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Introduction: Creating White Australia: new perspectives on race, whiteness and history

Abstract

As the promulgation of the White Australia Policy in 1901 would seemingly demonstrate, 'whiteness' was crucial to the constitution of the new Australian nation. And yet historians have paid remarkably little attention to this in their studies of Australia's past. 'Whiteness', as a concept, has only recently been recognised as a significant part of the story of Australian nationalism. In seeking to understand the operations of 'race', historians have primarily looked towards Indigenous peoples and other 'non-white' groups. *Creating White Australia* takes a fresh approach to the questions of Australian national formation and the crucial role of race in Australian history. Including contributions from some of the leading scholars in Australian history as well as the work of emerging historians, it argues that 'whiteness' has been central to the racial regimes which have so profoundly shaped the development of the Australian nation.

Keywords

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Introduction

Creating White Australia: new perspectives on race, whiteness and history

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As the promulgation of the White Australia Policy in 1901 would seemingly demonstrate, 'whiteness' was crucial to the constitution of the new Australian nation. And yet historians have paid remarkably little attention to this in their studies of Australia's past. 'Whiteness', as a concept, has only recently been recognised as a significant part of the story of Australian nationalism. In seeking to understand the operations of 'race', historians have primarily looked towards Indigenous peoples and other 'non-white' groups. *Creating White Australia* takes a fresh approach to the questions of Australian national formation and the crucial role of race in Australian history. Including contributions from some of the leading scholars in Australian history as well as the work of emerging historians, it argues that 'whiteness' has been central to the racial regimes which have so profoundly shaped the development of the Australian nation.

This collection is the first to draw together an array of studies dealing with the question of whiteness in Australian history as their central theme. It demonstrates that Australia's racial past can only be understood by recognising whiteness too as 'race'.

By revealing what 'white' meant in a particular place and time, each of these chapters contributes to the elucidation of how race and whiteness have, in effect, 'created' the historical, geographical and imagined entity

known as Australia. They show the multiple, and often contradictory, ways in which whiteness was understood, manifested, and seen, and, sometimes, how it failed to be seen. The new understandings they offer have considerable significance for how we approach the question of race in Australian history, as well as its more recent operations. Many chapters explore the colonial origins of whiteness, and its growing dominance, which culminated in the adoption of the White Australia Policy as the foundation of the new Australian nation. Others pursue the continuing evolution and impact of whiteness into the 20th century, from the heyday of White Australia through to more recent times, revealing the enduring nature of these racial structures. From the relationship between white identities and British identities and the destructive impact of colonisation in the Australian colonies, to the broader dynamics which shaped race relations in settler colonies, to the 'half-caste' menace and policies of biological absorption, to Indigenous resistance to the impositions of whiteness and racial classifications, to white interpretations of Aboriginal cultural practices, to the 'hidden' histories of the Chinese on the goldfields. From studies of the ambivalent figure of William Buckley (the escaped convict who lived with the Wathurung people for 30 years), to the recurrent stories of Aboriginal infanticide, to the eugenic obsession with creating an ideal white race in the early 20th century, to the appropriation of Aboriginal women's life stories by white writers in the 1970s. These chapters pursue the study of whiteness into previously uncharted territory—particularly into missionary contexts, and in terms of the relationship between women, gender and whiteness.

But the purpose of this book is certainly not to reposition white people at the centre of historical narratives. The devastating impact of whiteness on those deemed 'not-white' is at the heart of this book. The studies presented here show how whiteness was given meaning only in relation to 'other' races, and the attributes of power and privilege it accrued had severe implications for these groups. They thus provide

important new insights into the experiences particularly of Indigenous Australians, but also other 'non-white' groups such as the Chinese.

This work, of course, has not emerged in a vacuum. It has its roots in the spate of foundational works of whiteness studies which appeared in the United States in the early 1990s. David Roediger's 1991 publication, *The wages of whiteness*, was quickly followed by what would become equally influential works by Toni Morrison, bell hooks, Ruth Frankenberg and Cheryl Harris.¹ As Eric Arnesen has noted, since this time, 'Few branches of the humanities and social sciences have escaped the increasing gravitational pull of "whiteness studies"'.² Where previously 'race' had been seen only to refer to 'others', this scholarship established whiteness too as racial category, and one that was in urgent need of interrogation. As Richard Dyer has put it, 'As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples ... [white people] function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people'.³ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Australia's leading scholar in this field, has similarly observed: 'As long as whiteness remains invisible in analyses "race" is the prison reserved for the "Other"'.⁴ In other words, race has primarily been viewed as a problem only for 'non-white' people. Thus Ruth Frankenberg argued that to 'speak of whiteness is ... to assign *everyone* a place in the relations of racism' since it is 'more difficult for white people to say

¹ David Roediger, *The wages of whiteness: race and the making of the American working class* (London/New York: Verso, 1991); bell hooks, 'Representations of whiteness in the literary imagination', in *Black looks: race and representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992); Toni Morrison, *Playing in the dark: whiteness and the literary imagination* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Cheryl I. Harris, 'Whiteness as property', *Harvard Law Review* 106.8 (June 1993): 1707–91; Ruth Frankenberg, *White women, race matters: the social construction of whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

² Eric Arnesen, 'Whiteness and the historian's imagination', *International Labor and Working-Class History* (Fall 2001), 2. Homi Bhabha similarly remarked upon the 'blizzard of "whiteness studies"': Homi K. Bhabha, 'The white stuff', *Artforum* 36 (1998): 24.

³ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1.

⁴ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the white woman: Aboriginal women and feminism* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xix.

“Whiteness has nothing to do with me—I’m not white” than to say “Racism has nothing to do with me—I’m not a racist”.⁵ These insights have important ramifications for the study of Australian history, which the essays in this volume pursue in diverse ways. In doing so, they offer significant new perspectives.

Most studies of whiteness are based in present-day America. While this work has revealed the hegemonic and structural, but often invisible or disavowed, power of contemporary whiteness, the obviously important facts both of its historical formations and its manifestations in diverse locations across the globe have tended to be overlooked. While much American scholarship remains determinedly insular, some work from outside, and to a lesser extent from within, the United States, has pushed whiteness studies in important new directions.⁶ As Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Maryrose Casey and Fiona Nicoll have argued, ‘whiteness is a transnational process of racialization, which exceeds containment within fixed boundaries of identity and nation.’⁷ It cannot then be understood only through narrowly American-centred analyses. And there is indeed a significant and growing body of scholarship on contemporary Australian formulations of whiteness, which this collection clearly builds on. Largely due to the influence of Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Australian scholars have produced the largest body of contemporary whiteness scholarship outside of the United States.⁸ The key difference of this Australian work,

⁵ Frankenberg, 6.

⁶ See for example Alfred Lopez, ed., *Postcolonial whiteness: a critical reader on race and empire* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), which analyses constructions of whiteness in the postcolonial world (where postcolonial is used in its temporal sense); Sara Ahmed, ‘A phenomenology of whiteness’, *Feminist Studies* 8.2 (2007): 149–68; Lynette Russell and Margery Fee, “‘Whiteness’ and “‘Aboriginality’” in Canada and Australia: Conversations and Identities’, *Feminist Theory* 8.2 (2007): 187–208.

⁷ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Maryrose Casey and Fiona Nicoll, ‘Introduction: virtue and transnational whiteness’, in *Transnational whiteness matters*, eds. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Maryrose Casey and Fiona Nicoll (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), x.

⁸ See for example *The Australian Critical Race and Whiteness Studies Association Journal*, 2005; Susanne Schech and Ben Wadham, eds. *Placing race and localising whiteness*,

as Moreton-Robinson notes, is its focus on the colonial context and Indigenous dispossession. '[T]he problem with American literature,' she observes, 'is that it tends to locate race and whiteness with the development of slavery and immigration rather than the dispossession of Native Americans and colonization ... there is a refusal within the American work to acknowledge America as a former colony of Britain.'⁹

Despite its obvious implications for history, and more particularly the history of European colonialism, whiteness studies have remained overwhelmingly concentrated on contemporary contexts.¹⁰ As Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus have argued, while recently the terms 'white' and 'whiteness' have been widely adopted by historians, 'the specificities of how, historically, white identity was formed and shaped are only starting to be examined.' There is still a clear need for whiteness to be more robustly historicised.¹¹ Most of the small corpus of historical

(Adelaide: Flinders University, 2004); and other works cited in this introduction. The implications of this Australian scholarship, however, have yet to be addressed within American whiteness studies, most of which remains determinedly insular. For further discussion on this see Jane Carey, Leigh Boucher and Katherine Ellinghaus, 'Historicising whiteness: towards a new research agenda', in *Historicising whiteness: transnational perspectives on the construction of an identity*, eds. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus, (Melbourne: RMIT Publishing, 2007), vi–xxiii; Jane Carey, Leigh Boucher and Katherine Ellinghaus, 'Re-orienting whiteness: a new agenda for the field', in *Re-orienting whiteness: transnational perspectives on the history of an identity*, eds. Leigh Boucher, Jane Carey and Katherine Ellinghaus (New York: Palgrave, 2008), and Peter Kolchin, 'Whiteness studies: the new history of race in America', *Journal of American History* 89.1 (2002): 154–73. For a key example of the failure to take account of Australian scholarship see Steve Garner, *Whiteness: an introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁹ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Preface', in *Whitening race: essays in social and cultural criticism*, ed. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), viii. On this issue see also Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial white: race, diaspora and the British empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), especially xvi–xxi.

¹⁰ This is clearly evident in Garner.

¹¹ Carey, Boucher and Ellinghaus, 'Historicising whiteness', vii. For examples of the ways whiteness has begun to feature in historical scholarship see: Catherine Hall, *Civilising subjects: metropole and colony in the English imagination 1830–1867* (Cambridge: Polity, 2002); Philippa Levine, ed., *Gender and empire: the Oxford history of the British empire*, 6 (Oxford: Oxford

treatments of whiteness is also based in the United States, but some work has begun to pursue its formations in other locales.¹² Again, it is Australian scholarship which stands out here. Foremost among this work is Warwick Anderson's 2002 book *The cultivation of whiteness*, which, focusing on the early 20th century, examined 'medical and scientific visions of what it meant to be white in Australia during a period in which the colonial settler society came to refashion itself as a nation.' These visions, he argued 'helped to set the nation's racial agenda.'¹³ Angela Woollacott's previous work on Australian women's journeys to London in the early 1900s also contained some significant discussions of colonial whiteness, and how this travelled across national borders.¹⁴ The significant transnational dimensions of whiteness have also been the subject of Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds' important recent work, *Drawing the global colour line* (2008). While drawing on Australia as a key case study, this work approaches the appearance of whiteness in the early 20th century as 'a mode of subjective identification that crossed national

University Press, 2004); Ann Laura Stoler, ed., *Haunted by empire: geographies of intimacy in North American history* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹² For American historical works see for example: David Roediger, *Wages of whiteness*, and *Working toward whiteness: how America's immigrants became white* (New York: Basic Books, 2005); Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish became white* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews became white folks and what that says about race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a different color: European immigrants and the alchemy of race* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); Matt Wray, *Not quite white: white trash and the boundaries of whiteness* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2006). For work on other contexts see for example Alistair Bonnett, *White identities: historical and international perspectives* (Harlow/New York: Prentice Hall, 2000).

¹³ Warwick Anderson, *The cultivation of whiteness: science, health and racial destiny in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 1.

¹⁴ Angela Woollacott, "'All this is empire I told myself': Australian women's voyages "home" and the articulation of colonial whiteness', *American Historical Review*, 102.4 (1997): 1003–29. See also her *To try her fortune in London: Australian women, colonialism, and modernity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

borders and shaped global politics.¹⁵ Its more specific focus is on the emergence of what came to be termed ‘white men’s countries’—the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa (all former British settler colonies)—through tracing the ways that politicians and intellectuals constructed this racial/territorial concept. Transnational historical perspectives were also the focus of a collection of essays published in 2007, *Historicising whiteness: transnational perspectives on the emergence of an identity*. This collection encompassed new perspectives on the science and politics of whiteness, but also tracked its impact into numerous other spheres. In many ways this present volume builds directly on this collection, not least because it contained a large number of specifically Australian studies.

While acknowledging the importance of the transnational, other work has emphasised the significance of the colonial encounter in the historical trajectories of whiteness.¹⁶ As Carey, Boucher, and Ellinghaus have argued, ‘the construction of whiteness and the phenomena of European colonialism are fundamentally interconnected, and ... whiteness studies must be “Re-Oriented” to take this into account’. They highlight how ‘whiteness was differently constituted under colonial regimes’ and how settler colonies in particular—including the United States—were:

critical sites for the historical emergence of whiteness and its later trajectories. It was these colonies that had the greatest impact on Indigenous peoples, and where racial beliefs about the capacities and entitlements of white settlers were so crucial to validating the scale of this

¹⁵ Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the global colour line: white men’s countries and the question of racial equality* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008), 2. See also Marilyn Lake, ‘White man’s country: the trans-national history of a national project’, *Australian Historical Studies* 34.122 (2003): 346–63.

¹⁶ This was in fact the focus of many of the essays in Boucher, Carey, and Ellinghaus, *Historicising whiteness*. Ann Stoler explored some of these interconnections in *Race and the education of desire: Foucault’s History of sexuality and the colonial order of things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 46–7, 99–100, 149–64, 177–83.

violent expropriation ... It took considerable discursive and legislative work to inscribe settler colonies as 'white spaces'. And strident assertions of whiteness were a significant component of settler colonies' transition into autonomous nation-states.¹⁷

By contrast, this collection seeks to return to the significance of the nation, which in the Australian case necessarily encompasses the colonial. It is based on the recognition that, as the advent of 'White Australia' demonstrates, although new understandings of whiteness were transnationally generated, they were most frequently deployed within nationalist terms.¹⁸ Moreover, particular national and local contexts had a significant impact on specific local formations of whiteness, and there could be substantial differences between these. There is, then, a need for more detailed national studies. This collection stands out as one of the very few broad historical examinations of how whiteness has operated outside of the United States. Warwick Anderson's book remains the only historical monograph on Australian formulations of whiteness. The Australian case, we suggest, has much to offer to wider understandings of the changing historical constructions of whiteness. Indeed, with its settler colonial origins, and national foundations firmly based in the White Australia policy, it may well prove exemplary.

Creating White Australia substantially expands on the existing body of historical work on whiteness in Australia by exploring the multiple and often divergent tropes of whiteness in circulation throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. The chapters analyse sources created by a diversity of historical actors, in a range of settings and genres, and across disparate chronologies: from Christian missions to mid-19th-century goldfields;

¹⁷ Carey, Boucher and Ellinghaus, *Re-orienting whiteness*, 1, 10.

¹⁸ For further discussion of this point see Carey, Boucher and Ellinghaus, *Re-orienting whiteness*. See also Lake and Reynolds, 4. On the wider implications of the transnational turn in historical scholarship, see Leigh Boucher in this collection, and on the need for the nation still to be addressed see Antoinette Burton, 'On the inadequacy and the indispensability of the nation', in *After the imperial turn: thinking with and through the nation*, ed. Antoinette Burton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 1–23.

colonial cities to pre-colonial camps and settlements; legal institutions to women's groups and anthropological societies. The studies are linked both by their theoretical sophistication and their strong historical and geographical groundings. The volume is enriched by the wealth of exciting new approaches and methodologies, with contributions informed by disciplines as diverse as performance studies, archaeology, creative writing, women's studies, and postcolonial theory. Its chapters venture into fields which remain under-explored in whiteness studies—particularly in terms of the intersection between whiteness and colonialism, but also, for example, in relation to women and gender. The question of whiteness in missionary history, which several of the chapters address, has only recently begun to be explored. The chapters range from broad studies tracking the emergence of 'whiteness' as a racial designation to micro-histories which examine the pervasive reach of 'race' into everyday activities and intimate personal interactions. These novel approaches allow us to see the history of whiteness in Australia through many lenses, and in many voices, from the early 19th century—when it was relatively uncommon for Britons to speak or write of themselves as 'white'—through to the nation's fascination with the idea of its own whiteness at the turn of the 20th century, and well beyond.

The continent's shift from a set of disparately linked colonies to a federated nation state was a crucial moment in the construction of Australian whiteness. But how was whiteness defined in the years prior to federation, and how did understandings of whiteness change during the early and middle decades of the 20th century? As Ann Curthoys points out in her chapter, there is a need to tease out the competing and overlapping nature of identities such as white, British, European, and Australian, and the relationship between colonial/national, imperial and racial identifications. Elsewhere, noting the 'lack of specificity about the racial status of the coloniser population' in mid-19th-century Victoria (who were 'termed "Anglo-Saxon," "English," "British," "colonist" or, very, very rarely, "white"'), Leigh Boucher has urged the need to pay closer

attention to specific ‘grammars’ of racial difference: ‘precisely because designations of whiteness ... emerge at particular times, this demands a more robust historicisation of what populations we are referring to when we deploy this category in our analysis.’¹⁹ Nevertheless, it was the White Australia Policy which was promulgated in 1901, indicating the degree of significance which adhered to this identification by the early 20th century. Both the race and the perceived ‘white’-ness of non-Indigenous Australians were invoked as identities from the very beginning of European settlement of the continent. These ideas were used, sometimes explicitly, and sometimes implicitly, as the basis for claims to power, land and influence, but they also impacted on the social, cultural and geographical landscape in a variety of ways. It is these important issues which this collection addresses.

The opening section of the collection situates the understanding of Australian whiteness within its broader context, both in terms of the transnational and the competing, coexisting modes of identification. Thus, Ann Curthoys unpacks the terms ‘white’, ‘British’, ‘European’ and ‘Western’ and places them in both their Antipodean and global contexts. She points particularly to the importance of seeing Australian colonialism as a global ‘British’ phenomenon, positioning Australian history in conversation with the colonisation of Canada, New Zealand, and the Cape Colony, and identifying a paradoxical sense of ‘British entitlement’ which informed colonial claims for self-government, and the assumption of governance over Indigenous peoples. In the next chapter, Benjamin Mountford and Keir Reeves approach the global contextualisation of Australian whiteness from a different perspective. Exploring the mid-19th-century central Victorian cultural landscape through the life of one Chinese emigrant and goldseeker, Lee Fook Shing, they open a window into how race, ethnicity and whiteness were (and continue to be)

¹⁹ Leigh Boucher, ‘Whiteness, geopolitical reconfiguration and the settler empire in nineteenth century Victorian politics’, in Boucher, Carey and Ellinghaus, *Re-orienting whiteness*.

spatially inscribed in the settler-colonial context. Their analysis, as well as making an important intervention into the field of Chinese-Australian history, demonstrates what a focus on diasporic, or transnational, histories can add to our understanding of the development of whiteness in Australia. While the advantages of both Curthoys', and Mountford and Reeves', global approaches to Australian history are undeniable, a broader question about the utility of a 'national' (or, for that matter, a 'transnational') history of whiteness remains. The final chapter in this section, by Leigh Boucher, takes as its subject this problem of how to historicise White Australia when both national and transnational historiographical approaches leave much to be desired. Through an investigation of trends in history-writing at the ends of the 19th and 20th centuries, Boucher demonstrates the long history of transnational histories, in the process countering recent invocations of the transnational as a radical new approach and as a panacea for the limitations of nationally bounded historical writing. Ultimately, Boucher argues, the central 'problem' of history-writing is not in fact the nation state, but the universalising claims of liberalism which refuse to be contained within national boundaries.

The second section considers the place of whiteness on Indigenous missions and reserves in Australia during the 19th and early 20th centuries, exploring how racialised ideas about labour, gender, respectability and science could both entrench and unsettle the privileges of whiteness. In such institutions, whiteness was understood by missionaries and reserve managers as embodying a whole range of 'virtuous' qualities, including productivity, civility, piety and rationality. Yet, as these chapters also show, whiteness in these contexts was a particularly fragile construct, due both to the universalism of Christian doctrine and the marginalised position which white workers on Indigenous reserves and missions occupied in settler-colonial society. This latter theme is explored in Claire McLisky's chapter, which analyses the relationship between work and whiteness on Maloga Mission in

colonial New South Wales between 1874 and 1888. Building on the work of Australian labour historians, her chapter explores how racialised constructions of Aboriginal labour affected the politics of work and productivity in the late-19th-century settler-colonial mission field. The next chapter, by Joanna Cruickshank, investigates the intersections between gender and whiteness on Ramahyuck Mission in Victoria between 1885 and 1900. With a focus on Ellie Hagenauer, daughter of Moravian missionaries Louise and Friedrich Hagenauer, Cruickshank explores the dilemmas which missionaries faced when the physical and emotional proximity of mission life conflicted with the racial distance required by respectable whiteness. The section's final chapter, by Fiona Davis, interrogates the trip of two well-known anthropologists, Joseph Birdsell and Norman Tindale, to the Cummeragunja Aboriginal Reserve in May and June 1938. Drawing on original oral history testimony gathered by the author, this chapter explores what Davis calls the 'the unspoken, unarticulated power of whiteness' which, although always present, came to the fore with special clarity during their visit.

The chapters in the next section consider how whiteness has been understood, embodied, and challenged by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and performers since the 19th century, and, indeed, how whiteness affects the creative process itself. Firstly, Maggie Scott explores colonial reactions to the story of the 'wild white man', William Buckley, showing the ways in which 19th-century historians and commentators' framing of Buckley's story were deeply imbued with ideas about race and whiteness. Representations of Buckley, she concludes, 'lent authority to the labelling, categorisation, and naming of Indigenous peoples and culture', and 'illustrate the depths of colonial anxieties and desires which were projected onto the Indigenous Other'. In the following chapter, on cross-racial collaboration, Jennifer Jones explores how the white 'privilege' of editorship—a privilege which is in her case study inflected also by gender—can obscure the richness, nuance and (to a white audience) inexplicable difference of Aboriginal oral testimony. The

textual suppression of Indigenous perspectives, she suggests, demonstrates how white collaborators continued, in many cases, to prioritise the needs of White Australia throughout the 20th century and beyond. The final chapter in this section, by Maryrose Casey, takes this exploration of white privilege in the literary and performative fields one step further. Drawing upon extensive 19th-century primary descriptions of Aboriginal performances, Casey shows how the meta-structures of nomenclature, and even genre, can limit our potential for understanding the multiple meanings of past and present Aboriginal cultural practices. Using European terms to describe these practices, she argues, ‘would, in effect, make these performances part of a norm that privileges European practice as originary’; as such, we need a new vocabulary to describe Aboriginal performance practices.

The final section investigates the relationship between gender and whiteness in the Australian context. Marguerita Stephens’ chapter focuses on gender and violence in the construction of Australian colonial whiteness by examining the contested question of Aboriginal infanticide. Charting the persistence of the idea of Aboriginal infanticide from the late 18th century onwards, Stephens shows how ‘what was, in all likelihood, an exceptional and incidental practice amongst Aboriginal people ... was raised up by the interaction of European and Aboriginal fears of the other into a morally and racially defining trope that marked whole communities as “infanticidal”, and as people whose common rights could be morally suspended’. Despite the far-reaching consequences of this trope for all Aboriginal Australians, it was the figure of the ‘depraved’ and ‘dysfunctional’ Aboriginal mother who was at its centre, and who bore the brunt of settler society’s twin attempts to erase and to ‘rehabilitate’ Aboriginality through its policies of segregation and, later, forced assimilation. The regulation of motherhood to achieve ‘utopian’ racial and social ends was not, of course, limited to Aboriginal mothers, as Jane Carey’s chapter on how ideas about race and whiteness were mobilised by the early-20th-century Australian women’s movement

explores. The movement's concern with racial fitness did not apply only to racial 'others', but was also firmly embedded in ideas about health and whiteness. Long thought of as the realm of women, maternal health was an area in which women activists could claim a certain degree of expertise, and therefore exercise power. Carey places these racial anxieties in contrast to the movement's relatively limited discussions of the contemporary 'Aboriginal problem'. This theme is continued in the final chapter, which deals with whiteness and maternal feminism between 1900 and 1960. Here, Shurlee Swain, Patricia Grimshaw and Ellen Warne observe how the campaigns of the women's movement during this period were 'grounded in a mostly disguised racial discourse'. In a climate of fear about the continuing vigour of the white race, they argue, mothers came to be valued for their whiteness, a state of affairs which in turn allowed women's rights campaigners to argue for reforms such as the child endowment payment. Thus, 'Feminists who sustained a watching brief on women's labour issues could exclude quite unthinkingly Indigenous women and migrant women of colour from their conceptual frame'.

The charge that whiteness studies problematically returns the focus of historical scholarship back to its traditional subjects is a potent one. As Daniel Wickberg has noted, 'Just when [historians] thought they had moved whites out of the centre of history, here they are, back in a new and different form ... Why, of all people, one hears whispered in the hallways, do white people now need a history when it has been their history all along?'²⁰ Critical studies of whiteness can only be warranted if the oppression it creates remains clearly and explicitly at the centre of the endeavour. Thus, it is the effects of white power and privilege on those who lost—and still lose—the most from its operations that are the focus of the studies presented here. Rather than approaching race as a burden

²⁰ Daniel Wickberg, 'Heterosexual white male: some recent inversions in American cultural history', *Journal of American History* 92.1 (2006): 137–38.

reserved for and experienced only by 'others,' they reposition whiteness as the source of this 'problem.' They demonstrate that, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and continuing into the 21st, many white people in Australia have been, and continue to be, able to create and maintain for themselves positions of power through racialised constructions of rationality, civility, knowledge, authority, sex, labour and violence. These observations are particularly poignant given the demonstrated effects they continue to have on the way Australians—white and non-white, Indigenous and non-Indigenous—see themselves and their 'others.' As the recent Apology to the Stolen Generations, the Northern Territory Intervention, and continuing controversies over asylum seekers reveal, the issues addressed here have enormous contemporary resonance. Indeed, few issues are more contentious than race relations in present-day Australia. The 'History Wars' dramatically highlighted the ongoing struggles white Australians experience in confronting and comprehending the colonial past, and how the 'problems' of 'race' are usually attached only to 'non-white' people. By presenting a substantial new understanding of the racial, transnational, and gendered frames animating the settler-colonial project in Australia, the new perspective offered by this collection will help to overcome these impasses. Yet, perhaps more importantly, the collection demonstrates beyond a doubt that whiteness was never, and indeed is not, a stable or monolithic concept. By exploring the many faces of whiteness—acknowledged and unacknowledged, hidden and exposed—we are better able to confront its power.