

The Holocaust, the Aborigines, and the bureaucracy of destruction: an Australian dimension of genocide

PAUL R. BARTROP

The decade of the 1930s saw the beginning of a major reassessment of where the Commonwealth of Australia saw itself in relation to the rest of the world. The Statute of Westminster 1931, which effectively rescinded any remaining vestiges of British parliamentary control over the governments of the Dominions, provided Australia with the opportunity to go its own way on matters of foreign affairs at precisely the moment when freedom of movement was needed in view of international developments.

As things turned out, the Australians did not ratify the Statute of Westminster until 1942, when the nation was imperiled and Britain was not in a position to assist in the Commonwealth's defense. In the intervening decade, the Australians clung to the British lead in almost everything, notwithstanding an oft-expressed British preference that the great Dominion would develop its own policies based around its own strategic interests.

In one area only, it appeared, would Australia do so, and this would have enormous repercussions for those whose lives it touched. In matters of population policy, the Australians exercised an almost fanatical independence, mixing legislation with administration for the purpose of determining which overseas nationalities would have the privilege of contributing to the future population of the country. For Jews seeking to flee Nazi Germany or any of the anti-Semitic countries of Eastern Europe this would have devastating results.

But a selective immigration program formed only a part of the approach to building a "pure" population of blond-haired, blue-eyed Anglo-Australians. A second initiative was the development of what can only be described as a genocidal policy with regard to mixed-descent Aborigines, as this article will contend.

As a way into this topic, we can juxtapose two quotes, taken from statements made by Australian officials of the Department of the Interior in the 1930s. The first is from 1933:

In the [Northern] Territory the mating of an Aboriginal with any person other than an Aboriginal is prohibited. The mating of coloured aliens with any female of part Aboriginal blood is also forbidden. Every endeavour is being made to breed out the colour by elevating

female half-castes to the white standard with a view to their absorption by mating into the white population.¹

The second quote comes from 1936:

Jews as a class are not desirable immigrants for the reason that they do not assimilate; speaking generally, they preserve their identity as Jews.²

It is interesting to learn that the two officials who made these statements operated out of the same government department, and although Ministers came and went as the 1930s progressed, the same essential race-based thinking prevailed throughout the decade.

People rarely, if ever, consider Australia as a site of genocide. It is seen as the lucky country, a land of mateship and the notion of the “fair go,” a thoroughly egalitarian society in which all get their share and no one is treated unfairly. Yet for a full two-thirds of the 20th century most States practiced policies which aimed at the gradual destruction of the Aboriginal people, policies enforced by police and other authorities, and backed up by legislation.

The object of these policies was simple: to force the assimilation of mixed-descent Aborigines into mainstream European-Australian society in as thorough a manner as possible by “breeding out the color.” At exactly the same time, Australian governments were continually on the lookout for foreigners entering the country and upsetting the so-called racial balance, which hovered between 1933 and 1945 at around 95 percent British or British-descent (which in the context of the time amounted to the same thing).

It could quite legitimately be argued that this was all thoroughly consistent with the aims of the White Australia policy, a set of conventions never actually spelled out though understood by everyone.³ This intended both to keep put the so-called “colored races” (particularly those from Asia and the Pacific), and also to repatriate people from undesirable areas back to their original homelands. The quest for a White Australia was to last until the 1960s, and even though from 1945 the Commonwealth took in literally millions of immigrants, all arrived according to a carefully structured ethnic hierarchy. Australia in the postwar years would not accept all comers.

The Aborigines, of course, could not be repatriated or excluded, though this had not stopped some in the 19th century from finding their own “solutions” to the “problem.” Earlier methods of Aboriginal destruction had been tried by white settlers during the 19th century, and outright killing was common in many parts of the country. Henry Reynolds has estimated that at least 20,000 died as a direct result of settler murder, though this figure is, he concludes, an underestimation of a figure which was probably much higher.⁴ Scores of thousands of others died owing to disease, though the degree to which diseases were introduced deliberately for the purpose of destroying Aboriginal lives is highly contentious and probably a non-starter if we are looking for direct government involvement in the process of destruction. Murder in the 19th century was precisely that—unlawful killing. Aborigines were, under law, British subjects, and entitled to the

same protection as anyone else. It is instructive in this regard to learn that gangs or posses of settlers who went out on so-called “nigger-hunts” would often swear a blood oath prior to their departure never to divulge the nature of their actions to another person. When all was said and done, they knew that what they were committing was murder, an act contrary to the law of the land punishable by their own death. In other words, the genocidal annihilation of the Aborigines through violence was not a part of government policy during the 19th century; those committing such acts were acting in a manner contrary to law.

Toward the end of the century, however, it was realized that the likelihood of an Aboriginal survival much beyond the next 50 years was unlikely. Disease, dispossession and violence had taken their toll, and the number of full-blooded Aborigines was in free-fall. Successive policies by colonial, and then state, governments aimed to leave these survivors alone, and to ease the way for a dying people to depart the earth with some degree of what was viewed as dignity. Left to their own devices on reserves, little in the way of new legislation designed expressly for full-blooded Aborigines was passed by the states in the early 20th century. A great deal of attention, however, was paid to those of mixed Aboriginal-European descent.

The fundamental position was that all traces of Aboriginality were to be “bred out” of the “half-caste,” the “quadroon” and the “octoroon” (these were real terms, employed by leading public servants throughout the period under discussion). There would, moreover, be absolutely no “race mixing” between full-blooded Aborigines and white Australians. The Chief Protector and Director of Aboriginal Affairs in Queensland, J.W. Bleakley, was quite clear on this point in his Official Report for 1919:

It is only by complete separation of the two races that we can save [the Aborigine] from hopeless contamination and eventual extinction, as well as safeguard the purity of our own blood.⁵

As to those of mixed descent, it was decided that no further “cross breeding” could be permitted, as the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia between 1915 and 1940, A.O. Neville, later explained:

It is to the benefit of our own race that the full-blood should not any longer be encouraged to mate with other than full-blood; on the contrary, he should be rightly excluded from any association likely to lead to any other union. It would be contrary to our view of assimilation to do anything which might force our coloured people back to the black, and moreover their continued mating with full-bloods is liable to prolong the process of absorption until there are no more virile full-bloods remaining alive.⁶

With this in mind, as summarized by Colin Tatz, Neville developed a “three-point plan”:

first, the “full bloods” would die out; second, take “half-castes” away from their mothers; third, control marriages among “half-castes” and so encourage intermarriage with the white community. ... In this way, it would be possible to “eventually forget that there were ever any Aborigines in Australia.”⁷

This policy was to see innumerable personal tragedies on a catastrophic scale, the most important of which for our purposes concerned the thousands of children who were often forcibly ripped from the arms of their parents in order to be placed with white families, and raised as white children in the expectation that they would themselves take white partners in adulthood. At the end of the process, the “color” would be “bred out,” and an Aboriginal people would no longer exist.

Neville had no difficulties with the idea of encouraging mixed marriages of this kind, because the “half-caste” and the white were allied “by association, consanguinity and ancestry”:

The young half-blood maiden is a pleasant, placid, complacent person as a rule, while the quadron girl is often strikingly attractive, with her oftentimes auburn hair, rosy freckled colouring, and good figure, or maybe blue eyes and fair hair. ... In both cases the lads who have been properly cared for are well set up and often good looking. As I see it, what we have to do is to elevate these people to our own plane, and if intermarriage between them and ourselves becomes more popular, then we shall be none the worse for it. That will solve our problem of itself.⁸

Lest it be thought that Neville was alone in his view of the situation, or that Western Australia posed an isolated case, it is worth emphasizing that he merely articulated ideas held by his peers around the country, as the words of Dr Cecil Cook, Chief Protector and Chief Medical Officer of the Northern Territory between 1927 and 1939, demonstrate:

Generally by the fifth and invariably the sixth generation, all native characteristics of the Australian aborigine are eradicated. The problem of our half-castes will quickly be eliminated by the complete disappearance of the black race, and the swift submergence of the progeny in the white.⁹

Others agreed, and at a major conference in Canberra of all State and Federal Aboriginal affairs administrators in April 1937—the first of its kind—the following resolution was passed:

this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth, and it therefore recommends that all efforts be directed to that end.¹⁰

Compared to the policy advocated by some, this proposal was a “least-worst” option. One of those at the meeting, Lothar Gall, the Under-Secretary of the Home Department in Queensland, had earlier put forward a serious proposal that all “half-castes” be forcibly sterilized.¹¹ The position agreed to by the Canberra Conference recommended the opposite, an inter-breeding scheme on a vast scale. The process would have to be rigorously pursued, with commitment on the part of those carrying it out. In Neville’s own words,

The native must be helped in spite of himself! Even if a measure of discipline is necessary it must be applied, but it can be applied in such a way as to appear to be gentle persuasion. ... [T]he discipline we propose here is only akin to that which we usually impose upon ourselves. Let us try it for a generation or two, and we need not fear the

outcome. But when I say try it, I mean that every agency now in force and to be employed for the betterment of the native people must look upon the pursuance of the accepted united policy as paramount. There must be complete and enthusiastic co-operation between those charged with its initiation and conduct without reservation, and no backsliding, changes or let-down behind Authority's back must be permitted. Political influence must keep out. There will be difficulties and failures, but the end in view will justify the means employed—to wipe out forever an existing blot upon Australia's escutcheon, and succeed in the ultimate elevation of a minority of our people to social equality with the majority and, what is equally important, to give them the ability to think for themselves.¹²

Among the “disciplinary” measures to be adopted, the transfer of non-white children to white families is the most controversial, and a clear case of genocide under Article II (e) of the 1948 United Nations Genocide Convention, which unequivocally states that “Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” constitutes one of the five actions determining whether an act may or may not be considered a genocide.

As early as 1909 the Chief Protector of Aborigines in Western Australia, C.F. Gale—A.O. Neville's immediate predecessor in this position—declared that a policy of forcible separation would be both easy and in the long term quite peaceful:

I would not hesitate for one moment to separate any half-caste from its aboriginal mother, no matter how frantic her momentary grief might be at the time. They soon forget their offspring.¹³

Ripping children away from their parents was, in Neville's opinion, absolutely necessary. Referring to the conditions prevailing in Aboriginal shanty towns in the far outback of Western Australia, he concluded that until

children are taken from such indifferent environment and trained apart from their parents no real progress towards assimilation is to be expected, because so many factors including the character of the people themselves make it impossible. You will have a struggle to get the children away, even though the parents will be on hand to see them daily if they wish, but believe me they will thank you in the end, as I have been thanked by parents who resisted me almost to fighting point when I removed some lovely youngster from their doubtful care to place it in the Kindergarten to commence its upward journey through life. Once a child is removed it must never return to live with its parents within a settlement; if it does, all the good work already accomplished will be undone. Later in life it will see the difference for itself. We have to bear in mind that the process does not need repeating ad infinitum; the child removed to-day will be the parent of tomorrow, and will itself as the result of training and experience be better able to bring up its offspring than its parents were. You must for a generation or more pursue this course if you are to do any good.¹⁴

As a final observation of how Neville viewed the efficacy of his policy, we can consider the following personal reflection he made in retirement in 1947:

Many working half-caste girls having infants fathered by white men came to me to discuss the disposal of their children. When I explained to them that separation was inevitable for their children's sake, most of them saw the matter as I did, and on giving them up made and kept a promise not to molest them in any way. I found that these children in their new

surroundings had no difficulty in comporting themselves as white children, and any picture of their mothers which they might have retained at first rapidly faded from their minds. They attended the State schools and many of them were well above the average in their work. In later life there was a possibility of a meeting between the children and their mothers, but though this was unlikely, by that time both would realize the position sufficiently well to avoid any adverse consequences from it. Some of these near white children were adopted by childless white couples, and that too is all to the good.¹⁵

People such as A.O. Neville were not isolated cranks simply playing with their favorite theories. They were men invested with enormous power over their Aboriginal charges; they also had the power to hire and fire the white officers given the task of carrying out their policies. And they were far from mere humble civil servants whose task it was to execute the policies of their Ministers. The influence someone such as Neville could bring to bear over the formation of legislation was considerable. By the time the resolutions were passed at the aforementioned conference of Aboriginal affairs heads in Canberra in April 1937, for example, Neville “had persuaded the Western Australian parliament to create many of the enabling conditions for it.”¹⁶ As Robert Manne has shown, this legislation

made uncontrolled sexual relations between Europeans and Aborigines a punishable offence. It required Aborigines to seek the permission of the native commissioner to marry. It more or less forbade marriages between half-castes and full-bloods. It prohibited the association of quadroons with those deemed to be “native” under the act. Most importantly of all it gave the commissioner guardianship rights over all Aborigines up to the age of twenty-one, allowing him to remove all children, whether legitimate or not, from their families.¹⁷

We are, in short, talking here about people who were certainly civil servants, but were by no stretch of the imagination powerless. The advice they furnished their Ministers frequently became set policy, often in a short period of time and with little dissent in the nation’s parliaments.

Where does this fit into a discussion of the Shoah, a calamity of far greater magnitude and violence taking place at the same time on the other side of the world? Earlier work undertaken by the present author on Australia and the Holocaust has highlighted a position that is far from complimentary of the Australians, whose policies towards the Jews of Europe left an immense amount to be desired. To begin with, the Australians consciously devised a refugee policy which allowed in only 10 percent of all Jews who had applied to come in and were eligible to do so under existing immigration laws. This was done deliberately with the racial dimension of the situation in mind. Other measures were just as discriminatory: the Australian bureaucrats and politicians played with quota numbers to reduce refugee numbers while making it appear as though they had increased them; they raised the amount of landing capital required upon arrival, if the immigrant in question was Jewish; they entered into migration agreements with other countries on the proviso that such arrangements did not extend to Jews in those countries; and they devised immigration application

forms which actually required all aspiring immigrants—from anywhere outside the British Empire—to state whether or not they were Jewish.

The prewar Jewish refugee issue was a jolting period of self-analysis concerning Australia's place in the world and its responsibilities towards other human beings in need of help. In response to this challenge came a large measure of indifference to the fate of Europe's persecuted; this characterized both government policy and public perceptions for most of the 1930s. Jewish refugees were always looked at as alien immigrants, and judged on that basis rather than on the urgency of their situation.

There were few in Australia who thought positively about the Jews or their plight. Moreover, while there were many who felt that the Nazi persecution of the Jews was abhorrent and evil, an oft-repeated opinion was that it should be the responsibility of the world beyond Australia to find a solution to the problem. During the war years this was compounded by the total inability of Australians to reach Jews trapped inside the Nazi-occupied countries. No matter; three days after the outbreak of war in September 1939, the Australian government announced that no more refugee immigration from within Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, or any area occupied by Germany, would be permitted.

By this stage, the Australian government was operating from the assumption that the term refugee was synonymous with the word "Jew," and consequently a ban on all Jewish migration was brought down for the duration of the war. This did not stop arrivals from elsewhere, and evidence has been found to show that immigration was actively pursued from other European countries, including those occupied by the Nazis, between 1940 and 1945. That they were unable to arrive in the numbers sought by the Australian government is of no consequence. Throughout this time, the Australian government was proclaiming to its citizens that it was a tolerant and caring Administration which did not play favorites; at the same time, its senior public servants and policy-makers were going out of their way to find ways of keeping Jews out or reducing the number of those who would be let in.

Just how far the government was aware of what it was doing can be gauged from a statement made by the Minister for the Interior, John McEwen, on 16 March 1939. Justifying his approval of yet another administrative order restricting Jewish entry—there had been many throughout the 1930s—McEwen stated:

It is realised that approval of this recommendation would amount to discrimination against a particular race. It is considered, however, that, in the special circumstances, the proposed action would be justified. It is most desirable, in the interests of the composition of the future population of Australia, that as far as possible the immigration policy of the Commonwealth should be selective.¹⁸

The position was put more vigorously to the international community assembled at the Evian Conference in July 1938. Here, Australia's representative Thomas Walter White, in a famous statement, joined the Jewish refugee issue to that of the Aborigines in a classic example of political double-speak. Recounting what

he saw as the many measures Australia had already undertaken to facilitate the entry of Jewish refugees into the country, White said:

Under the circumstances, Australia cannot do more, for it will be appreciated that in a young country man power from the source from which most of its citizens have come is preferred, while undue privileges cannot be given to one particular class of non-British subject without injustice to others. It will no doubt be appreciated also that, as we have no real racial problems, we are not desirous of importing one by encouraging any scheme of large-scale foreign immigration.¹⁹

So there it was: a clear statement, from a very highly placed Australian Federal Minister, that Australia had “no real racial problems.” Under this rubric, the Aborigines were quite clearly irrelevant. For White, they were not a racial “problem,” and A.O. Neville, in Western Australia, would surely have agreed with him. To Neville, the full-blooded Aborigines were dying out—no problem. Those of mixed descent were being dealt with through administrative processes and legislation—again, no problem.

If the Jews came into Australia, however, this would cause racial strife where none presently existed. Interior Minister John McEwen was cognizant of this when he wrote his opinion in March 1939 that

It is considered that, if a Jewish problem is not to arise in Australia with the attendant anti-semitic feeling, a limit should be placed on the total number of Jews admitted annually.²⁰

Left up to the bureaucrats to work out how this was to be achieved, numerous administrative measures were subsequently worked out in McEwen’s department to see to it that “no undue influx” of Jews was allowed to enter the country.²¹

Accompanying this bureaucratic discrimination came a public reaction which in certain respects pointed to an anti-Semitic presence rarely witnessed in Australia. Several of these have been recounted elsewhere, and need not be again rehearsed here.²² One notable statement is, however, worthy of comment in the current context. The populist magazine *Smith’s Weekly* was read widely throughout Australia, and people often waited eagerly to see the latest issue. Throughout the Depression it was to many a major vehicle for the expression of their frustrations. It took no prisoners, and was known as a newspaper respecting nothing and fearing no one. It spoke in plain language, appealing to the lowest common denominator and explaining complex issues in simple terms; not quite a member of the yellow press, it was certainly off-white in its approach to the issues of the day. At the height of the Jewish refugee crisis, in July 1939, *Smith’s* ran the following, an amazing statement under the circumstances:

Only one final solution of the Jewish problem is therefore conceivable; that they should break down their old tribal isolation and inter-marry, on a vast scale, with their Gentile oppressors.

If that happened, Jewish brains would give a distinct lift to the mental quality of humanity in general. And there would be no more pure Jews, handy and unpopular scapegoats, for every brutish and deluded popular mob.²³

It is shocking to consider the parallels between this statement, concerning a preferred future action towards Jews, and the reality of what was already happening to Aborigines across the nation. Aboriginal Protectors throughout Australia were already adopting the procedure suggested by *Smith's Weekly*.

It is impossible to conclude otherwise than that Australia in the 1930s was possessed of an administrative culture that in reality practiced genocide;²⁴ it carried, moreover, a potential for the acceptance of genocides perpetrated by others. In the quest for a racially pure Australia, successive governments adopted policies that were at the least discriminatory, and at the most brutally destructive. They sought to blot out any future Aboriginal presence; they connived to restrict the entry of Jews into Australia; they entered into agreements with so-called “racially desirable” countries for the purpose of importing immigrants with fair hair and blue eyes (throughout the period 1933–1945 the Department of the Interior even adopted Nazi terminologies such as “Aryan” and “non-Aryan Christian” to describe those who might be seeking to enter Australia as immigrants); they worked hard to develop an exclusive society shaped according to racial models in a manner every bit as contrived as those of the Nazis. And, when all was said and done at the end of the war, the Australians rubbed it in by arranging the importation of former Nazis into the country as protected immigrants.²⁵

There will be some in Australia (and perhaps elsewhere) who will not be pleased with the tenor of this article. Some Jews will be upset at the notion that the experience of the Australian Aborigines constituted genocide, preferring instead to consider that only the Holocaust can be so described. Some white Australians would argue that what happened to the so-called “Stolen Generations” was not genocide because it did not involve killing, and that the thoroughly altruistic motives of the bureaucrats and governments should be taken into account before the dreadful charge of genocide is even raised.²⁶

To both of these objections I would again draw attention to the United Nations Genocide Convention of 9 December 1948. Australia was an early signatory to the Convention, accepting the UN’s definition—which included Article II (e), referred to earlier. The Australian parliament ratified the country’s accession to the Convention with the Genocide Convention Act 1949, absorbing the UN definition *in toto*. Of necessity, we must apply a strictly black-letter application of the law of genocide as held by the United Nations and supported by the government of the Commonwealth of Australia if we are to ascribe responsibility. If the Acts drafted by people such as A.O. Neville were something other than genocide, then the charge would read differently, and would have to be judged according to different criteria. That is why such precision is needed when applying the term genocide to any event. We need to know what it *is* and what it *is not*. We have to know when to apply it, and when not to. And as this article has shown, I think it should be applied to Australia in the 1930s.

Despite the avowed Australian position, the practice of forcible removal of Aboriginal children persisted under certain conditions into the 1970s. The anomaly was permitted by the fact that, despite Australia’s accession to the UN

Convention and subsequent parliamentary ratification, genocide as a crime was not at any stage actually written into the Australian legal system—as Mr. Justice Crispin, of the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory, concluded in a landmark decision handed down in December 1998:

It is clear that whilst the Act effectively ratifies the Convention it does not purport to incorporate the provisions of the Convention into Australian municipal law. ... In enacting the Genocide Convention Act the Commonwealth of Australia chose to ratify the Convention but to refrain from creating any statutory offences of the kind contemplated. There is nothing to indicate that the common law then recognised the existence of any offences of that nature ... I am unable to conclude that the common law recognises any offence of genocide ... Nor, in my view, is there a sufficient jurisprudential basis for any attempt to graft such an offence on to the corpus of the common law. ... I have concluded that no offence of genocide is known to the domestic law of Australia.²⁷

The decision of Mr. Justice Crispin was upheld, on appeal, by the Federal Court of Australia on 1 September 1999. The decision startled the Australian public and shocked the Jewish community, which had thought the War Crimes (Amendment) Act 1989 would take care of all outstanding issues of war crimes and crimes against humanity (embracing genocide as represented by the Holocaust). By way of response, Federal Senator Brian Greig—ironically, from A.O. Neville’s State of Western Australia—introduced a private Member’s Bill (the Anti-Genocide Bill 1999) into parliament on 13 October 1999.²⁸ The Bill’s intention was to formally recognize genocide as a crime in Australian domestic law. Had this existed in the past, a case could conceivably have been brought against those responsible for the removal of Aboriginal children; as things stand today, no form of redress on the grounds of genocide can even be contemplated. Questions as to whether or not it should be must remain moot in light of this.

Australians are far from clear as to what the term genocide means, though it is a much used (even over-used) concept. Prior to the 1990s, if pressed, most would probably have placed a discussion of genocide into some sort of a framework concerning Jews, Nazis and the Holocaust; now, they might add Bosnia and Rwanda. It is contended that very few would be able to bring themselves to acknowledge the experience of the Australian Aborigines in such a light. Lingering popular prejudice against the Aboriginal people would refuse to “elevate” their experiences to such a status as the Holocaust or more recent events.

The concept of Australia as a site of genocide is anathema to many, not least the Prime Minister, John Howard. When the Federally constituted “National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families” handed down its report in April 1997, Howard referred to the whole sorry episode as a “blemish” in an Australian story of which all should otherwise be “extremely proud,” a “heroic achievement in the face of immense difficulties.”²⁹

This “blemish” was genocide. It took place, as considered policy, for 70 years, in a stable Westminster parliamentary democracy. It did not involve killing, but

its ultimate objective was the same as Hitler's was for the Jews; namely, that at the end of the process the target group would have disappeared from the face of the earth. For part of the time the Australian case occurred concurrently with that of the Nazis, and there was a measure of overlap between the two as fugitives from the Nazis sought refuge in Australia. Having to work through the same department that determined the fate of Aborigines at the Federal level, refugee Jews from Hitler's Germany were restricted in their opportunities to enter Australia, and for largely the same reasons as Aboriginal children were being stolen from their families: as objects in the quest for racial and cultural assimilation.

Genocide can take many forms, and have a number of outcomes. In the Australian case, huge personal tragedies took place as children and families were separated. The continuity of Aboriginal life was skipped by a whole generation, and a legacy of the most intense hurt and bitterness was left in the already desperately sad relationship between black and white Australians.

As a final point of note, attention should be drawn to the fact that the present Prime Minister has persistently refused to issue any form of official apology to the Aboriginal community on behalf of other Australians. Of course, he is under no compulsion to do so; but it is the reasoning behind his stance which is so disturbing to many Australians: at a reconciliation convention in May 1997, he stated that he "did not believe that current generations of Australians could be held accountable for or regarded as guilty for the acts of earlier generations over which they had no control."³⁰ Howard has since reaffirmed that position many times, and he holds true to it still. This, together with his promotion of the virtues of Australia's historical development, sets an extremely dangerous standard for future generations, a situation not helped by the decline of history in Australia's schools and universities.

Genocide, Holocaust, Jews, Aborigines, Australians. Many find the juxtaposition of images distasteful, even unfair. Others see this range of concepts as a fundamental *non sequitur*. Yet there is a certain legitimacy to be found in aligning the situation of the Aborigines with that of the Jews *vis-à-vis* Australia. A failure to recognize this does little to relieve the burden of the past which Australians have to bear, a burden which few even realize exists.³¹ What John Howard will not understand is that, in the words of Richard Hall, "we have to know and own our past to be free of it... We also need to remember the past, so that we can be vigilant against those who have learnt nothing."³² This is just as true when looking at the Australian role in the Holocaust as it is when looking at the history of the Aboriginal-European relationship.

It remains to be seen where this will lead us; but the events of 60 years ago must surely sound out a warning to any who are concerned about the future of Australia. Those who only look at the positives, who refuse to acknowledge the negatives, and who do not learn from every episode in the nation's history, do so at the nation's peril.

Notes and References

1. Colin Tatz, *Genocide in Australia* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 1999) AIATSIS Research Discussion Paper No. 8, p 27.
2. National Archives of Australia (hereafter NAA), A434, file 49/3/7034, *Admi. of German Jews—Cabinet Decision re.*, T.H Garrett to J.A. Carrodus, August 6, 1936.
3. Robert Manne is one author who advocates this position. See his *The Way We Live Now: The Controversies of the Nineties* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1998), pp 25–26.
4. Henry Reynolds, *The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia* (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books, 1982), p 122; Henry Reynolds, *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers, and Land* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p 53.
5. Commonwealth of Australia, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families* (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997), p 73 (hereafter *Bringing Them Home*).
6. A.O. Neville, *Australia's Coloured Minority: Its Place in the Community* (Sydney: Currawong, 1947), p 56.
7. Tatz, *Genocide*, p 25.
8. Neville, *Australia's Coloured*, p 57.
9. *Bringing Them Home*, p 137.
10. *Ibid*, p 32.
11. Robert Manne, “A cruel case of absurd historical denial,” *Age* (Melbourne), Vol 15, 1999, p 17.
12. Neville, *Australia's Coloured*, pp 80–81.
13. *Bringing Them Home*, p 276. In the Report this quote is wrongly attributed to James Isdell, a Travelling Protector of Aborigines. Tatz, *Genocide*, p 25, has located the correct source as C.F. Gale.
14. Neville, *Australia's Coloured*, pp 176–177.
15. *Ibid*, pp 179–180.
16. Raimond Gaita, *A Common Humanity: Thinking about Love and Truth and Justice* (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 1999), p 122.
17. Manne, *The Way We Live Now*, p 29.
18. NAA A445, file 235/5/4 Part 3, “Admission of Jews Policy Part 3,” Interior memorandum for Cabinet (*Immigration of Jews into Australia*), March 16, 1939.
19. NAA A434, file 50/2/41837, “Refugees from Austria: Special Committee Proposed by USA, Evian,” Speech by Lieut.-Colonel the Honourable T.W. White, Delegate for Australia at Evian-les-Bains Conference on July 7, 1938. On Evian and Australia, see also Paul R. Bartrop, “‘No real racial problems’: Australia, refugees, and the Evian Conference, 1938,” in Alice L. Eckardt, ed., *Burning Memory: Times of Testing and Reckoning* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1993), pp 21–41; and Paul R. Bartrop, “The Dominions and the Evian Conference: a lost chance or a golden opportunity?,” in Paul R. Bartrop, ed., *False Havens: The British Empire and the Holocaust* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1995), pp 53–78.
20. NAA A445, file 235/5/4 Part 3, “Admission of Jews Policy Part 3,” Interior memorandum for Cabinet (*Immigration of Jews into Australia*), March 16, 1939.
21. NAA A434, file 49/3/7034, *Admi. of German Jews—Cabinet Decision re.*, J.A. Perkins, Minister for the Interior, memorandum for Cabinet (*Question of Admission of Jews from Germany*), June 2, 1933. It is worth noting that this term first appeared on a government memorandum as early as June 1933, setting in train the mindset that would dominate Australian refugee policy *vis-à-vis* Jews until 1945.
22. See, for example, Paul R. Bartrop, “‘These people are undesirable’: Australian responses to refugees from Nazism before World War II,” in G. Jan Colijn and Marcia Sachs Littell, eds, *Confronting the Holocaust: A Mandate for the 21st Century* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), pp 63–80; also, Paul R. Bartrop, *Australia and the Holocaust, 1933–45* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 1994), Chapter 9.
23. *Smith's Weekly*, July 22, 1939, p 13.
24. Robert Manne, who has written at length on the issue, is not quite so certain that we should be talking about genocide, though he does not reject the position outright. Rather, he prefers to argue a case conditioned along the following lines:

If a case is to be made that genocide was committed it can only be made with regard to a particular policy plan, biological assimilation; at a particular time, the 1930s; and in particular places, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. And even here the case would have to concede, in my opinion, that the policy was more one of intentions than effective actions, and that, after 1940, it was, everywhere in Australia, abandoned in both thought and deed.

See Manne, *The Way We Live Now*, pp 40–41. Unlike Manne, I am not convinced that the policy was abandoned after 1940, but as the current paper considers the 1930s only, our disagreement need not be debated here.

25. In this regard, see especially Mark Aarons, *Sanctuary: Nazi Fugitives in Australia* (Melbourne: William Heinemann Australia, 1989).
26. The most vociferous advocate of this position is Ron Brunton, who has consistently argued the line that successive Australian assimilation and removal policies did not constitute genocide. Among many items from Brunton, see especially his “Betraying the Victims: The ‘Stolen Generations’ Report,” Institute of Public Affairs (Sydney), *IPA Background*, Vol 10, No 1, 1998. It is the author’s opinion that Brunton offers much rhetoric but no convincing evidence to challenge the essential points put in the current article.
27. In the Matter of an Application for a Writ of Mandamus directed to Thompson; *ex parte* Nulyarimma & Ors (unreported) Crispin J, Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory, December 18, 1998 at pp 15–17.
28. As of this writing, the fate of the Anti-Genocide Bill 1999 has yet to be determined. Its future should be settled sometime after June 30, 2000.
29. Carmel Bird, ed., *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* (Sydney: Random House, 1998), p 126
30. *Ibid.*
31. For a perspective on Aboriginal–Jewish relations covering a different time period (the 19th century), see Paul R. Bartrop, “Living within the Frontier: early Colonial Australia, Jews, and Aborigines,” in Sander L. Gilman and Milton Shain, eds, *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), pp 91–110.
32. Richard Hall, *Black Armband Days: Truth from the Dark Side of Australia’s Past* (Sydney: Vintage, 1998), p 8.