acting in concert' and their tendency to 'cling strictly together as such a race is apt to do in the midst of its superiors'. Ironically, new regulations required all Chinese diggers to reside together in specially designated camps, thus confirming critics' accusations that they failed to assimilate into the broader community. The Commission recommended a Californian-type tax to 'check and diminish this influx', but the Victorian government also introduced the first form of 'immigration restriction', utilising, at the suggestion of the Colonial Office, the British Passengers Act, that limited the number of passengers for health and safety reasons to one passenger for every two tons of ship's burthen. In 'An Act to make provision for certain Immigrants' in 1855, the number of 'immigrants' permitted to land was restricted to one for every ten tons of ship's burthen and 'immigrant' was defined as 'any male adult native of China or its dependencies or any islands in the Chinese Seas or any person born of Chinese parents'. The lawlessness of the goldfields focussed attention on the dangers of difference and dissidence. In acting to exclude Chinese men from the colony, Victorian legislators were also affirming that the ideal colonist was European, civilised and a family man.

With the passage of the first Immigration Restriction Act in 1855, the Victorian government was also challenging prevailing British and international doctrines of freedom of movement and reciprocity of treaty rights. When the Victorian governor advised the Colonial Office that the law didn't violate the Treaty of Nanking of 1842, because it neither prohibited Chinese from landing nor denied them full protection and liberty, British officials agreed, noting that the inflow was formidable enough to justify the measure.<sup>21</sup> Meanwhile, in California, efforts to implement similar immigration restrictions were frustrated when the Supreme Court ruled that legislation to restrict or prohibit Chinese immigration was unconstitutional, because it encroached on federal jurisdiction over foreign commerce and immigration.

In Victoria, the Immigration Restriction Act, though not disallowed, proved ineffective, because ships' masters evaded the law by detouring to the neighbouring colony of South Australia, where Chinese passengers were off-loaded just over the border, thence to complete their long journey to the goldfields on foot. Many died on the arduous walk, but with thousands of Chinese fortune-seekers still arriving in Victoria, their

<sup>21</sup> Price, *The Great White Walls are Built*, pp.69–70; for a suggestion of British complicity, see Robert A. Huttenback, *Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Colored Immigrants in the British Self-Governing Colonies 1830–1910* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1976) pp.61–2.



population on the goldfields continued to grow. When South Australia also passed restrictive legislation in 1857, Chinese gold-diggers travelled to Victoria via New South Wales and by the end of the decade their number in the southern colony had reached 45,000.<sup>22</sup>

Agitation against the Chinese continued. In 1857, for example, a public meeting at Geelong 'numbering not less than one thousand persons' sent a petition demanding the parliament 'check any further increase of the Chinese race in Victoria'; the Local Court at Castlemaine presented a Memorial against the 'Chinese influx' while miners at a goldfield named 'Jim Crow' near Ballarat collected 345 signatures in favour of Chinese exclusion.<sup>23</sup> Not all protest was so constitutional. In the same year, at Ararat in western Victoria, where Chinese overlanding from South Australia had discovered one of the richest alluvial leads in the colony, their tents and stores were burned by European competitors and they were forced to abandon their new ground.

Two months later, again on American Independence Day, a small group of white miners on the Buckland River determined to evict more than two thousand Chinese from the river valley in north eastern Victoria. With acts of 'brutal violence and base robbery', they drove the Chinese eight miles down the valley, leaving three dead from drowning and others injured. According to a local newspaper:

Eye-witnesses told of ruffianly behaviour, unmanly violence and unbounded rapacity. One said he had seen Chinamen knocked down and trampled on; another said he could have walked dry shod across the river on the piles of bedding with which its surface was covered and its current interrupted just before the Lower Flat.<sup>24</sup>

European miners once again asserted their presumed proprietorial rights to the land and its wondrous store of precious minerals.

Lowe Kong Meng had invested in and worked the Majorca goldmine, soon after his return to Victoria in 1854, but as he told the Select Committee into Chinese Immigration in 1857, his treatment at the hands of other miners was 'very bad'.<sup>25</sup> He suffered further misfortune when the Europeans burned the Chinese tents at Ararat, where he had stores, and he lost three to four hundred pounds. When the Select Committee asked him about the arson and violence at Ararat, suggesting that robbery must

<sup>22</sup> Estimates varied. See William Young, 'Report on the Condition of the Chinese Population in Victoria', *VPP* (56/1868) p.50; see also Geoffrey A. Oddie, 'The Chinese in Victoria, 1870-1890', M.A. thesis (School of History, University of Melbourne, 1959) p.9.

<sup>23</sup> Petitions, 15 July and 12 August 1857, *VPP* (1856-7).

<sup>24</sup> *Ovens and Murray Advertiser* (8 July 1857), quoted in Serle, *The Golden Age*, p.326.

<sup>25</sup> Lowe Kong Meng, Minutes of Evidence, p.12.

also occur in China, he replied: 'This is not robbery ... They burnt all the tents to try and keep away the Chinese from that place'.<sup>26</sup>

Like many of his fellow countrymen settled into the Melbourne community, Lowe Kong Meng was a merchant turned migrant. By 1857, there were about forty Chinese merchants working in the city, mostly importing provisions – rice, tea and sugar – from China to sell to their compatriots as they headed to the goldfields. Most Chinese migrants left their wives and families at home and sent money back, hoping to commute at regular intervals. Their plans to return to China and come back again – 'to live both here and there' – took freedom of movement for granted.<sup>27</sup> If they stayed for ten years or so in the new country, they might bring their families to live with them, but in Victoria, by 1857, the Chinese diggers were too frightened to contemplate such a move. 'I do not think they would bring their families to settle here under any circumstances now', Lowe Kong Meng told the Select Committee.<sup>28</sup>

Writing later about the complaint that Chinese men weren't true colonists because they didn't bring their wives and families with them, Lowe Kong Meng, with co-authors Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy, asked: 'Can it be wondered at?' Reports of the scandalous treatment of Chinese miners on the Buckland River had gone back to China. How could it be imagined, they asked:

when the news of this atrocity went home to China, any woman of average self-respect would expose herself to be chased through the country by a band of infuriated ruffians, and to see her children burnt to death, perhaps, in her husband's flaming tent? Treated as pariahs and outcasts by the people of this great, 'free' country, the Chinamen in Victoria have hitherto had but scanty encouragement to invite their wives to accompany or to follow them. Subject to be insulted and assaulted by the 'larrikins' of Australia, what Chinaman could be so destitute of consideration for the weaker sex as to render them liable to the same ignominious and contumelious treatment?<sup>29</sup>

In 1860, Lowe Kong Meng married a European woman, Mary Ann, the daughter of William Prussia from Tasmania, and they would eventually raise twelve Australian children. In 1863, in recognition of his service to the local Chinese community, the Chinese Emperor awarded Lowe Kong Meng the title of mandarin of the blue button, civil order. With fellow countryman Louis Ah Mouy, he was also a founding director and major

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> C. Y. Choi, 'Chinese Migration and Settlement in Australia with Special Reference to the Chinese in Melbourne', Ph.D. thesis (Australian National University, 1971) pp.40–1; on Chinese mobility see Adam McKeown, *Chinese Migration Networks and Cultural Change: Peru, Chicago, Hawaii, 1900–1936* (Chicago, University of Chicago, 2001).

<sup>28</sup> Lowe Kong Meng, *Minutes of Evidence*, p.11.

<sup>29</sup> Lowe Kong Meng *et al.*, *The Chinese Question in Australia*, p.19.

shareholder of the Commercial Bank of Australia. Both men were leading advocates for their community and encouraged their fellow countrymen to join them in their new land.<sup>30</sup>

### **Freedom of movement: international treaties and transnational solidarities**

The long nineteenth century was the great age of global mobility. According to Patrick Manning, the period between 1850 and 1930 was the most intensive period of migration in human history.<sup>31</sup> The burgeoning fortunes made possible by economic liberalism fostered remarkable freedom of movement, while the advent of steam ships and railways made travel cheaper and faster. Millions of people left Europe, China and India and travelled to North and South America, South East Asia, the East Indies, the West Indies, Australasia and the Pacific. Adventurous and ambitious, cowed or courageous, people travelled in pursuit of work, to make a new life, to provide fresh opportunities to their families or simply to satisfy their curiosity about foreign lands.

Modernity meant mobility. In the United States, future president Theodore Roosevelt's paean to nineteenth century progress focussed on the liberation afforded by modern travel. 'The ordinary man of adventurous tastes and a desire to get all out of life that can be gotten', he wrote, 'is beyond measure better off than were his forefathers of one, two, or three centuries back. He can travel round the world; he can dwell in any country he wishes; he can explore strange regions.'<sup>32</sup> Although the freedom to 'dwell in any country' was, as this book shows, a privilege increasingly reserved for whites, more than 50 million Chinese embarked for new lands in these decades, an equal number of Europeans and about 30 million Indians.<sup>33</sup>

With the abolition of slavery during the first half of the nineteenth century, new sources of cheap labour were needed for colonial plantations, mines and industry. Millions of Indians were recruited as contract labourers to work in British colonies in the Caribbean, South East Asia, South Africa and the Pacific, becoming effectively the global working class of the British Empire. But Indians also travelled individually, for education, to pursue their profession, to do business and to see the world.

<sup>30</sup> Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration between the United States and South China, 1882–1943* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Manning, *Migration in World History* (New York, Routledge, 2005) p.149.

<sup>32</sup> Theodore Roosevelt, 'National Life and Character' in Theodore Roosevelt, *American Ideals and Other Essays Social and Political* (New York, Publisher, 1897) pp.274–5.

<sup>33</sup> Manning, *Migration in World History*, p.149.

Millions of Chinese were also recruited to work in the British, Dutch and Spanish Empires. Although the Chinese Emperor formally prohibited the emigration of his subjects to barbarian lands, China had been forced to engage in trade and treaties with Western powers following the first Opium War in 1840–42.<sup>34</sup> Under the terms of the Treaty of Nanking, Britain opened five Treaty Ports – Amoy, Canton, Fuzhou, Ningbo and Shanghai – and Hong Kong became a Crown colony. In allowing the British to ‘hire any kind of Chinese person who may move about in the performance of their work or craft without the slightest obstruction of Chinese officials’, the Treaty effectively imposed freedom of movement.<sup>35</sup>

In their pamphlet *The Chinese Question in Australia*, written in 1879 to defend Chinese rights of migration and settlement, Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy referred to the significance of British imperial intervention. It was the British who had forced their way into China in pursuit of trade in opium and tea and who said, in effect: ‘We must come in, and you shall come out. We will not suffer you to shut yourselves up from the rest of the world.’<sup>36</sup> It was the British who had incited the Chinese to engage with the world and who invited them to travel and work in their colonies.

From the 1840s, Chinese merchants had themselves invested in plantations, tin mines and trade in South East Asia and recruited contract workers from home. From 1847, the Spanish began transporting labourers from the ports of Macau and Amoy to Cuba and Peru. During the next three decades, shiploads of so-called Chinese ‘coolies’ were sent across the seas to labour in Singapore, the Straits Settlements, the Americas, Hawaii and the West Indies, but contract labour was complemented by the credit ticket system and other modes of voluntary emigration, notably to Australasia and North America.

In the case of migration to settler societies, emigrants usually left overcrowded countries with a low standard of living for places where labour was scarce and resources abundant, lands where settlement was often made possible by the ongoing and taken for granted dispossession of Indigenous peoples. In their account of Chinese migration to Australia, Lowe Kong Meng, Cheok Hong Cheong and Louis Ah Mouy explained

<sup>34</sup> Yen Ching-Hwang, *Coolies and Mandarins: China’s Protection of Overseas Chinese during the Late Ch’ing Period (1851–1911)* (Singapore, Singapore University Press, 1985) ch. I.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Godley, ‘China’s Policy Towards Migrants, 1842–1949’, in Christine Inglis *et al.* (eds.) *Asians in Australia: The Dynamics of Migration and Settlement* (Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1992) p.3. On the role of humiliation in British imperial domination of China, see James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham/Hong Kong, Duke University Press/Hong Kong University Press, 2003) pp.74–118.

<sup>36</sup> Lowe Kong Meng *et al.*, *The Chinese Question in Australia*, p.4.

the decision in terms of the logic of taking up empty lands in their own region of the world. When they had heard that:

there was a great continent nearly half as large again as China, and containing only a few hundreds of thousands of civilized people thinly scattered around the coast; that it was rich in precious metals and very fertile; and that it was only a few weeks' sail from our own country, numbers of Chinese immigrants set out for this land of promise.<sup>37</sup>

In China, they advised, with a population of more than 400 million, many men, women and children died each year from starvation. Australia comprised an area of close to 3 million square miles, but its population was small: 'no more than 2,100,000 white people, and a few thousand blacks'. In the 'face of those facts', they asked their fellow colonists:

Would you seek to debar us from participating in the abundance with which a bountiful Providence – or, as our Master Confucius says, the most great and sovereign God – rewards the industrious and the prudent in this country? Did man create it, or did God?

Whoever had created Australia, white men were certain that 'this land of promise' belonged to them. It seemed fortuitous that the original inhabitants appeared destined to fade away before the superior forces of civilisation and progress.

In fact, the Aboriginal population had been decimated by the rapidity of dispossession in Victoria, where a lack of natural barriers meant that settlers moved onto Aboriginal lands 'as fast as any expansion in the history of European colonisation'.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the goldrush decade, the Aboriginal population had fallen to less than two thousand people, the survivors mostly living on reserves or missions. In Melbourne, one Chinese resident observed sorrowfully that: 'eight out of every ten of the Yarra Yarra tribe, the late possessors of the soil on which the great City of Melbourne is built . . . are dead'.<sup>39</sup> Alarmed by the possibility of teeming hordes coming from China, some Europeans feared that they, in turn, might be overwhelmed.

In this age of economic liberalism, international treaties provided the framework in which reciprocal rights of freedom of commerce and movement were claimed by the British, other Europeans, the United States and also by the Chinese.<sup>40</sup> In 1860, the Convention of Peking (Beijing)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p.5.

<sup>38</sup> Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 2005) p.97.

<sup>39</sup> Anon, *Brother Shem or the Wrongs of the Chinese* (Melbourne, Goodhugh and Hough, 1857) p.9.

<sup>40</sup> On the imperial context of international treaties, see Antony Anghie, *Imperialism, Sovereignty and International Law* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005).

contracted between the British and Chinese governments extended rights of freedom of movement and guarantees of protection for persons and property in each other's Empires. British pressure on Australian colonists to adhere to the new treaty provisions led the colonies to repeal their initial discriminatory legislation, with Victoria complying in 1865 and New South Wales in 1867.

In 1868, the Burlingame Treaty between the United States and China went even further than the British treaties in recognising freedom of movement and migration as universal rights: 'the inherent and inalienable right of man to change his home and allegiance and also the mutual advantage of the free migration and emigration of their citizens and subjects respectively from one country to the other for purposes of curiosity, of trade or as permanent residents'.<sup>41</sup> In California, however, few citizens could see the mutual advantage of free migration and the ensuing campaign of opposition to the Treaty was relentless.

The struggle over free migration highlighted the contradictions inherent in political liberalism. Individual liberty and freedom of movement were heralded as universal rights, but only Europeans could exercise them.<sup>42</sup> The conflict also highlighted competing and changing understandings of sovereign rights. The Chinese cited the 'illustrious Vattel' to invoke their sovereign rights as a nation bound by treaty under international law. As John Fitzgerald has pointed out, to Chinese readers Emmerich de Vattel and other authorities on international law guaranteed the equality of nations and provided a framework in which they would demand equality of treatment.<sup>43</sup> Californians and Australians, by contrast, utilised a republican discourse on the rights of the sovereign male subject to insist on their democratic right to determine who could join their self-governing communities.

As the San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin* explained to its readers, of all those parts of the world where the Chinese had gained a footing, 'the Australian colonies most resemble California'. Thus, the experience of Australia 'becomes valuable to us':

<sup>41</sup> Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement*, pp.78–9.

<sup>42</sup> Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999); Ann Curthoys, 'Liberalism and Exclusionism: A Prehistory of the White Australia Policy', in Laksiri Jayasuriya, David Walker and Jan Gothard (eds.) *Legacies of White Australia: Race, Culture and Nation* (Crawley, University of Western Australia Press, 2003).

<sup>43</sup> John Fitzgerald, 'Introduction', in Sechin Y. S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (eds.) *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition and Honor in East Asian Nationalism* (Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2006); Emmerich de Vattel, *The Law of Nations or Principles of the Law of Nature, Applied to the Conduct and Affairs of Nations and Sovereigns: From the French of Monsieur de Vattel* (Philadelphia, Johnson and Co., [Leyden, 1758] 1883).

Though nominally under British rule, the six separate Australian colonies are practically, each of them, separate republics, electing their own legislatures by universal suffrage, levying and expending their own revenues and each one of them separately making their own laws subject only to the veto of the British authorities, when such laws are opposed to British treaties with other nations.

Importantly, however, whereas 'in aristocratic forms of Government [such as in China] treaties may be maintained against popular wishes', in democracies, 'the power of the people is supreme and cannot be reduced or signed away in whole or in part'.<sup>44</sup>

Anti-Chinese campaigners in California and Australia also drew on the supporting discourse of Anglo-Saxonism to argue that the capacity for self-government was the preserve of the Anglo-Saxon race.<sup>45</sup> The Chinese, characterised collectively as contracted coolies and servile labour, were said to lack the manly independence and self-possession necessary to participate as individuals in a representative democracy. 'The Chinaman is by tradition and education a monarchist', declared the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 'regarding aristocracy as the only reasonable form of government; and he thrives best under its sway . . . For the elective franchise he is entirely unfit, not would he care for the privilege of exercising it if thrust upon him'.<sup>46</sup> When anti-Chinese activists thus campaigned against the Chinese as colonists, citizens and workers, they also impugned their manhood. 'Rice-eating men', declared Australians and Californians in chorus, had neither the rights nor responsibilities of masculine 'beef-eating' men.

International doctrines of freedom of movement thus collided with the ascendant democratic power of white manhood. In an age when 'glorious manhood asserts its elevation', in the words of republican Australian poet Daniel Deniehy, Chinese labour, represented as docile and servile, was cast as a profound threat to the new-found status of the independent, upright, working man, a figure increasingly coded as 'white'.<sup>47</sup> The elevation of manhood in the democracies on the Pacific Coast was thus forged in the molten mix of global migration, class politics and a discourse on racial difference. International doctrines of freedom of movement and the treaties that guaranteed it provoked strong resistance from self-styled 'white men's countries', a proprietorial formulation used successively against Indigenous peoples, Chinese, Indians and ultimately all those labelled as Asiatics.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>44</sup> *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 10 April, 29 July 1878.

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998) pp.26–31.

<sup>46</sup> *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 26 September 1878.

<sup>47</sup> Daniel Deniehy, quoted in *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 August 1853.

<sup>48</sup> Price, *The Great White Walls are Built*, p.62.