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“All that appears possible now is to mitigate as much as possible the trials of their closing years”¹: Alfred Deakin’s Attitudes to Aboriginal Affairs

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This article examines Alfred Deakin’s attitudes towards, and impacts upon, Aboriginal people during the period 1880-1910, drawing on newspaper articles and parliamentary debates as principal source materials. The discussion begins by charting the long, influential and often positive relationships Deakin had with several Aboriginal communities during a period as a Victorian MLA between 1881 and 1884. It then proceeds to document Deakin’s extraordinary descent into paternalism and racially-based fatalism which pervaded his later association with Aboriginal affairs whilst Victoria’s Chief Secretary (1886-1890), Victorian MLA for Essendon and delegate to Federal conventions (1890-1900), as the Federation debates took shape. And finally, the article outlines the attitudes Deakin expressed towards Aboriginal people in his various post-Federation political roles, including Attorney-General, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs. In doing so, the discussion draws out the connections between Deakin’s advocacy of a white Australia and his attitudes towards Aboriginal Australia, and demonstrates the extent to which the creation of a new nation both informed and responded to socio-racial ideologies that mandated the exclusion of non-white identities from the nation-to-come.

Introduction

Alfred Deakin (1856-1919), journalist, barrister and politician, was born in Fitzroy, Melbourne to British immigrant parents who had arrived in Australia in 1850. J.A. La Nauze considered Deakin a gifted politician, citing as evidence the fact that from July 1880 he was continuously “a member of parliament in Victoria and later in the Commonwealth until [his retirement in] 1913”.² Over the course of his career, Deakin was at various times the Chief Secretary and Solicitor-General of Victoria, the first Attorney-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, and later three times Prime Minister, as well as leader of the popular movement for federation. Historians have been generally effusive about Deakin’s significance in Australian history. Mark Hearn and Ian Tregenza write of a “general consensus [that] Australia’s second prime minister, Alfred Deakin [...], was the most significant political leader in the decade following

¹ J.A. La Nauze, *Federated Australia: Selections from Letters to the Morning Post 1900-1910* (Carlton, 1968), p.149.

² *Ibid.*, p.v.

federation”,³ while Paul Kelly concludes simply that Deakin was “Australia’s greatest prime minister”.⁴

This article maps and teases out Deakin’s attitudes towards, and impacts upon, Aboriginal people during the period 1880-1913, drawing on newspaper articles and parliamentary debates as principal source materials. The matter of Australian Prime Ministers’ (1901-1945) relationships with, and effects upon, Indigenous Australians has been largely neglected within Australian historiography. Prior to the 1990s, most biographical publications about Deakin make no mention of the influential role Deakin had upon generations of Aboriginal people, at both colonial and national levels. For instance, Walter Murdoch’s and La Nauze’s biographical studies of Deakin make no mention of Deakin’s integral role in the battle for Aboriginal land rights in Victoria, or Deakin’s epochal opinion on “half-castes” in his role as Attorney-General of Australia.⁵ Similarly, neither Brian Costar nor Fred Alexander make any mention of Deakin’s association with Aboriginal affairs.⁶ While Marilyn Lake’s critique of “the chief authors of the White Australia project” implicitly links Deakin’s avowedly White Australia leanings with his attitudes towards Aboriginal people,⁷ generally speaking, the historiography on Deakin has followed the tendency of the Great Australian Silence to treat the Aboriginal aspects of Australian history as either irrelevant, or unrelated to the matters of central concern; to, as W.E.H. Stanner would have it, exclude them from view.⁸

Until the 1990s, historians discussing Deakin’s role in Aboriginal politics seemingly endeavoured to show how the noble and ignoble are separable; to treat his positive contributions to Australian political history and negative racial attitudes as somehow distinct. The same tendency was evident in the celebratory narratives around the centenary of federation, in which Deakin remained a central figure, where, with some notable exceptions, “[t]he dominant story about Australian history [...] spoke little of the blatant racism that underlay Federation”, and “the related dispossession and denial of Aboriginal rights, and the targeted discrimination embedded in the founding of the new nation [...] remained an indisputably disturbing but still separate story”.⁹ On the contrary, this paper argues that Deakin’s federalist project, based as it was on ideals that have since come to be associated with Australian national identity more broadly — framed in terms of what Paul Kelly famously described as “the Australian settlement”, of which he deems Deakin the “principal architect”¹⁰ — was, at least in part, premised upon the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the Australian body-politic. As Deakin declared:

³ Mark Hearn and Ian Tregenza, “‘The Maximum of Good Citizenship’: Citizenship and Nation Building in Alfred Deakin’s Post-Federation Speeches”, in John Uhr and Ryan Walter, eds, *Studies in Australian Political Rhetoric* (Canberra, 2014), p.177.

⁴ Paul Kelly, *The End of Certainty: Power, Politics, and Business in Australia* (St Leonards, 1994), p.1.

⁵ Walter Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin: A Sketch* (London, 1923); J.A. La Nauze, *Alfred Deakin: A Biography* (Carlton, 1965).

⁶ Fred Alexander, *Australia Since Federation: A Narrative and Critical Analysis* (Melbourne, 1967); Brian Costar, *From Barton to Bruce: The Melbourne Prime Ministers 1901-1927* (Melbourne, 2001).

⁷ Marilyn Lake, “White Man’s Country: The Trans-National History of a National Project”, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 34, 122 (2003), p.346.

⁸ W.E.H. Stanner, “After the Dreaming”, in Robert Manne, ed., *The Dreaming and Other Essays* (Collingwood, 2009).

⁹ Patricia Grimshaw, “Federation as a Turning Point in Australian History”, *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 33, 118 (2002), pp.28-9.

¹⁰ Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p.1.

The unity of Australia is nothing, if that does not imply a united race. A united race means not only that its members can intermix, intermarry and associate without degradation on either side, but implies one inspired by the same ideas, an aspiration towards the same ideals, of a people possessing the same general cast of character, tone of thought — the same constitutional training and traditions.¹¹

In 1994, Stuart Macintyre was one of the first to discuss how it is possible to see in Deakin's co-authorship of the White Australia Policy an expression of his sense of innate Anglo-Saxon superiority, and he contended that Deakin's "xenophobic dread was apparent in his treatment of [...] indigenous Australians".¹² Macintyre noted that Deakin subscribed to the "convenient belief that Aborigines were racially incapable of exercising rights, and he shared the common expectation that they were a doomed race to whom the usurpers owed only the responsibility of smoothing the dying pillow", concluding that "[t]here is much in Deakin's politics that inspires admiration and much that horrifies".¹³ More recently, Russell McGregor has highlighted how Aboriginal affairs barely registered in the thoughts of Australia's Federation Fathers and their planning for the new nation.¹⁴ He rightly singles out Deakin, one of the venerated architects of federation, as an exemplar of how politicians and large sections of the Australian community viewed Aboriginal people in this period. In 1901, in his role as Australian Attorney-General, Deakin declared:

In another century the probability is that Australia will be a White Continent with not a black or even dark skin among its inhabitants. The Aboriginal race has died out in the South and is dying fast in the North and West even where most gently treated.¹⁵

As McGregor had earlier shown, the "doomed race" ideal Deakin evokes so archetypically here took hold around the same time as Deakin launched his political career.¹⁶ Deakin tied the "doomed race" and White Australia together, proceeding to declare that "[o]ther races are to be excluded by legislation if they are tinted to any degree. The yellow, the brown, and the copper-coloured are to be forbidden to land anywhere".¹⁷ It is no coincidence that the coalescence of these two forms of exclusion — the inevitable demise of Indigenous Australia, and the deliberate exclusion of undesirable immigrants — occurred at the very moment of the new Australian nation's inception, defined as it was by its inseparably racial *and* social sense of superiority.

The following discussion will chart the long, influential and at times intimate relationships Deakin had with several key Aboriginal communities during a period as a Victorian MLA that lasted from 1881 until 1884. It then proceeds to document the hardening of Deakin's attitudes towards paternalism and racially-based fatalism, which pervaded his later association with Aboriginal affairs whilst Victoria's Chief Secretary (1886-1890), Victorian MLA for Essendon and delegate to federal conventions (1890-1900) as the federation debates took shape. And finally, the article outlines the attitudes Deakin expressed towards Aboriginal people in his various post-federation political

¹¹ David Dutton, *One of Us?: A Century of Australian Citizenship* (Sydney, 2002), p.32.

¹² Stuart Macintyre, "Deakin and the Sovereignty of the People", *Voices: The Quarterly Journal of the National Library of Australia*, Vol. 4, 2 (1994), p.17.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Russell McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion: Aboriginal People and the Australian Nation* (Canberra, 2011).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.xxi.

¹⁶ Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880-1939* (Carlton, 1997).

¹⁷ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xxi.

roles, including Attorney-General, Prime Minister and Minister for External Affairs, until his retirement in 1913. In doing so, the discussion draws out the connections between Deakin's advocacy of a white Australia and his attitudes towards Aboriginal Australia, and explores the extent to which the creation of a new nation both informed and responded to socio-racial ideologies that mandated the exclusion of non-white identities from the nation-to-come.

While the British race patriotism underlying the Australian federal project was well recognised by its architects at the time, and has been widely acknowledged ever since, the anomalous status federation produced for Aboriginal Australians when the borders of the nation were extended to coincide with the boundaries of the continent, as Edmund Barton so evocatively expressed, has not been so widely acknowledged, nor discussed.¹⁸ In part, as McGregor makes clear, the different levels of consideration paid to the “threats” non-white immigrants and Aboriginal Australians presented to white Australia were founded on the widely-held assumption that

active measures had to be taken to safeguard white Australia against coloured aliens, but not against the coloured indigenes, since they were expiring independently of government action or inaction. The white Australia ideal faced little threat from a dying race.¹⁹

However, this article argues that Deakin's attitudes towards Aboriginal Australia, and his racial attitudes more broadly, were similarly concerned with, and shaped by the demands of, the nation-building project. As the following discussion will suggest, the twinned exclusions of both endogenous and exogenous “others” from the new Australian nation were of equally pressing concern, even if they were expressed, and addressed, in divergent ways. Ultimately, restricted immigration and the doomed race ideal came to serve the same purpose of building a white Australia. In the same way that around the time of federation, Australian historians began to turn their attention away from the violent history of Australian colonisation, and towards “nation building and the construction of the unifying mythologies necessary to buttress it”²⁰ — and so produced the Great Australian Silence — the Fathers of Federation, Deakin among them, appear to have absorbed and promoted the convenient doomed race ideal in legitimating and developing the ideal of a peaceful, pure white Australia.²¹ Deakin's ideological progression from relatively sympathetic and supportive to harshly restrictive in relation to Aboriginal people, and Aboriginal politics, followed a similar trajectory, as the following bears out.

1881-1884: Aboriginal Advocate

It is relatively little known that Deakin played a very influential role in enabling Aboriginal communities to retain some power at Coranderk, a government-owned Aboriginal reserve near Melbourne that operated from 1863 until 1924. In their chronicling of the Coranderk residents' political struggles with the Victorian Parliament in the 1870s and 1880s over control of their lands, Giordano Nanni and Andrea James describe Deakin in glowing terms, as one of “[t]wo influential supporters and

¹⁸ See Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and MisceNation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era”, *Social Analysis*, Vol. 36 (1994), pp.168-9.

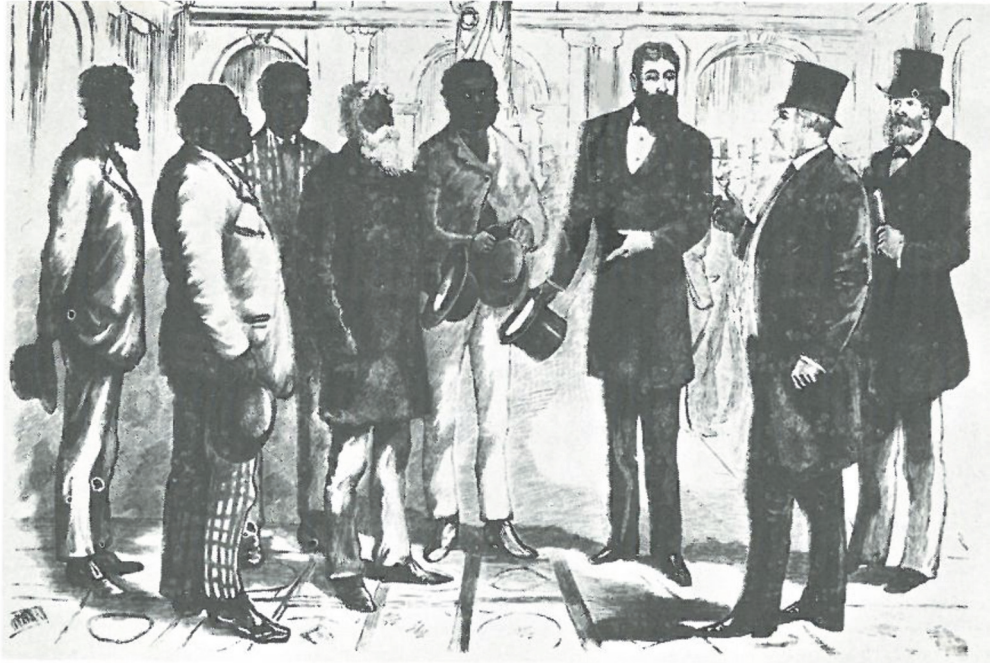
¹⁹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xxi.

²⁰ Ann McGrath, *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines Under the British Crown* (St Leonards, 1995), p.364.

²¹ Patricia Grimshaw has written of Federation as a “turning point” in Australian history (Grimshaw, “Federation as a Turning Point”).

sympathisers [who] introduced the Kulin deputation to Chief Secretary Berry".²² Deakin was also instrumental in assisting an Aboriginal delegation to present a petition for their rights to the Governor, as depicted in the following image from a newspaper of the period.²³

Figure 1: "Deputation of Blackfellows at Parliament House", La Trobe Collection, SLV.



Note: Alfred Deakin is seen introducing the deputation of Kulin men to Chief Secretary Berry.

Deakin's efforts to assist the Aboriginal community at Coranderrk station were significant, and sustained. In March 1882, Deakin again acted as a kind of broker between the Aboriginal deputation from Coranderrk, who were petitioning to have their voices heard in the management of their station, and the Victorian Parliament, requesting "that a time be named to receive a deputation of the Board".²⁴ In the same month, four members of parliament, including Deakin, asked that in the appointment of a manager at Coranderrk the Aboriginal residents be consulted and that the Chief Secretary take control of the station.²⁵ A petition signed by eight parliamentarians (including Alfred Deakin, and in his hand), and addressed to Chief Secretary Grant was then circulated, stating:

As friends and well-wishers of the aboriginals, we [...] protest against some of the recommendations made to you by the Central Board for the protection of aborigines. We consider that the wishes of the natives themselves should be taken into account [...] We are of opinion that the natives are the

²² Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country* (Canberra, 2013), p.27.

²³ See "Coranderrk Aboriginal Station", *The Mount Alexander Mail*, 30 March 1881, p.3.

²⁴ Alfred Deakin, Letter to Chief Secretary, 18 March 1882, VPRS 1411, Unit 36, Public Record Office Victoria (PROV).

²⁵ M. Cook *et al.*, Letter to Chief Secretary, 23 March 1882, VPRS 1411, Unit 36, W2872 (PROV).

first persons to be consulted with regard to their overseers and any proposed changes in their way of living. We hold that their sentiments of attachment to the soil or to particular persons should be allowed for [...] They are the last remnant of a dying race, which in a few years will have passed from the continent we have colonised, and all we desire is that, through you, sir, they may be enabled to end their days in peace.²⁶

Three months later, Deakin again formed part of a deputation which sought to further the Aboriginal community's requests for the reinstatement of the former manager at Coranderrk, John Green, and to have the Aboriginal Protection Board sacked. In 1884, Deakin advocated on behalf of several Aboriginal people with the Chief Secretary, asking "what is proposed to be done concerning the complaints against Goodall [the Superintendent of Coranderrk]?"²⁷ He was also a signatory to a petition which led to the release from jail of Thomas Bamfield, a Taungerong clan head who was a passionate advocate for Kulin land rights at Coranderrk.²⁸

Yet within a decade, Deakin was moving away from his role as advocate and broker for Aboriginal people at Coranderrk and elsewhere, and working instead in favour of the long-standing public desire for distinctions between "full-bloods" and "half-castes" to be drawn in aid of the "[d]ispersal of the half castes [...] as a means of ensuring resumption of [the] land".²⁹

1886-1889: The Half-Caste Act and the Breaking-up of Reserves

In 1886 the so-called "Half-Caste Act" was introduced in Victoria, extending the restrictions of the *Aboriginal Protection Act 1869* (Vic), enacted by the Victorian Parliament to regulate the lives of Aboriginal people. Richard Broome has described the 1886 Act as the "most draconian Aboriginal legislation of its time in Australia", explaining that it extended the Board for the Protection of Aborigines' existing powers to control where Aboriginal people could live, where they could work, and what kinds of jobs they could do, as well as who they could associate with and who they could marry.³⁰ The 1886 Act was also a policy which altered the definition of Aboriginality and thus enabled the removal of Aboriginal people of mixed descent from the Aboriginal stations or reserves and attempted to force them to merge into white society.

The 1886 Act was based on what the former Inspector to the Protection Board and temporary manager of Coranderrk, Christian Ogilvie, himself a key figure opposed to Aboriginal interests in the debates just outlined, described as a "system of decentralisation".³¹ One of the stated aims of this policy was to dismantle the reserve system and "to merge the half castes into the white population",³² but it also served to cut costs in the running of the reserves, and free up reserve lands for further "settlement". The result was the destruction of Coranderrk and the break-up of many other Aboriginal communities across the colony. Bain Attwood has noted that considerable support for the 1886 Act came from the Victorian public, which by the 1880s was mostly in agreement that "half castes" generally should no longer be regarded or treated as

²⁶ Petition to Chief Secretary, 23 March 1882, VPRS 1226, W2872 (PROV).

²⁷ Alfred Deakin, Letter to Chief Secretary, 3 January 1884, VPRS 1411, Unit 38 (PROV).

²⁸ Nanni and James, *Coranderrk*, p.74.

²⁹ Diane E. Barwick, "Coranderrk and Cumeroogunga: Pioneers and Policy", in T. Scarlett Epstein and David H. Penny, eds, *Opportunity and Response: Case Studies in Economic Development* (London, 1972), p.35.

³⁰ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800* (Crows Nest, 2005), p.181.

³¹ Nanni and James, *Coranderrk*, p.51.

³² "Board for the Protection of Aborigines", *The Evelyn Observer*, 16 May 1884, p.2.

“Aborigines”.³³ Influential newspapers such as the *Argus* wrote about Coranderrk: “The visitor cannot fail to be struck with the whiteness of the skins of the majority of the population [...] It is a mistake, therefore, to regard this as a settlement of pure-bred aborigines”.³⁴

Throughout this period, public opinion, as well as that of Deakin and other influential Victorian politicians, was being increasingly shaped by popular “scientific” theories of race, including social evolutionism, which placed greater emphasis on distinctions between Aboriginal people on the twinned bases of biology and physiognomy. As McGregor has outlined, it was around this time, and under the influence of these theories, that the “doomed race” ideal — the expectation that the “Aboriginal race” would disappear as a result of natural processes “outside the sphere of moral opinion or remedial action”³⁵ — became increasingly prevalent throughout Australian society. In 1888, for example, *The Age* stated:

[W]here two races whose stages of progression differ greatly are brought into contact, the inferior race is doomed to wither and disappear [...] The process seems to be in accordance with a natural law which, however it may clash with human benevolence, is clearly beneficial to mankind at large by providing for the survival of the fittest.³⁶

As Richard Broome notes, “[s]ocial Darwinism defined Aboriginal policy”.³⁷ Reflecting these developments, the Board for the Protection of Aborigines believed that by merging the younger, lighter-skinned Aboriginal people into colonial society and thereby isolating the last of the “full blacks” on the reserves, the latter would soon die off, thereby leaving no “real Aborigines” to speak of. “After which”, the Board had explained in 1884, “all responsibility of the Government [...] would cease — *finality being thus attained*.”³⁸

While Diane Barwick has credited Deakin for “excising certain punitive clauses [from the 1886 Act] in response to yet another deputation of Coranderrk folk”,³⁹ she subsequently suggested he favoured the permanent dispersal of “half castes” from Coranderrk and other stations, remarking that by 1885 he was “preoccupied with [...] talk of federalism” and “building a nation”.⁴⁰ Barwick further notes, in an even more damning critique of Deakin, that he “virtually disclaimed responsibility” for a petition from Kulin leaders about the proposed 1886 Act, in which they appealed to Deakin (the then Chief Secretary) by writing: “We aborigines all wish and hope to have freedom, not to be bound down by the protection of the board [...] we should be free like the white population”.⁴¹ Other historians such as Attwood and Nanni and James concur, and have argued further that Deakin accepted the distinction between “full blacks” and “half-

³³ Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines* (St Leonards, 2003), p.25.

³⁴ “The Aborigines at Coranderrk”, *The Argus*, 19 March 1881, p.4.

³⁵ Mark Francis, “Anthropology and Social Darwinism in the British Empire: 1870-1900”, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 40, Special Issue (1994), p.207.

³⁶ “No Title”, *The Age*, 11 January 1888.

³⁷ Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Australians: A History Since 1788* (Crows Nest, 2010).

³⁸ John Chesterman and Heather Douglas, ““Their Ultimate Absorption”: Assimilation in 1930s Australia”, *Journal of Australian Studies*, Vol. 28, 81 (2004), p.50 [emphasis added].

³⁹ Barwick, “Coranderrk and Cumeroounga”, p.36.

⁴⁰ Diane E. Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk* (Canberra, 1998), pp.238, 291.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp.291, 299.

castes”, and that ultimately this belief helped to deny the latter “both their Aboriginality and their rights to the land at Coranderrk”.⁴²

Several writers, including Broome, Nanni and James, and Michael Christie, have asserted that “viewed in the harshest light the 1886 Act could be construed as an attempt at legal genocide” as it aimed to eliminate Aboriginal people “as a distinct and observable group”.⁴³ Contrary to Barwick’s concessions concerning Deakin’s role in ameliorating the legislation, Attwood has highlighted how Deakin was instrumental in rushing it through the Victorian Legislative Assembly “with breathtaking speed, scarcely allowing for any debate”.⁴⁴ Increasingly concerned with the formation of a new, racially-delineated nation, and under the influence of emerging theories of social evolution which distinguished between “castes” of Aboriginal people based on the “preponderance of blood”, it appears Deakin was prepared, by 1886, to help facilitate, or at least not to resist, the process of Aboriginal elimination. Having done so, however, he had little to say on the matter, prepared, perhaps, to let the natural laws of evolution do their work — almost a year passed, and only singular newspaper reports linked Deakin with Aboriginal affairs after the passage of the 1886 Act.⁴⁵

Continuing along a similar trajectory to that he had pursued in relation to Coranderrk, a few years later in 1889 Deakin was instrumental in a bid to close down several government reserves against the express wishes of local Aboriginal communities.⁴⁶ This apparent shift in Deakin’s attitude — from one emphasising inclusivity and engagement towards one denying Aboriginal rights to land, or even a voice at the political table — seems striking. However, it is at least partially explicable in relation to broader changes in the prevailing notions of racial identity, which in turn may be interpreted in relation to the consolidation of Anglo-Australian identity in the lead-up to federation. Deakin, like most settlers in this period, was of the conviction that Aboriginal people of mixed descent were not “real” Aboriginal people at all. In places such as Coranderrk, where what were termed “full blood” Aboriginal people resided, he was prepared to stand up for them, especially since within social evolutionist understandings these were precisely the people most vulnerable to extinction. In government reserves where there was a preponderance of “half castes”, as they were termed, his conviction that they were not “real” Aboriginal people at all led him to conclude that they should be actively isolated from their families and compelled to assimilate into mainstream white society.

The racial distinction Deakin drew, and contributed to, both rhetorically and legislatively, between “real” Aboriginal people — with remnant rights to land, and political participation — and “half-castes” as somehow inauthentic and therefore entitled to nothing more than the potential for assimilation, was conveniently aligned with public-political opinion in justifying the dissolution of Aboriginal reserves. Deakin, in his new position as Chief Secretary of Victoria, evinced and acted out this alignment himself. For example, Jan Critchett has noted that in 1889 Deakin was paramount in a decision to allow only a fraction of Framlingham Aboriginal station in western Victoria to be retained for Aboriginal people.⁴⁷

⁴² Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, p.25; quotation from Nanni and James, *Coranderrk*, p.182.

⁴³ Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians*; Nanni and James, *Coranderrk*; quotation from Michael F. Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835-86* (Sydney, 1979), p.205.

⁴⁴ Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines* (Sydney, 1989), p.81.

⁴⁵ For example, “Blacks as Shearers”, *The Weekly Times*, 19 November 1887, p.6.

⁴⁶ *Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD)*, Legislative Assembly, Vol. 61 (1889), pp.1525-6.

⁴⁷ Jan Critchett, “Introduction to the Facsimile Edition”, in James Dawson, *Australian Aborigines* (Canberra, 1981).

Deakin's statements in Parliament suggest that a visit to Framlingham helped shape his opinion. In response to the suggestion by MLA Murray that the proposal to convert Framlingham into an "experimental farm" was regarded as a "most ruthlessly cruel one",⁴⁸ Deakin made it clear that he did not consider Aboriginal people to have a deep and unwavering attachment to their lands, and also inferred that they were like children who could be easily manipulated into one opinion or another.⁴⁹ News of Deakin's mediation with the Framlingham Aboriginal community was widely reported in the newspapers and in parliamentary debates. John Murray raised the matter in the Victorian Parliament, calling it "the first big national case of eviction that had occurred in this colony",⁵⁰ and the newspapers described the protests arising.⁵¹

The Age and several other newspapers printed stories about the plight and pathos of Aboriginal people's deputations with Deakin. *The Age* recounted:

Mr. Deakin was addressed by two of the aboriginals, who descanted on the hardship it would be to them to have to leave Framlingham, which was their old hunting ground, and they regarded it as their home, being very comfortable there. One of them pathetically reminded the Chief Secretary that some of them had not long to live, and they wished to be permitted to end their days at Framlingham. In replying Mr. Deakin informed them that the object of the board was not to inflict injustice or injury on the aboriginals, but rather to do all that was possible to promote their happiness [...] he did not see why both proposals could not be carried out — that is, to allow the blacks to remain on about 500 or 600 acres, and devote the remainder of the reserve to an experimental farm.⁵²

Other newspapers, such as the *Camperdown Chronicle*, published letters to the editor that were not so charitable about Deakin's stance, including one from James Dawson, the Local Guardian for Camperdown.⁵³ The *Portland Guardian*, on the other hand, expressed the popular opinion that Deakin "appeared to be struck with a fact which has been evident to all viewing the question in as [*sic*] common sense light — that nearly 4,000 acres of land is a great deal more than is necessary for the purposes of some 60 or 70 aborigines".⁵⁴ The matter of Deakin and his party excising thousands of acres of land from the Aboriginal station did not quickly diminish in import, or attention. Media reports in 1890 stated that a "debate ensued" in the House of Legislative Assembly about "the Aborigines at Framlingham" after Deakin and his parliamentary colleagues mooted the splitting up of the station.⁵⁵ One of Deakin's parliamentary colleagues defended the excising of the land available to the Aboriginal community there by noting that "it seemed strange to allow 4,000 acres of land to remain idle for the sake of only twenty full-blooded blacks".⁵⁶

Yet Deakin himself revealed the circular logic used in support of the proposed changes to Framlingham, stating:

The circumstances of the Framlingham station at the present time were that, under the operation of the Aborigines Protection Law Amendment Act of 1886, the number of aborigines had been reduced

⁴⁸ *VPD*, Legislative Assembly, Vol. 61 (1889), p.1525.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p.1526.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ See, for example, "Deputations", *The Camperdown Chronicle*, 29 August 1889, p.2.

⁵² "The Proposed Abolition of Aboriginal Stations", *The Age*, 2 November 1889, p.10.

⁵³ See James Dawson, "To the Editor", *The Camperdown Chronicle*, 26 September 1889, p.2.

⁵⁴ "Warrnambool", *The Portland Guardian*, 6 November 1889, p.4.

⁵⁵ "Parliament: Legislative Assembly", *The Leader*, 27 September 1890, p.22.

⁵⁶ *VPD*, Legislative Assembly, Vol. 64 (1890), p.1718.

from about 70 to 34, of whom some 14 were not true aboriginals. There were, in fact, only 20 pure-blooded blacks; the remainder being half-castes.⁵⁷

Here, Deakin employed the reduction in the population of Framlingham resulting from the 1886 Act he had helped to introduce, combined with the racial classifications he was increasingly reliant on, as justification for the further dispossession of the remaining “pure-blooded blacks” of the lands on which they resided, and had evidently come to regard as their own.

1890-1900: Federation and Commonwealth Control of Aboriginal Affairs

At the very moment that Australia was federating, there were calls from the Aborigines Protection Society, based in London, for the new federal government to assume national control of Aboriginal affairs. However, the topic of whether or not Australia’s imminent Federal Parliament should take over this power from the colonies, then states, was very rarely discussed in Australia’s press. Even at the 1890 National Convention on “Australian Federation: Its Aims and its Possibilities”, no mention was made of Aboriginal affairs in the lengthy discussion about the merits and demerits of federal and state powers.⁵⁸ Historian Russell McGregor is unequivocal on the matter:

In the ten years of debate that preceded the federation of Australian colonies, the Federation Fathers gave no thought to how Aboriginal people might be included in the nation-to-be. Nor did they give any thought to how Aboriginal people might be excluded. Indigenous Australians barely registered in their planning for the new nation.⁵⁹

McGregor draws our attention to the fact that the only significant exception came not from Deakin or any of Australia’s Federation Fathers but from a New Zealand delegate who pointed to Australian delegates’ failure to address the status and rights of the Indigenous population as a serious flaw in the federation convention proceedings, and a significant variance between the colonies on either side of the Tasman.⁶⁰ Similarly, there is very little record that Aboriginal affairs was discussed in the drafting of the constitution, and Deakin remained largely silent on the matter until the threat of international embarrassment in 1905 urged him to prompt discussion in a newspaper article he wrote for a London newspaper, described in further detail below. No record exists of Deakin taking this matter up in Hansard, or in his personal correspondence.

Robert Garran, who officiated at the federation conferences of the late 1890s and would later go on to become a respected authority on the Constitution, proffered that the only reason Aboriginal people were mentioned at all in the Constitution (twice, with both references exclusionary) was that the “federating colonies were very jealous of their powers, and assigned nothing to the Federal Parliament unless they thought it very definitely a matter of federal concern”.⁶¹ He later recalled that “throughout the debate I don’t think a word was said about the aborigines. It simply did not occur to anybody that Federal power over them was needed”.⁶² McGregor sums up the situation succinctly: “for the federal leaders, Aboriginal people were of little consequence”.⁶³

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1716.

⁵⁸ Howard Willoughby, *Australian Federation: Its Aims and its Possibilities* (Melbourne, 1891).

⁵⁹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xvii.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.xix.

⁶² *Ibid.*.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

1901: Definitions of Aboriginality

McCorquodale and later McGregor have argued that Deakin's opinion as the Commonwealth Attorney-General in 1901 that "half-castes were not 'aboriginal natives' within the meaning of section 127 of the Constitution" was to have significant ramifications for Aboriginal families around Australia.⁶⁴ Deakin's opinion, given on 29 August 1901, read:

Section 127 of the Constitution makes a particular exception that in reckoning the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth or a State, 'aboriginal natives shall not be counted'. The rule as to the construction of such exceptions, where, as in this case, they are not remedial, is that they should be construed strictly.

I am of the opinion that half castes are not 'aboriginal natives' within the meaning of this section, and should be included in reckoning the population.⁶⁵

McCorquodale states:

No reason was advanced, except that based on the rule as to the construction of statutory exceptions, namely that where they are not remedial they should be construed strictly. Accordingly, for the purposes of Commonwealth law, but not of course, or necessarily, for any other (state or territory) law, people with a preponderance of Aboriginal 'blood' were considered to be 'aboriginal natives' and those with less were not.⁶⁶

Deakin again adopted a "preponderance of blood" test in 1902, in relation to a rebate of excise duties on sugar cane in the production of which "white labour only has been employed".⁶⁷ Deakin's advice as Attorney-General on the subject of "half castes" and "preponderance of blood" proved to be contentious. The matter of who was eligible to vote, for example, was queried several times by electoral officers in at least two states; the Attorney-General's Department repeatedly confirmed the advice already given.⁶⁸

McCorquodale emphasised that Deakin's unequivocal stance was odd given that "Commonwealth law in this area was silent on the point" and also notes the longevity of Deakin's opinion as Attorney-General, stating that the Commonwealth upheld and confirmed the "preponderance of blood" test as late as 1961, and that Queensland continued to apply the test until 1971.⁶⁹ Further, as Tim Rowse and Len Smith have remarked, until the 1967 Referendum, the Australian Bureau of Statistics "included 'half castes' but not 'full bloods' in the tables presented for the entire Australian population, acting on Attorney-General Alfred Deakin's advice in 1901 that 'half castes' were not 'aboriginal natives'".⁷⁰

⁶⁴ John McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia", *Aboriginal History*, Vol. 10, 1/2 (1986); McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xxv.

⁶⁵ Patrick Brazil and Bevan Mitchell, eds, *Opinions of Attorneys-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, with Opinions of Solicitors-General and the Attorney-General's Department* (Canberra, 1981), p.24.

⁶⁶ McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race", p.19.

⁶⁷ John Chesterman and Brian Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights: Aborigines and Australian Citizenship* (Cambridge, 1997), p.97.

⁶⁸ See Chesterman and Galligan, *Citizens Without Rights*; Department of Home Affairs, Aborigines' Right to Vote, 30 April 1904, A101, B1904/4739, National Archives of Australia (NAA); Department of Home Affairs, Whether Half-Caste Aboriginal Natives of Queensland Over 21 Years of Age are Precluded from Having Their Names on the Roll, 3 July 1905, A406, E1905/9383, NAA.

⁶⁹ McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race", p.33.

⁷⁰ Tim Rowse and Len Smith, "The Limits of 'Elimination' in the Politics of Population", *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 41, 1 (2010), p.91.

While Deakin's opinion had the ostensibly positive impact of enfranchising those excluded from the definition of "Aboriginal native" and entitling them to social welfare payments, for many, as McGregor notes, "this was negated by a further proviso that those persons of any degree of Aboriginal ancestry who lived on state reserves or received state welfare benefits were ineligible for Commonwealth welfare payments".⁷¹ In addition, it is the suggestion here that one of the ramifications of his, the Commonwealth's, opinion, was that it contributed significantly to the common perception that the Aboriginal population was small and hence insignificant, since the majority could now not be counted in the census. This contributed to the erroneous opinion that Aboriginal people were dying out, an opinion repeatedly iterated by both Deakin and the press.

Deakin's addresses to Parliament and at public functions, such as one reported in the *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, thus generally reflected a maudlin fatalism:

The Attorney general on Wednesday touched a chord that sounded all through the Chamber when he made a feeling allusion to the aboriginal races of Australia. It was his earnest hope, said Mr Deakin, that the last hours of this slowly dying race might induce the knowledge that the aboriginals were being treated not only with justice, but with generosity by the white man.⁷²

1904: Smoothing the Pillow of a Dying Race

In 1904, Deakin was cited in the *Brisbane Courier* and other newspapers after appearing as a guest speaker at a banquet in Melbourne, where he was quoted extending his dying race thesis and aligning it with the White Australia ideal:

The Hon A Deakin said the white Australia policy had been nourished and cherished by their fathers from the first day they put foot on Australian soil. Referring to the disappearance of the aborigines, Mr Deakin said: 'The races that inhabited Australia were gradually passing away. If we had any regrets for this early disappearance of the blacks we had much to be thankful for in thus early getting rid of what might have turned out to be a great incubus'.⁷³

Three months after these reports, Deakin wrote a letter to the editor of the *Brisbane Courier* to remonstrate about the intent of his words being misconstrued to give the impression that

I had said it was fortunate our aborigines were dying out because they would otherwise have interfered with our white Australia ideal. I need scarcely tell you that no such thought has ever crossed my mind. I had expressly explained that our policy did not involve any hostility to the races which we seek to exclude, and certainly indicated no antagonism to our coloured fellow subjects of the Empire. I then proceeded to say that the aborigines had even greater claims upon us.⁷⁴

Deakin then clearly and unequivocally explained his government's rationale for the absence of Commonwealth policy on the topic of Aboriginal affairs, confirming McGregor's assertions, quoted earlier, by stating: "we were not called upon to legislate for them since they were disappearing as a race".⁷⁵ Reportage of a visit to Moama (on the Murray River) in 1904 prompted Deakin to again highlight to an "overfilled hall" that the Aboriginal race was dying out, and this time to insist that the Commonwealth had its hands tied in relation to helping out the remaining populations. In the context of entreating the electorate to "give over control" of Murray waters to the Commonwealth,

⁷¹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xxv.

⁷² "Our Melbourne Letter", *Ovens and Murray Advertiser*, 21 September 1901, p.3.

⁷³ "A.N.A. Banquet", *The Brisbane Courier*, 2 February 1904, p.4.

⁷⁴ "Mr. Deakin and the Aborigines", *The Brisbane Courier*, 10 May 1904, p.4.

⁷⁵ "Deakin and the Aborigines", p.4.

Deakin maintained that “[t]he aboriginal races were dying out, and people said the Commonwealth should assist them, but it was entirely a State matter and had nothing to do with the Commonwealth”.⁷⁶ Having thereby absolved the Commonwealth of any responsibility, Deakin instead implored the states to take care of Aboriginal people, noting that “we owed a first duty to them”.⁷⁷

1905-1909: Ill-treatment of Aboriginal People and Australia's Reputation

As noted in the introduction, Deakin had been a journalist early in his career, and even during his political career was a “special correspondent” for the London newspaper, the *Morning Post*. In this capacity, Deakin wrote a singular article entitled “The Aborigines”, first published on 24 March 1905,⁷⁸ in which he summarised the treatment of “our aborigines by their white neighbours” and noted that in southeastern Australia “their numbers were always small”.⁷⁹ While Deakin conceded there had been “occasional armed collisions” in the south, he effectively exonerated the southern states from significant wrongdoing, stating that “our records are on the whole respectable” and that for “many years past the States have dealt kindly with the remnants of the scanty tribes over whom they have exercised guardianship”.⁸⁰ Deakin's intent behind writing the article was soon made apparent, however, as he launched a scathing attack on Western Australia's treatment of Aboriginal people. In doing so, he drew a sharp moral distinction between his home state and those surrounding it, writing of the parlous state of affairs in the “north-west territory of Western Australia”, which he held was even worse than in Queensland where “blood red imprints” had impugned the early pages of its history.⁸¹ Yet even here, Deakin demurred on the culpability of the state as such, adding that “none” of these “serious outrages” on the “blacks” were made with “the consent of the public or the authorities”.⁸²

Deakin appeared to distance the Commonwealth from both the “welfare of the helpless blacks of the north and the reputation of Western Australia”,⁸³ reverting back to his position that Aboriginal people were a dying race, outside remedial action. Essentially, Deakin's letter suggested the states were incapable of protecting Aboriginal people outside the “limits of civilisation” and that they could be protected from the evil vices of white men only by the Commonwealth. Yet his concluding sentence reiterated the standard fall-back position of settler-colonial Australia — an expression of prophetic and fatalistic regret: “All that appears possible now is to mitigate as much as possible the trials of their closing years”.⁸⁴

In May 1907, Deakin was drawn into debates about the treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, in response to allegations by Bishop Gibney that were increasingly becoming the subject of media attention.⁸⁵ In October 1907, Deakin officiated at the opening of a “Christian Endeavor” missionary exhibition held in Melbourne, and took the opportunity to mount a thinly veiled attack on the various state governments' failure

⁷⁶ “Federal Politics: Hon. Alfred Deakin at Moama”, *The Riverine Herald*, 13 May 1904, p.2.

⁷⁷ “Deakin at Moama”, p.2.

⁷⁸ Reprinted in La Nauze, *Federated Australia*, pp.147-9.

⁷⁹ La Nauze, *Federated Australia*, p.147.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.149.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Bishop Gibney, “The Treatment of Aborigines: A Criticism”, *The Western Mail*, 18 May 1907, p.51.

to care for Aboriginal people. He also called for the South Australian government to cede control of the Northern Territory to the Commonwealth, and to thus be granted control of Aboriginal affairs in that locale.⁸⁶

Two months later, Deakin found himself embroiled in a House of Representatives debate about a report in *The Age* concerning the “alleged ill-treatment of Aborigines” during an expedition led by explorer and cattle baron, Alfred Canning, in establishing the Canning Stock Route in Western Australia.⁸⁷ The allegations, raised by the expedition’s cook, E.J. Blake, focused on the explorers’ “inhuman” treatment of Aboriginal people they met along the way, which included “capturing and chaining” some to use as guides to find water, and the exploitation of Aboriginal women “for immoral purposes”.⁸⁸

Following the publication of these allegations, along with another article published in *The Age* expressing more general concerns about the ill-treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia,⁸⁹ Deakin was asked in Federal Parliament to “despatch an official denial to the London representative of the Commonwealth for publication in the English press”.⁹⁰ His reply emphasised that his primary concern was to mitigate any potential impact these allegations might have on Australia’s reputation.⁹¹ He was especially concerned with averting any assumption on the part of British readers that the allegations of ill-treatment of Aboriginal people in Western Australia applied “indiscriminately to the whole continent and to the treatment of a vast number of aboriginals”, accentuating instead that the allegations referred to “isolated injuries to particular aborigines in Australia”.⁹²

The questions asked by Mr Mahon of the Prime Minister, without notice in the House of Representatives, similarly focused on the extent to which the allegations had the potential to be injurious to Australia’s standing in England.⁹³ In a similar vein to Henry Reynolds’ much later worries about an “indelible stain” upon the reputation of the Australian nation,⁹⁴ the heat of these debates centred around how the West Australians’ treatment of Aboriginal people would be received by “Great Britain to the detriment of the entire people of Australia”.⁹⁵

The chance of being embarrassed by the London press was seemingly sufficient motivation for Deakin to promptly send a memo the following day to Captain Collins, the representative of the Commonwealth in London. The cable instructed Collins to quickly quash any damning reports, and:

⁸⁶ See “Christian Endeavor Convention: Opening of Exhibition”, *The Express and Telegraph*, 11 October 1907, p.1.

⁸⁷ “Ill-Treatment of Blacks: Statements Denied”, *The Age*, 6 December 1907, p.5.

⁸⁸ “Ill-Treatment of Blacks: Methods in Western Australia”, *The Age*, 5 December 1907, p.8.

⁸⁹ “No Title”, *The Age*, 6 December 1907, p.4.

⁹⁰ “References in Federal Parliament”, *The Kalgoorlie Miner*, 7 December 1907, p.8.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ See *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates (CPD)*, House of Representatives, Vol. 49 (1907), p.7115.

⁹⁴ Henry Reynolds, *The Question of Genocide in Australia’s History: An Indelible Stain?* (Ringwood, 2001).

⁹⁵ “Federal Parliament”, p.8.

If any allegations of ill-treatment of aborigines in Western Australia appear in press, represent that assertions have been contradicted by leaders of the expedition whose conduct has been challenged, and urge that opinion be reversed pending enquiry about to be undertaken by Government.⁹⁶

The press in England were apparently either not keen, or insufficiently interested, to report on the allegations of cruelty, and the London office reported back to that effect, in somewhat relieved tones.⁹⁷

Meanwhile, on Christmas Eve 1907, Deakin had personally signed a letter to the Premier of Western Australia (and forwarded an urgent telegram) in which he proposed the “appointment [of a] Royal Commission [which would] inquire into allegations of ill-treatment of natives”.⁹⁸ Ultimately, while the Commission “acknowledged incidents of chaining Aborigines, feeding them with salt beef and not providing water, and ‘running down prospective informants with horses’ [...] it failed to lay any criminal charges”.⁹⁹

Aboriginal affairs appears intermittently in Deakin’s correspondence, and in the newspapers, in the period 1908-9. The impugned reputation of Australia, the Commonwealth’s lack of political power with regard to Aboriginal affairs, and the belief that Aboriginal people were fast becoming extinct were consistent themes in Parliamentary questions posed to Deakin, as well as his responses, concerning Aboriginal affairs in this period. In 1909, newspaper reports on Parliamentary proceedings related Mr Fisher (Leader of the Opposition) asking the Prime Minister about the “constantly recurring complaints of the treatment of aborigines in the different States, and the danger of the reputation of Australia being thereby reflected on”.¹⁰⁰ Conveniently, however, Deakin reiterated his defence that the “powers of the Commonwealth Government were so limited as to be almost non-existent” (powers, of course, that he had himself helped to establish and circumscribe).¹⁰¹

1909-1913: Securing “better treatment” for the “last remnants” of a Dying Race

During Deakin’s third and final stint as Prime Minister, from June 1909 until April 1910, his Fusion government introduced the Northern Territory Acceptance Bill to consummate the Northern Territory’s transfer to Commonwealth control, a move Deakin had been instrumental in advancing when he helped to broker the agreement with the South Australian government behind that state’s *Northern Territory Surrender Act 1908*.¹⁰² While the Commonwealth’s acceptance bill was not successful within Deakin’s short third term of government, he was highly influential as opposition leader in advocating for its eventual passage under the Fisher Labor government in November 1910.¹⁰³ This was a significant moment in Indigenous affairs policy-making in Australia, one Gavin Souter has characterised as “a turning point in Australia’s official treatment of its Aborigines”.¹⁰⁴ Souter suggests that the still “Draconian” regulations which followed the transfer compared favourably to “the harshness with which Australia had

⁹⁶ Department of External Affairs, Allegations of Ill-Treatment of Aborigines in Western Australia, 24 December 1907, A1, 1908/1748, NAA.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ McGrath, *Contested Ground*, p.254.

¹⁰⁰ “Federal Parliament: Treatment of Aborigines”, *The Daily Telegraph*, 29 September 1909, p.5.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² See Alan Powell, *Far Country: A Short History of the Northern Territory* (Darwin, 2015).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Gavin Souter, *Lion and Kangaroo: The Initiation of Australia* (Surry Hills, 2012), n.p.

been accustomed to treat its Aborigines".¹⁰⁵ Yet already by 1910 Deakin himself had largely ceased expressing any serious concern for the Territory's Aboriginal inhabitants, and instead looked forward to the "comic opera" the Minister responsible would, he anticipated, bring to the Parliament, "especially in his adventures in supervising the aboriginal population".¹⁰⁶

In 1902, debating the prospective transfer, Deakin had suggested that "[a]mong the desirable features connected with this proposal is that it might give the Commonwealth an opportunity of dealing with those [Aboriginal] races", and expressed his hope that under such an arrangement the Commonwealth "might be able to secure to the last remnants of the aboriginal races that better treatment which every civilized people must feel is part of the 'white man's burden'".¹⁰⁷ By 1910, however, his concerns appeared to have solidified around the commonly twinned principles of "defence and development", and were focused squarely on "the national interest" as the "first, second, third, and last" priorities.¹⁰⁸ Tellingly, in an early refrain of the oft- and still-repeated calls for Australia to "develop the north", Deakin argued that "[e]ither we must accomplish the peopling of the Northern Territory or submit to its transfer to some other nation. The latter alternative is not to be tolerated. The Territory must be peopled by a *white race*."¹⁰⁹ In December 1911, less than a year after the transfer, while he still expressed his hope for the "fair and, if possible, generous and sympathetic consideration that is due to the aboriginal population of the Territory, which has suffered a good deal at the hands of lawless people of our own colour", he now delegated responsibility for this to the new Chief Protector Professor Baldwin Spencer, whose appointment Deakin viewed as "a guarantee that the aboriginal population is certain to be well dealt with".¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Deakin purported to be of the opinion that Aboriginal people could and should be protected by the Commonwealth rather than the states. It is plausible that the reputation of Australia was a powerful catalyst for Deakin to advocate the transfer of control. On the other hand, however, these arguments from one of the founding fathers of Australian federation began only *after* the Commonwealth had already, with Deakin's integral involvement and without argument to the contrary, accepted a lack of control over Aboriginal affairs. This willing acquiescence to the demands of the states for continuing control over Aboriginal affairs — and in particular those states Deakin subsequently criticised most stridently — conformed to the common, though never hegemonic, belief, shared and promoted by Deakin, in the doomed race ideal. It also provided a convenient explanation, even excuse, for the federal government's consistent lack of action on behalf of Indigenous Australians. Supporting this, Hugh Mahon, a member of the first Commonwealth parliament, argued that "[i]t is not clear that the States were unduly desirous of retaining control of the natives. The position is probably due to the reluctance of the Federalists to assume a burden rather than to the determination of the States to preserve a right".¹¹¹ And while Deakin was an advocate for the transfer of the Northern

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *CPD*, House, Vol. 46 (1910), p.6265.

¹⁰⁷ *CPD*, House, Vol. 37 (1902), p.15907.

¹⁰⁸ Russell McGregor, *Environment, Race, and Nationhood in Australia: Revisiting the Empty North* (New York, 2016), p.51.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* [emphasis added].

¹¹⁰ *CPD*, House, Vol. 51 (1911), p.4722.

¹¹¹ McGregor, *Indifferent Inclusion*, p.xix.

Territory to Commonwealth control in 1911, his primary concerns were the defence and development of white Australia, and only secondarily the “consideration” of the Territory’s Aboriginal inhabitants, responsibility for whom he all-too-readily delegated to Chief Protector Spencer following the transfer.

Deakin’s approach to Indigenous affairs was marked by a circular logic of diminishing returns for Indigenous people, with racial classifications used to delineate between “authentic” and “inauthentic” Aboriginal people and populations; the decreases in the Aboriginal population these distinctions helped to institute taken as further evidence of the “doomed race” ideal; and this ideal in turn used to justify further restrictions of Aboriginal rights and lands. From a relatively sympathetic supporter of Aboriginal people prior to federation, to an advocate of intervention and control as federation approached and after, Deakin’s position affirmed and served to enact his belief in a white Australia. McGregor’s suggestion that “[t]he white Australia ideal faced little threat from a dying race” rings true in relation to the federation debates, however as subsequent shifts in policymaking towards absorption and assimilation make clear, the Indigenous population within the boundaries of the newly federated Australian nation would require active management and intervention if the white Australia ideal was to become, or be made, reality. Deakin was therefore an important representative of particular understandings of and approaches to Indigenous people and the Australian nation that have had long-lasting and significant consequences. As “Australia’s greatest prime minister”,¹¹² who played a fundamental role not only in the federation of the Australian colonies but also in the racial distinctions and delineations underlying the nation-to-be, this aspect of his legacy should be treated as important, and integral. This has remained a significant historiographical omission, in keeping with the Great Australian Silence, that this article seeks to redress.

¹¹² Kelly, *The End of Certainty*, p.1.