

TRANS-NATIONAL LINKS TO OUR NATIONAL STORY

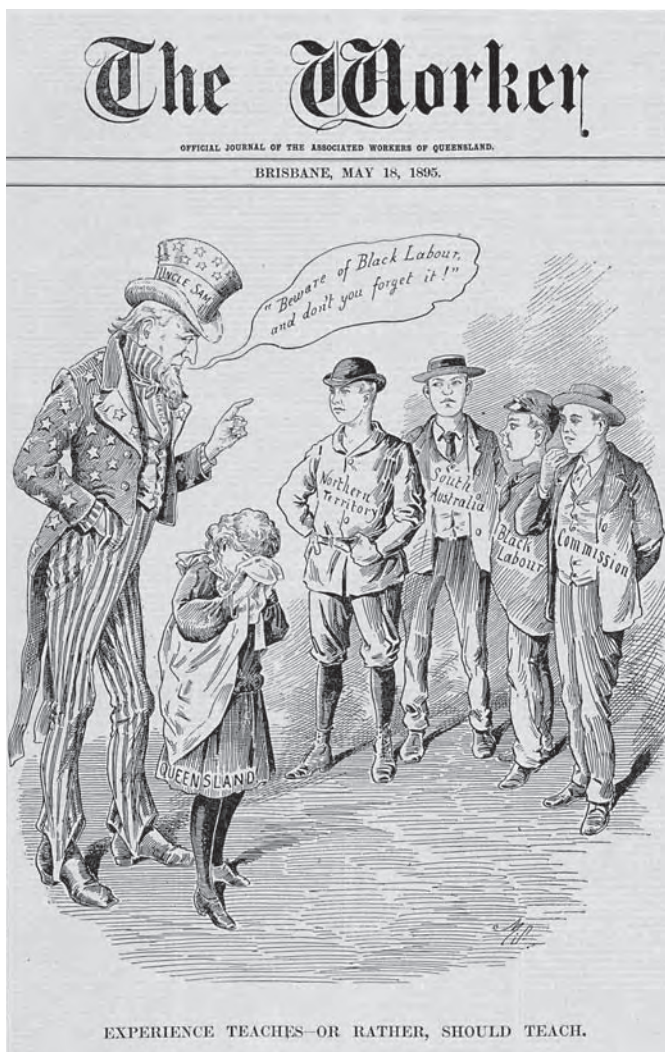


Sarah de Santis, a Norman McCann Summer Scholar for 2007, investigates the influence of trans-national racial ideology on Australian immigration policies

While carrying out research in the National Library of Australia, I saw all sorts of people from all walks of life, reading, writing, and researching history. Whether I was sitting at a desk in the Manuscripts Reading Room, at a microfilm machine in the Newspapers and Microforms Reading Room, or over journals in the Petherick Reading Room, I often wondered what historical story those around me were attempting to recreate and what contribution their material might make to Australia's broader national story.

The National Library is a wonderful repository of all things historically significant to the growth of national Australia. However, the contents of its holdings are not strictly national. As seen in the immense circulation of worldwide writings about race and ideologies, the notorious White Australia policy, for example, was instituted at a time when the world's nations were also developing ideas of 'ethnology', 'racial hierarchy' and 'difference'.

Recent Australian historical scholarship has begun to unravel how influential America's multiracial experiment of Reconstruction had been on Australian politics in the years of Federation (1890–1901). While creating the Australian constitution, our political leaders actively looked to other countries like South Africa and the United States of America and their experiences of nation-building—in particular, the USA's experience of race riots, lynchings and political upheaval, particularly after the



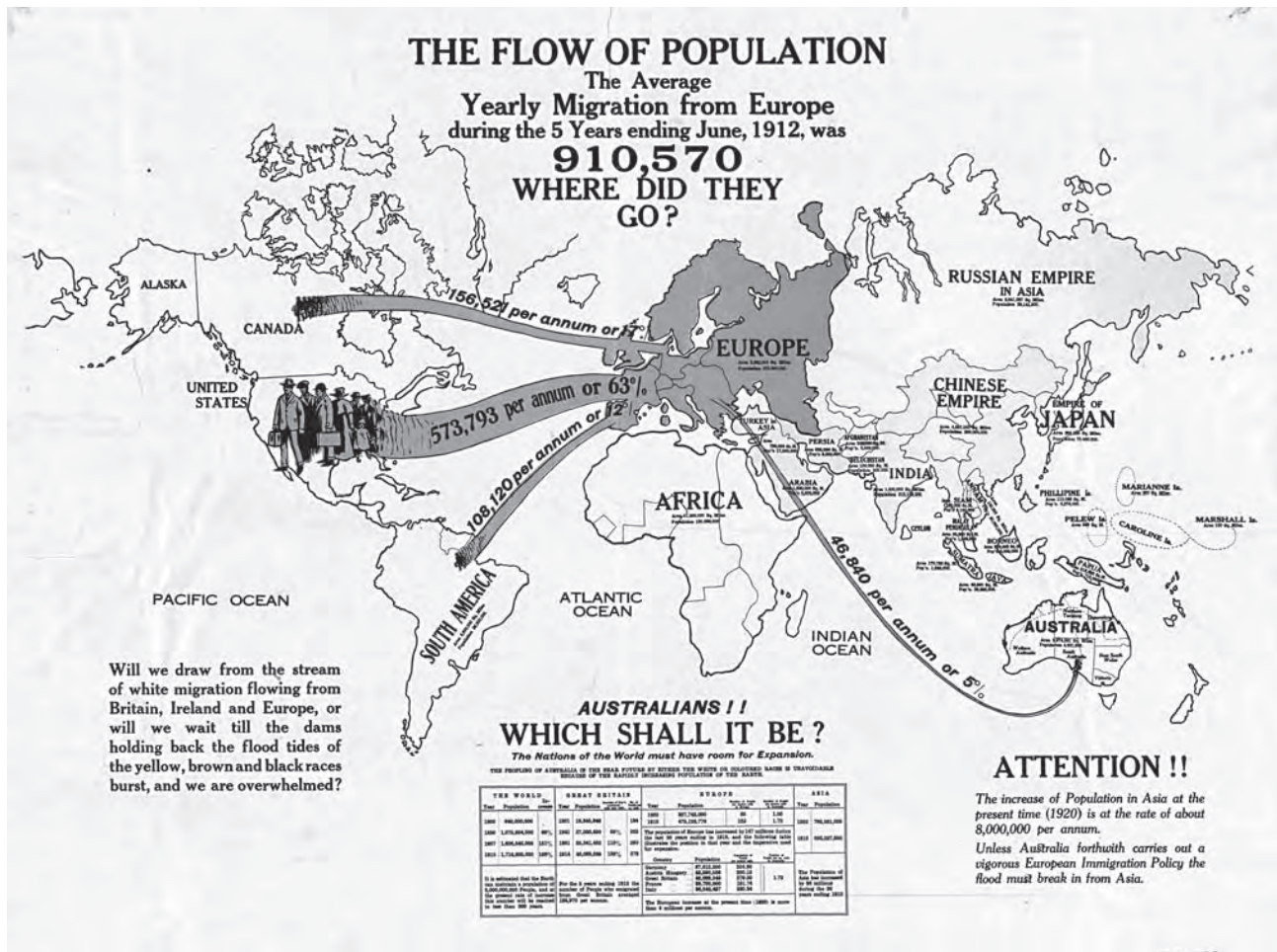
1868 Fourteenth Amendment had redefined national citizenship to include all 'blacks'—and they assessed which avenues of policy would best mould their newborn nation.

In Australia, British immigrants clashed with Chinese settlers during the goldrush years in the 1850s and early 1860s, and with indentured labourers from the Pacific Islands in the 1870s and 1880s. This racial conflict, combined with the racial ideology of the time, made our national leaders determined that racial inequality should not become an issue in Australia. Immigration laws would have to be actively set in place to make certain that the majority of the population shared the same racial background and cultural heritage. The American experience had heralded a

above left:
Greg Power
Sarah de Santis, Norman McCann
Summer Scholar 2007

above:
Unknown artist
'Experience Teaches or Rather,
Should Teach'
reproduced from *The Worker*,
18 May 1895
(Brisbane: *The Worker*, 1890–
1974)
Newspapers Collection NX 371

A wonderful depiction of Uncle Sam (USA) telling Queensland, one of the younger colonies, about his experience with black labour and how that experience should be enough for her not to make the same mistake.



Unknown author
The Flow of Population c.1920
coloured map; 99.8 x 74.0 cm
Map Collection
G 3201 E27

This interesting map from the Library's Map Collection reflects many of the fears that predominated Australian thinking. It depicts the huge flow of European immigration towards America and Canada and asks Australians whether they would prefer to accept white migration from Europe or wait until the growing surplus of Asia's populations invades.

warning, and the White Australia policy was our nation's response.

The shared interrelationship between Anglo-Saxon nations was, in effect, an ongoing, active effort to create the 'new world'. Given this, such interactions cannot be viewed as merely one-off or unidirectional. Long hours spent searching the National Library's manuscripts have given me greater insight into just how strong these trans-national links were (and some might argue, still are). Indeed, this research has allowed me to establish an Australian link that may have proved just as influential to many American policy-makers, particularly during the establishment of their 1920s immigration restriction programs.

Unlike Australia, the United States of America has had a strong history of open immigration which has enabled millions of immigrants to enter their ports year after year. Burgeoning numbers of immigrants in the early decades of the twentieth century, combined with a change from northern and western European immigrants to southern and eastern, created a growing sense of hostility between ethnic groups.

Policy-makers and citizens considered this shift to have a destabilising effect on the structure of American democratic institutions. The contradictory ideals of open immigration on the one hand and a tightening of immigration measures on the other, therefore, made immigration a controversial and often heated debate for decades. In 1921, however, after thirty years of restrictionist crusading and four Presidential vetoes on a literacy test bill—eventually overridden and implemented in 1917—Congress implemented a Quota Law which placed numerical limits on the annual number of immigrants allowed into the United States based on the 1910 Census. For many, this quota still drew in too many 'inassimilable' immigrants from the wrong parts of the world and, in 1924, the law was extended to become the 'national origins quota system'—a more restrictive program based on the 1890 Census which allowed more 'white' Europeans in than their 'swarthy' counterparts.

This act was not America's first restrictive immigration law—the exclusion of Chinese, other Asians, and various classes of

undesirable aliens (paupers, criminals, anarchists, and the like) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries signalled the beginnings of a legal restriction law. However, the 1924 national origins quota system did establish for the first time numerical limits on immigration and a racial and national hierarchy that favoured western and northern European immigrants over their southern and eastern counterparts and drew a line of explicit exclusion to all Asians. For over a quarter of a century, this regime of immigration restriction not only remapped the nation in terms of ethnic and racial categories and hierarchies of difference, it also radically remapped the entire globe in the same way.

It is at this point that our national story begins to take its place on an international stage. In 1924, during the pivotal, polemical months of Congressional debate, Australia's own wartime Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, began a series of lectures across North American states to espouse the virtues of the White Australia policy and immigration restriction towards all Asiatic peoples. Who organised Hughes'

contract for the lecture tour and what persuaded him to undertake it, particularly at this time in American history? In an attempt to answer these questions, I began to study his papers in search of clues. The timing and nature of Hughes' USA tour were too much of a coincidence. I wondered whether Hughes had enough of the right connections to actively influence the American public and, more importantly, the American Congress in its decision to accept such an openly exclusionary immigration policy.

The material that I found in the National Library's manuscripts, journals, newspapers, maps, and pictures sections all provided vital pieces of the puzzle. It became an investigative search, an obsession to discover the final picture. There were fragments like Hughes' 1924 diary, which provided me with an itinerary of dates, contacts and appointments during his lecture tour across fifteen states, and copies

of his lecture notes—the most prominent being his speeches on 'The Evolution of the White Australia Policy', 'Australia and the Pacific', and the 'Union of English-Speaking Peoples'—which helped me piece together the various topics he spoke on and to whom. A particularly interesting find was his personal collection of newspaper cuttings which included articles written by American journalists for American audiences, praising his speeches and his lecture series. These articles gave me an insight into the ways in which Americans responded to Hughes' claims for an American national sovereignty premised on race.

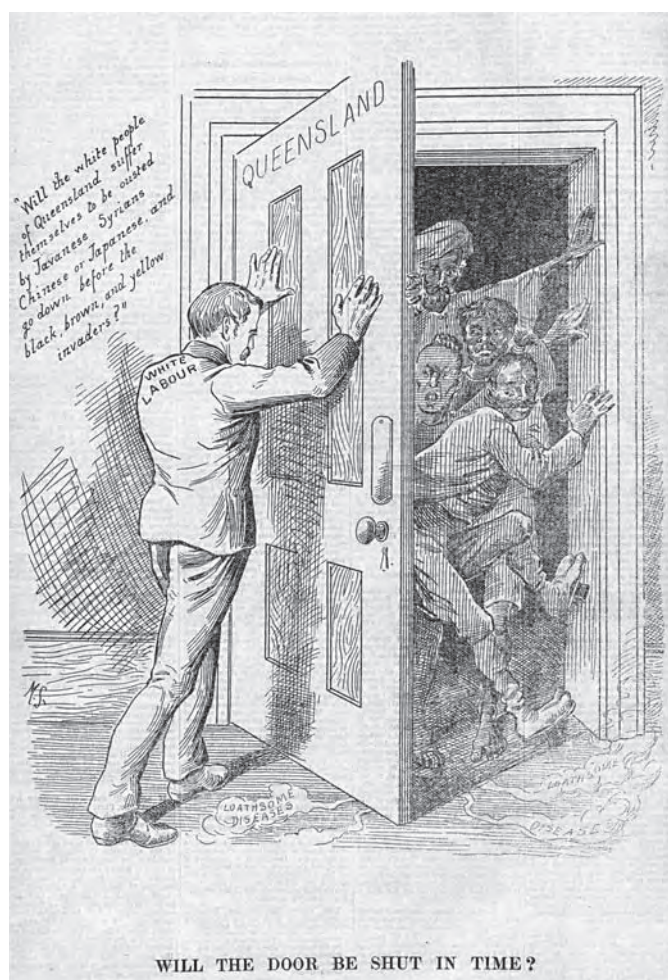
But then there was other, more explicit



above:
Unknown photographer
Portrait of William Morris Hughes [between 1915 and 1923]
b&w negative; 12.5 x 10.0 cm
Pictures Collection
nla.pic-vn3507622

left:
Unknown artist
'Will the Door Be Shut in Time?'
reproduced from *The Worker*,
22 May 1897
(Brisbane: *The Worker*,
1890–1974)
Newspapers Collection
NX 371

This was one of the bigger questions that many political reformers were asking Australian workers throughout the decade preceding Federation. Many Australians viewed Asian immigration as loathsome for economic as well as racial reasons; namely, that their standards of living were believed to be so low that they would bring into the country pestilence and disease.



Unknown artist
 'A White Australia'
 reproduced from *The Worker*,
 27 January 1900
 (Brisbane: *The Worker*, 1890–
 1974)
 Newspapers Collection NX 371

In this image, a robust and healthy White Australian reclaims the country from black indentured labour by painting Australia with the brush of 'white labour only'.

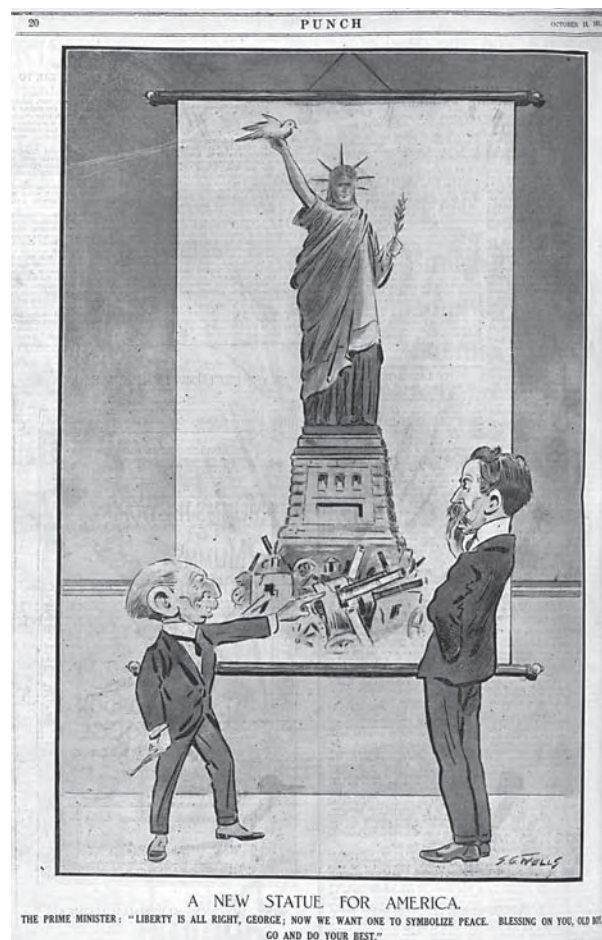


material, such as cuttings Hughes presumably had taken himself from the House and Senate debates surrounding the 1921 Quota Law in the Congressional Records. While these pieces certainly indicate that Hughes had a strong interest in the outcome of the country's immigration legislation, the biggest questions remained. Did Hughes have the connections to influence the country's legislators? Did Australia's 'Little Digger' have the power to sway major American leaders into accepting immigration restriction?

While the answers to these questions continue to evade me, they spur me on in my investigation. What is certain, however, is that Australian and American history cannot be strictly confined to national borders or to an historian's national myopia. As reflected in the Library's collections, this was an epoch of history that involved a highly evolved trans-national circulation of migratory movements and knowledge of racial ideology around the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The documents that I collected together from the National Library of Australia not only portray our national history, but they also hint at the international chain of responses our history has had on the world.

Unknown artist
 'A New Statue for America'
 reproduced from *The New Punch*,
 13 October 1921
 Newspapers Collection NX 104

The Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes, discussing the ins and outs of 'liberty' with the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, at the 1921 Peace conference. Hughes believed that world peace could only be lasting if it were based on the unity of the world's English-speaking nations. He strongly advocated that world peace would come not through a League of Nations as President Wilson proposed, but through this unity of a 'white' fraternity of nations.



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