

GOODBYE TO ALL THAT: REFLECTIONS ON WHITE AUSTRALIA

The White Australia Policy

Keith Windschuttle

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Reviewed by R. J. Stove

It is not obvious why anyone would actively seek the title of “Australia’s best living historian.” The very phrase suggests some surreal *Guinness Book of Records* entry, on the lines of “wittiest man in Luxembourg” or “greatest rock group ever produced by Bangladesh.” What is perfectly obvious is that nowadays, Keith Windschuttle alone among Australians consistently threatens the historiographical preeminence of Geoffrey Blainey. One suspects that Blainey himself hails this development. Any major thinker cherishes competitors talented enough to be worth fretting about. He may, as Newton said of himself, stand on giants’ shoulders; but he can never be content with his exalted location if his only confreres are earthbound midgets.

Between Windschuttle and Blainey lie similarities as notable as – if less manifest than – their differences. Both men are conspicuously honest, for one thing (eccentric though it would have seemed to our grandparents that possessing mere honesty might one day appear an outlandish intellectual virtue). Accordingly, both men interest themselves more in wherever their researches take them than in half-baked polemics, though Windschuttle’s temperament has a steely argumentative edge, and a relish for combat, which Blainey’s lacks. Yet either man’s merits would have been in vain if they had been expressed through turgid prose. In fact, both Blainey and Windschuttle are blessed with the gift of rare, addictive readability.

This readability takes different forms with each writer. With Blainey, it reveals itself as a heightened poetic consciousness, a feather-light perception of the beauty and menace in nature, even the beauty and menace in those industrial processes which from Stalin’s tame artists inspired torrents of social-realist garbage. Windschuttle’s, by contrast, is an output as unpoetic as

any black-letter lawyer's case notes. Some ill-wishers think of Windschuttle as a hanging judge. One element of truth resides in the metaphor: Namely, that his historiographical outlook is forensic rather than ambiguous or hesitating. He does not moralize. He does not empathize. He adjudicates. He can convey opponents' theses with often devastating fairness – generally in clearer language than those opponents condescend to use – but when the time comes for him to put on the black cap, he puts on the black cap.

Perhaps a danger exists in the Windschuttle approach: the danger of positivism, of supposing that if an event is officially undocumented it never occurred. (As every student of medieval European history – or of some other area where documentation remains frustratingly fragmented and scarce – soon realizes, what people *assume* happened can be almost as significant as what actually happened.) Not that Windschuttle himself has been guilty of positivism in the above crude form. Still, some of his less intelligent supporters certainly have been; and their misreadings of Windschuttle's conclusions as a license to canonize Gradgrind and Scrooge become intrinsically instructive, however unfortunate.

Hence the particular importance of Windschuttle's latest and best book, titled (with a straightforwardness characteristic of its creator) *The White Australia Policy*. Many among those who cheered on Windschuttle's previous volume, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, will find *The White Australia Policy* an irritant. For Windschuttle – similar to Blainey in his reserves of moral courage, though without Blainey's Christian beliefs¹ – has dared to desecrate Australian political modernism's Holy of Holies. That thrice-sacred relic is the belief in the White Australia Policy's unremitting malevolence.

What was the White Australia Policy, anyhow? Nothing more – though also nothing less – than a form of ethnically based restriction on migrant intakes. Coeval with Australia's existence as a federal nation, the Policy began in 1901, was spectacularly relaxed in 1966, and was formally abolished in 1973. Hatred of the Policy, as might be predicted, now unites the rent-a-mob left with the rent-a-sleaze right. To the rent-a-mob left, the Policy must always be abominable as the birthmark of "institutional racism" on Australia's body politic. To the rent-a-sleaze Right, the Policy must always be equally abominable, as Australia's greatest and longest-lasting barrier to utopian visions of "the global economy." (Whatever this slogan may mean in textbooks, we have all grown only too aware of what it means in practice: a permanent male underclass of bachelors and divorcés, gutted by anti-marriage femocrats' employment policies; unable to imagine the concept of a "family wage" even in its dreams; and indistinguishable from the atomized flotsam of Mexican *barrios* and Brazilian *favelas*, save by the Latinos' comparative paucity of television sets.)

Therefore Windschuttle's production contains material bound to offend everyone, except that minuscule minority which prefers truth to chic. The

fact that Windschuttle's own politics are of a thoroughly temperate sort will probably compound rather than reduce his opponents' rancor. Windschuttle is no turbo-capitalist. He is no white supremacist (nor is this Catholic-paleoconservative reviewer). His outlook is close to that of a mild nineteenth-century British liberal, with a hint of Clement Attlee-style social democracy, in that he concedes labor unions' right to exist.

DILIGENCE VS. DOGMA

The particular rent-a-mob left fable condemned by Windschuttle flourishes like bindweed in the history departments of Australian "universities," being upheld in its pure form by – to cite only the best-known names therein – Lynam, Lyn-dall ("Historians are always making up figures") Ryan, Henry Reynolds, and Mary Kalantzis. This *depositum fidei* – for we really are talking here about a religious hallucination, impervious to reasoning – can be summarized, with only slight parodistic elements, as follows:

By the late nineteenth century Australia had become a multicultural paradise, in which the Anglo lion lay down with the Afghan lamb, and in which the Oriental selflessly labored to induct us within (to coin a phrase) The Greater Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.

Alas, into "this other Eden" there entered – once all the Australian colonies had formed, in 1901, their federation – a serpent, in the shape of Federation's biological racists. These satanic traitors, such as Sir Edmund Barton (prime minister 1901–1903) and Barton's successor Alfred Deakin (prime minister thrice between 1903 and 1910), bound Australia hand and foot with the chains of the White Australia Policy. And the great hopes of maintaining the pre-1901 polyethnic haven were therefore doomed. Then behold, the veil of the multicultural temple was torn in two from top to bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the Thousand-Year Aryan Reich of Sir Robert Menzies came to pass. And every man's hand was against Australia, and Australia's hand was against every man. And the very name of Australia was cursed by the tribes of Manhattan and Madras and Manila and Mogadishu, yea, even unto the seventh generation.

It subsequently required the Four Just Men – Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, and Paul Keating, the prime ministers from 1972 to 1996 – to wash away white Australia's sins. But the forces of evil returned, in the shape of the fascist John Howard, who reimposed the Menzies Aryan dictatorship. And the land brought forth white picket fences. And there was darkness and gnashing of asylum seekers' teeth.

Conflicting interpretations of the same dogma do, naturally, exist. Thus, whereas for Reynolds the primary Axis of Evil consisted of non-Labor lead-

ers like Barton,² veteran Maoist Humphrey McQueen saved most of his bile for the embryonic Labor Party.³ But these are mere theological quibbles, to be expected among chronically disputatious high priests. On the central doctrine they agree readily enough.

Windschuttle's need to refute this doctrine causes him to give unexpected emphasis—almost two-thirds of his book—to pre-1901 Australian history. He appreciates that Barton and Deakin did not emerge, and could not have emerged, out of the blue; that the firm advocacy by the nation's most celebrated popular magazine, the *Bulletin*, of "Australia for the White Man" did not exist in a vacuum (although he is skeptical about the ultimate influence which the *Bulletin* wielded). What, then, were the Policy's actual, as opposed to alleged, origins?

In answering this question, Windschuttle alludes to societies as different from pre-Federation and immediately post-Federation Australia as can be imagined. Since some of these allusions comprise the very few disappointing parts of his narrative, let us specify where he fails to convince.

He is right, he is one hundred times right, in accentuating the theological rather than ethnic basis for pre-Reformation Christendom's hostility toward Muslims and Jews. In his own words: "both these groups were attacked because of their religion, not their race. Indeed, in fifteenth-century Spain ... [they] were given the choice of changing their religion, which many chose to do, an option that would not have been available had their persecution been based on biological grounds."⁴ (This, of course, is bad news for those fashionable mountebanks—the James Carrolls, the John Cornwells, the Daniel Goldhagens, etc., etc.—who make lucrative authorial careers from blaming Nazism on Catholic "anti-Semitism"; but since such mountebanks' particular discipline is victimology rather than history, they need not detain cultural literates for longer than is needed to note their deplorable existence.)

Problems arise, and Windschuttle's own persuasiveness temporarily fails, elsewhere in the same chapter. "One thing now clear," he writes, "is that modern biological science has been unable to define people by race either in terms of their external physical characteristics or their inherited genetic make-up. Race is an unscientific category."⁵ Examining Windschuttle's sources for this and the paragraph's other assertions, we discover "the same old same-old": in other words, citations of Marxist and quasi-Marxist gurus who lusted after blatant political power and who cared little or nothing for truth. Ashley Montagu, Margaret Mead, and Sir Julian Huxley are all there. Of these, Montagu (né Israel Ehrenberg) emerged from the anthropological atelier of Franz Boas—who devoted his whole later life to condoning and publicizing environmentalist mythomania, most notoriously in the case of Mead's Samoans—and became, even by Boasian standards, a slavering apologist for Stalinism. "Soviet Russia," declared Montagu in 1942, "is the outstanding example of perfect management of ethnic group relations under

unusually difficult economic conditions.”⁶ Predictably, he afterwards churned out the “Statement on Race” issued by UNESCO, of which Huxley served as the first director-general. Huxley’s own notions of science, although couched in language less absurd than Montagu’s, make for equally ominous reading. In Huxley’s view, UNESCO’s role should entail “taking the techniques of persuasion and information and true propaganda that we have learnt to apply nationally in war, and deliberately bending them to the international tasks of peace, if necessary utilizing them, *as Lenin envisaged*, to ‘overcome the resistance of millions’ to desirable change.”⁷

To place one’s trust in the veracity of these social engineers is to ignore all the genetic and medical discoveries since the Boasians first flourished: Discoveries that point in entirely the opposite direction. One need not concur with a peevish recent white-nationalist attack on Windschuttle⁸ to admit that writing on race as if *The Bell Curve* and *Why Race Matters* and *IQ and the Wealth of Nations*⁹ had never been published does give the proverbial hostages to fortune, though it would be par for the Australian tabloid course.

Complaint over. On page after page of *The White Australia Policy*’s subsequent chapters, revelations abound. Windschuttle shows, first, that the Policy derived mainly from economic rather than from racialist motives; second, that it made eminent civic sense from the standpoint of those social classes which advocated it; third, that most Australians during the Policy’s operation proved perfectly capable of living amicably with nonwhites, and needed no multicultural mafia to force upon them this desirable outcome; fourth, that comparisons of the Policy to Afrikaners’ apartheid – comparisons profuse within such fever-swamps as Humphrey McQueen’s brain – are ludicrous. This last conclusion Windschuttle validates with spectacular ease, and the preceding three he validates with heroic diligence. In a strange way, notwithstanding his erudite professionalism, Windschuttle represents the achievement of the commonsensical amateur. After all, most of the evidence he supplies has been lying around ordinary collegiate libraries for decades. Australian history has had no equivalent to the Venona archival revelations that in 1995 transformed the study of European and American Communism. Any clever layman could have located nearly all the primary sources that Windschuttle provides. But it took Windschuttle to make the effort, and, having made the effort, to present his findings with lucid finesse.

ROOTS OF THE POLICY

Hoary legend after hoary legend collapses at the touch of Windschuttle’s scythe. Take the oft-credited role of Social Darwinist thinking in the Policy’s origins. Were the Policy’s architects and supporters really aflame with enthusiasm for Social Darwinism? Yes, they were, according to the much-read *Australian Race Relations*, by Melbourne academic Andrew Markus¹⁰ (and

half-a-dozen other comparably respected texts). No, Windschuttle shows, they were (mostly) not:

These authors [who portray late-nineteenth-century Australian culture as a Social Darwinist paradise] have done nothing more than comb through a very small sample of reading matter, such as newspaper editorials and contemporary journal articles, and found three or four phrases each, which appear to express some of the terminology commonly used by Social Darwinists. On no better evidence than this, they have then proclaimed the Australian colonies awash with scientific racism.¹¹

Crucial to Windschuttle's evidence is the extent to which Australia – at the very time it is supposed to have been inundated with Social Darwinist ideas – managed to continue as, dare one say it, a Christian society. Leading Australian clerics in this period, unlike their predominantly invertebrate counterparts in 2005, actually fought against their foes rather than appeasing them – whether these foes were Social Darwinist or otherwise. Windschuttle reminds us that when Social Darwinism did attract an intellectual following among Australians, it derived this following as often as not from socialist campaigners. Since Marx himself felt abject reverence not only for Social Darwinism, but also for Darwinism – he sent Darwin a copy of *Das Kapital*, inscribing it as being from a “sincere admirer” – this should occasion no astonishment.

Another fiction similarly felled: Australia as hotbed of genocidal hatred towards Chinese. Windschuttle shows that whatever anti-Chinese outbreaks of goldfield violence occurred (“they are nothing to be proud of, true, but it is important to keep them in perspective...the white men involved were a militant minority”),¹² racial aversion in itself cannot have fueled them. After all, “there were plenty of Maoris and black Americans on the goldfields, who never attracted any animosity.”¹³ What made the difference in the Chinese case? Two factors primarily: the sheer *numbers* of Chinese who started congregating on the goldfields from the late 1850s on, by which stage the most profitable gold deposits had begun to give out; and the absence, among the Chinese themselves, of any Western-style concepts concerning the individual's political freedom.

We can hardly blame this country's nascent labor movements for resenting the presence, and the spectacular augmentation within a few years, of what amounted to a peon caste. Australian pastoralists demonstrated during the mid-nineteenth century – once the convict transportation system had become unsustainable – a voracious appetite for hiring coolies; were these same pastoralists so inherently virtuous and public-spirited that they could automatically be trusted to forgo establishing other forms of serfdom? To the working classes it did not seem so. Eighty years after the goldfields' heyday had ended, these classes' sensitivity to anything that would turn their homeland into “a peasant country or a gang labor country”¹⁴ made

them recoil with disgust from peasant-farming, Chesterbellocian doctrines, propagated most notably during the 1940s by B. A. Santamaria's National Catholic Rural Movement. (Whether they *should* have recoiled with disgust is a wholly different question; but they did thus recoil, and this aspect of Santamaria's program died a quick, largely unnoticed death.)

Windschuttle's *tour de force* is his examination of the parliamentary debates surrounding White Australia's legal implementation at a national level in 1901. More outright tosh must have been written about these debates than about any other aspect of the Policy, which is saying a vast amount. Like a policeman who knows that solving a crime involves tedious spadework which cannot be delegated to others, Windschuttle painstakingly pores over *Hansard* (Australia's equivalent to the *Congressional Record*) and exhibits the most fantastical discrepancies between what the rent-a-mob left quotes Federal parliamentarians in the early twentieth century as having said, and what they actually said. Far from being — in Reynolds' meretricious words — “per-vaded with ideas of race and blood” and “talk[ing] over and over about the dangers of pollution and contamination,”¹⁵ they bent over backwards (with a few exceptions) to deny any biological animus towards Asians. They paid Asians tribute despite the fact of having a genuine Yellow Peril to fear: the seemingly irreversible rise of Japanese expansionism, which would see off tsarist Russia's armed forces in 1904–05. Did they demonize this Yellow Peril? They did not. Here — just one example among sixteen which could have been chosen — is Deakin, addressing the national legislature on the Immigration Restriction Bill which eventually became the Policy's statutory centerpiece:

We all know, from the merest acquaintance with current news and with critical literature, how high a position that nation [Japan] occupies in arts and letters, and how worthy they are of the place, in our estimation, generally conceded to the highest and most civilized among the nations of the world.... I contend that the Japanese require to be excluded because of their high abilities.... It is not the bad qualities but the good qualities of these alien races that make them dangerous to us. It is their inexhaustible energy, their power of applying themselves to new tasks, their endurance, and low standard of living that make them such competitors.¹⁶

(As a dizzying example of the way that approval for the Policy crossed ideological and, for that matter, racial lines, we find suffragette and anti-conscriptionist Adela Pankhurst Walsh announcing in the 1930s: “the sur-est — indeed the only — defense of our White Australia is friendship with Japan.”¹⁷)

Surprisingly, although he itemizes the specific racial appeal which the White Australia Policy had for this country's (and the world's) first socialist prime minister, John Christian Watson,¹⁸ Windschuttle fails — in his investigation of White Australia's zenith — to stress (he does *mention*) one central point. Namely, the fact that all nations of European stock (most famously the

United States in 1924) adopted similar prohibitions to Australia's, in actuality if not always in statutes, against nonwhite peoples. Sometimes the Policy won support even from those nonwhites who, by modern criteria of identity politics, should have been most hysterical in condemning it. In extreme old age Sir Garfield Barwick, who had been foreign minister in Menzies's cabinet, recollected a meeting he held with Malaysia's leader Tunku Abdul Rahman during the mid-1960s:

I remember the Tunku saying to me that he understood Australia maintaining a European population: "Why should you have my insoluble problem? The problem of ethnic diversity is insoluble. I have Malays, Indians and Chinese and it is insoluble."¹⁹

Windschuttle makes no mention of this. He likewise omits Menzies' sorrow at the de facto junking of the Policy by the fashionable flaneur Harold Holt, who succeeded Menzies as prime minister in 1966. Menzies had doggedly opposed the advice of immigration minister and former cyclist Sir Hubert Opperman that the Policy be dropped;²⁰ as late as December 1976 he called himself "[an] old-fashioned White Australian."²¹

In fact Windschuttle's whole coverage of the Policy's desuetude could well have been more elaborate. He underrates, for instance, the Immigration Reform Group, which exercised so powerful a backstairs influence as Menzies's reign drew to a close. (Contrary to what might be expected from American usage, this group's "immigration reform" meant increases, rather than decreases, to Australia's immigration levels.) Nevertheless Windschuttle is careful to quote a telling passage from the Australian Catholic bishops. While these bishops took pains to censure "any false assumption of racial superiority which too often underlies the so-called White Australia Policy," they conceded "merit in the economic argument which has been used to justify this policy."²² This is hardly the zealous endorsement of multicultural tribalism which certain half-educated journalists have credited preconiliar antipodean Catholic officialdom with favoring.

Windschuttle does not believe that the White Australia Policy can be reinstated; nor, it is clear, would he consider this reinstatement desirable even if it became possible. Whether we can now afford to eschew a Christian Australia Policy, this reviewer takes leave to doubt. Queen Isabella of Spain, faced (as we are faced) with a mortal threat to her country's religious and military survival — a threat at least as immediate as any menace that Islamic terrorism holds for Australians these days — could conceive of one long-term remedy, and one alone, to the problem: eject the infidel, or make him convert. More than five hundred years after the Queen's *reconquista*, little if anything can be added to this solution, other than the monstrous and salutary warning of present-day Islamicized Holland. The fact that all advocacy of national self-defense via sharp Christian proselytism is now unpublishable, even as a suggestion (not just in Australia's lowest-common-denominator scandal-

sheets, but in our notionally “right-wing” magazines), tells us a great deal about the nature of our worst current ethnic problem, about our opinion-forming classes’ blithe indifference to this problem, and about such classes’ total incapacity to solve it.

*R. J. Stove lives in Melbourne. A slightly different version of this article is in the April 2005 issue of Melbourne’s **National Observer**.*

ENDNOTES

1. Using a phrase apparently coined by former Australian Prime Minister Gough Whitlam, Windschuttle called himself (in a recent e-mail to the present reviewer) “a Christian fellow-traveler.”
2. Henry Reynolds, *North of Capricorn: The Untold Story of Australia’s North* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003), p. 189.
3. Humphrey McQueen, *A New Britannia: An Argument Concerning Australian Radicalism and Nationalism* (Melbourne: Penguin Books, 1970), pp. 50, 53.
4. Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, p. 30.
5. Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, p. 28.
6. M.F. Ashley Montagu, *Man’s Most Dangerous Myth: The Fallacy of Race* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), p. 82.
7. Sir Julian Huxley: *UNESCO: Its Purpose and Its Philosophy* (Washington D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1947), p. 60 [italicization added by R.J.S.].
8. Andrew Fraser, “Rehabilitating (and Denaturing) the White Australia Policy,” *American Renaissance*, February 2005.
9. Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, *The Bell Curve* (New York: Free Press, 1994); Michael Levin, *Why Race Matters: Race Differences and What They Mean* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1997); Richard Lynn and Tatu Vanhanen, *IQ and the Wealth of Nations* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002).
10. Andrew Markus, *Australian Race Relations 1788–1993* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1994), pp. 14, 111.
11. Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, p. 54.
12. Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, pp. 170–171.
13. Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, p. 167.
14. These words are from K. M. Dallas, “The Origins of White Australia,” *Australian Quarterly*, March 1955; Windschuttle, pp. 160–161.
15. Reynolds, *North of Capricorn*, p. 188.
16. *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 4, p. 4812; Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, p. 72.
17. Verna Coleman, *Adela Pankhurst: The Wayward Suffragette, 1885–1961* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996), p. 147.

18. Ross McMullin, *So Monstrous a Travesty: Chris Watson and the World's First National Labour Government* (Melbourne: Scribe Publications, 2004), is – as Windschuttle takes impish pleasure in observing – quaintly reticent on this theme.
19. Sir Garfield Barwick, *A Radical Tory: Garfield Barwick's Reflections and Recollections* (Sydney: Federation Press, 1995), p. 181.
20. Michelle Grattan (ed.), *Australian Prime Ministers* (Sydney: New Holland Publishers, 2000), p. 201.
21. A. W. Martin, *Robert Menzies: A Life, Vol. 2, 1944-1978* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1999), p. 564.
22. H. I. London, *Non-White Immigration and the "White Australia" Policy* (New York: New York University Press, 1970), pp. 121-122; Windschuttle, pp. 330-331.