4. 'They formed a little family as it were': The Board for the Protection of Aborigines (1875–1883)

Samuel Furphy

In October 1876, James MacBain rose in Victoria's Legislative Assembly to explain why he had resigned from the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) after more than a decade's service, including several years chairing its meetings. After an absence overseas, he had returned to the board in January to discover a radically altered policy towards Aboriginal administration, making his membership untenable: 'During [my] absence in England,' he said, 'four new members of the board were appointed; they formed a little family as it were; and they appointed a gentleman as inspector ... for doing what [I do] not know'.¹ This essay will examine the 'little family' to which MacBain objected, and explore the internal politics of the Board for the Protection of Aborigines at a crucial time in its history. By characterising the board as a contested space, the essay will attempt to understand the political dynamics that shaped debate on Aboriginal policy, thus integrating Aboriginal history and political history in fruitful ways. At the centre of the analysis will be a trio of new board members appointed in July 1875: Frederick Race Godfrey, Edward M Curr and Albert Le Souëf. These former pastoralists almost immediately pursued the closure of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve, near Healesville, sparking a sustained period of protest from Kulin people and their supporters in the settler community.

Many historians have identified the policy shift inaugurated by the new board appointments of 1875, and some have noted the similar political inclinations of the three men. Bain Attwood, for example, characterises them as 'English, politically conservative and closely associated with squatting interests'.² Diane Barwick, in her richly detailed and chronological account of the *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, hinted at deeper connections, but even she overlooked important sources that reveal a close friendship between the men.³ A key strength of Barwick's account, however, is her attention to the complex motives and actions of the many individuals involved in the Coranderrk saga. She is able to trace the shifting alliances of Aboriginal policy debate, recognising the

1 Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Session 1876, vol 25: 984.

2 Bain Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2003: 13.

3 Diane Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*, Laura E Barwick and Richard E Barwick (eds), Aboriginal History Inc., Canberra, 1998: 108–111. The key sources that Barwick did not cite include personal papers of both Edward M Curr and Albert Le Souëf, which are considered in more detail below.

significance of factors such as politics, religion, ethnological vanity and personal friendship. Building on Barwick's research, therefore, this essay will consider the backgrounds of the men who threw Aboriginal policy into a state of chaos, mapping the strong personal and professional links between them, describing the policy approach they championed, and exploring the ethnographic legacy left by two of them.

The politicisation of Aboriginal governance

The 1870s was a turbulent decade for Aboriginal administration in Victoria. After successive periods of neglect and then broad consensus in Aboriginal policy, the decade was characterised by sustained and sophisticated Indigenous activism, and disagreement within the settler community regarding the destiny of the Aboriginal population. The colony's first era of Aboriginal policy had ended in 1849 with the demise of the Port Phillip Protectorate. This scheme had been imposed upon colonists by the British Colonial Office, but faced considerable opposition from local settlers in a period when calls for self-government were strong.⁴ Following its closure, Aboriginal governance became a marginal political issue, particularly after the discovery of gold demanded the attention of the settler population and sparked a period of exponential population growth. Only the Assistant Protector William Thomas was retained as a Guardian of Aborigines, and missionary activity was limited.

As Leigh Boucher outlines in this collection, however, the prevalence of liberal ideology in Victoria's post-gold-rush community sparked a reassessment of the plight and destiny of the colony's surviving Aboriginal people.⁵ Soon after the achievement of responsible government in 1856, the new settler parliament conducted a Select Committee on Aborigines (1858–59), which investigated 'the present condition of the Aborigines of this colony, and the best means of alleviating their absolute wants'.⁶ The inquiry was proposed and chaired by Thomas McCombie, a journalist, novelist, historian and member of Victoria's Legislative Council, who told his parliamentary colleagues that while the subject might now appear insignificant, 'in future times it would be deemed of far greater consequence'.⁷ The committee concluded that 'great injustice has been perpetrated upon the Aborigines'; and although it did not question British

4 Jessie Mitchell, "'The galling yoke of slavery': race and separation in colonial Port Phillip", *Journal of Australian Studies* 33(2), 2009: 125–137, doi:10.1080/14443050902883355; Samuel Furphy, 'The trial of Warri: Aboriginal protection and settler self government in colonial Victoria', *Journal of Australian Colonial History* 15, 2013: 63–82.

5 See Leigh Boucher's chapter in this publication. See also David Goodman, *Gold Seeking: Victoria and California in the 1850s*, Allen & Unwin, St Leonards, NSW, 1994: 18–20.

6 *The Argus*, 13 October 1858: 5.

7 *The Argus*, 27 October 1858: 6.

sovereignty or the taking from Aboriginal people of 'their hunting grounds and their means of living', the report insisted that 'proper provision should have been made for them'.⁸ The initial result of the committee's recommendations was a mission-style system of government-funded reserves, which was overseen by the prosaically named Central Board to Watch of Over the Interests of the Aborigines. The members of the new board were mostly urban philanthropic types, later described by Broome as 'radical and well-intentioned ... if ignorant of Aboriginal people'.⁹ The Scottish-born MacBain, a businessman and politician who had arrived in Melbourne during the gold rush, joined the board in 1864 and served as its president for the rest of that decade. With substantial pastoral interests, he was more moderate than many of his colleagues, but shared their progressive views on Aboriginal policy.¹⁰

The reserve system the Central Board pioneered was shaped in significant ways by the lobbying of Aboriginal people. In the wake of the Select Committee inquiry, the Woiwurrung clan head, Simon Wonga, assisted by an ageing William Thomas, pushed for the creation of reserves on land selected by Aboriginal people for that purpose. His efforts resulted in the creation of the short-lived Acheron reserve, in the territory of the Taungurong people, and subsequently, in 1863, the Coranderrk reserve, which was located in Woiwurrung territory near the newly surveyed town of Healesville.¹¹ While missionaries managed several of the reserves funded under the new scheme, the Central Board controlled Coranderrk directly. In 1861 it appointed John Green, a Presbyterian lay preacher, as general inspector of the reserves. He explained in 1863: 'My method of managing the blacks is to allow them to rule themselves as much as possible.'¹² A sympathetic overseer, Green played a particularly prominent role at Coranderrk and the Central Board praised his work there. Coranderrk's proximity to Melbourne resulted in it becoming a significant site for those wanting to experience Aboriginal culture, including tourists, photographers, and scientists.¹³ Its location also enabled its leaders, including Wonga, and later William Barak, to visit politicians and government ministers in Melbourne and

8 Victorian Parliament, 'Report of the Select Committee of the Legislative Council on the Aborigines; together with the Proceedings of the Committee, Minutes of Evidence, and Appendices', John Ferres, Government Printer, Melbourne, 1859: iv.

9 Richard Broome, *Aboriginal Victorians: A History Since 1800*, Allen & Unwin, Crows Nest, NSW, 2005: 125.

10 J Ann Hone, 'MacBain, Sir James (1828–1892)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1974, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/macbain-sir-james-4063>.

11 Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*: 7–10.

12 John Green to Central Board Appointed to Watch over the Interests of the Aborigines, 28 July 1863, quoted in Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 67.

13 See for example J Lydon, 'The experimental 1860s: Charles Walter's images of Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, Victoria', *Aboriginal History* 26, 2002: 78–130.

lobby for better conditions and greater autonomy on land they believed had been granted them in perpetuity. Coranderrk was to become a key source of debate in Aboriginal policy.

Despite the apparent success of the new system, a majority of Aboriginal people continued to live off the reserves. In 1869, however, the Parliament of Victoria passed its first *Aborigines Act*, based on a plan drawn up by the Central Board.¹⁴ The Act granted the board extensive powers over Aboriginal people: to prescribe place of residence; to control employment contracts; to collect and disburse Aboriginal wages; and to assume guardianship of Aboriginal children. Reflecting this more aggressive paternalism, the Central Board was renamed the Board for the Protection of Aborigines. It did not immediately utilise its extensive new powers, but the proportion of Aboriginal people living on reserves increased from one third to one half by 1877.¹⁵ Moreover, the legislation created a powerful framework for Aboriginal governance and brought it more overtly into the political sphere. The colony's Chief Secretary was the *ex officio* chairman of the new board; although he never attended meetings and left the elected vice-chairman to exercise effective control, the ministerial oversight provided the means for the politicisation of Aboriginal policy, and a focal point for Aboriginal protest. The scene was set for the controversies that followed over the next decade, which included a Royal Commission on Aborigines in 1877 and a parliamentary inquiry in 1881.

The Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve was the focus of the vast majority of debate in Aboriginal policy during the 1870s and 1880s. Although John Green's management had been supported and praised by the Central Board in the 1860s, tensions began to develop in the 1870s when the economic potential of the Coranderrk land began to influence the decision-making of the reconstituted BPA. The board had resolved to make Coranderrk profitable by growing hops under the direction of agriculturalist Frederick Search, but in 1874 changes in legislation dictated that any profit from the farm at Coranderrk should be returned to the government's consolidated revenue. The underfunded BPA thus lost a financial incentive to persevere with Coranderrk. Meanwhile, Aboriginal residents protested against the hiring of European labour on the hops farm. John Green increasingly supported the Kulin and found himself at odds with Frederick Search. Consequently, the board dismissed Green in 1874, which in turn prompted the Coranderrk residents to submit a petition in protest. The vice chairman of the board, R Brough Smyth, was a key figure in the campaign against John Green. Other members of the board, who had known of Green's

14 *An Act to provide for the Protection and Management of the Aboriginal Natives of Victoria*, 11 November 1869.

15 Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*: 12; Michael Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835–86*, Sydney University Press, Sydney, 1979: 179.

work for more than a decade, were later concerned he had been mistreated. Smyth found support, however, from a trio of new members appointed in mid-1875.

The 'little family'

The three principal members of the 'little family' that so incensed MacBain were Frederick Race Godfrey, Edward M Curr and Albert Le Souëf.¹⁶ The son of an army officer, Godfrey was born in India in 1828 and educated in England. Arriving in the Port Phillip District in 1847, he had a successful career as a pastoralist in the north of the district; he was a pioneer of irrigation and an early member of the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria. After moving closer to Melbourne in 1863, he became a prominent lay Anglican.¹⁷ In 1874 he was elected to the Legislative Assembly, but was embroiled in controversy when an opponent alleged that voters had been 'corruptly treated ... to meat, drink and refreshments' by agents of Godfrey.¹⁸ Exonerated by the Elections and Qualifications Committee, he took his seat in parliament, where he claimed to support measures not men, but was broadly aligned with moderate and conservative members. He was later a company director and president of the Melbourne Club.

Born in Hobart in 1820, Edward M Curr was the eldest son of English-Catholic parents. His father was agent of the Van Diemen's Land Company and later a prominent politician who campaigned for Victoria's separation from New South Wales. Curr was educated in England and France before establishing his father's pastoral empire in the Port Phillip District in the 1840s. He subsequently traded horses and cattle, and attempted to establish pastoral stations in New Zealand and New South Wales, before finding employment with the Victorian Government in 1862. He rose to the senior position of Chief Inspector of Stock, a handsomely paid position in a predominantly pastoral economy. Curr was an accomplished and published writer of non-fiction and, during the 1870s, developed an interest in Aboriginal languages and ethnology.¹⁹

Albert Le Souëf was a parliamentary official, having served as Usher of the Black Rod in the Legislative Council since 1863. Born in England less than a month

16 For an account of their appointment see Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 108–111.

17 Margaret Gravell, 'Godfrey, Frederic Race (1828–1910)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1972, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/godfrey-frederic-race-3624/text5631>.

18 'Elections and Qualifications Committee. Petition against Mr. F. R. Godfrey, M.L.A. for East Bourke', *The Argus*, 1 July 1874: 6.

19 Samuel Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*, Aboriginal History Monograph 26, ANU E Press, Canberra 2013, <http://press.anu.edu.au/?p=223251>; see also Harley W Forster, 'Curr, Edward Micklethwaite (1820–1889)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1969, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/curr-edward-micklethwaite-3301/text5025>.

before Godfrey, he was educated at the Moravian Mission School in Neuwied, Germany, before joining his family in the Port Phillip District in 1841.²⁰ Le Souëf worked as a station overseer and profited from various pastoral and stock-trading ventures before taking up his parliamentary position.²¹ In 1853 he had married a daughter of a prominent pastoralist and naturalist, John Cotton, and was also secretary of the Zoological and Acclimatisation Society.²²

In referring to these men as a 'little family', MacBain might simply have meant that they formed a new faction on the board, which supplanted the influence of the urban philanthropists who had earlier dominated its affairs.²³ Certainly, their status as long-term colonists, who had arrived in Victoria long before the gold rush, set them apart from most other members. On closer inspection, however, it seems likely that MacBain was implying a strong personal connection between the three men, beginning with their common experience as pastoralists in northern Victoria in the 1840s. The eldest of the three, Edward M Curr, began squatting on the Goulburn and Murray rivers in 1841. Within a decade he and his family had acquired leases to 300 square miles of prime pastoral land.²⁴ His standard route to Melbourne passed by the Aboriginal Protectorate station on the Goulburn River, which was a convenient place to stop for the night or rest his horses.²⁵ The station was presided over by Assistant Protector William Le Souëf, who has been described as the 'failed protector'; he was dismissed in 1843 for, among other things, his harsh treatment of Aboriginal people.²⁶ His teenage son Albert lived at the station from 1841 to 1844, so Curr and Le Souëf must surely have met in this period. By 1847, Le Souëf was employed as an overseer on the Reedy Lake station, near Kerang.²⁷ In the same year, the recently arrived Godfrey took up nearby Boort station. Le Souëf and Godfrey were of a similar age and probably began their own close association in this period. It is likely that Godfrey and Le Souëf also fraternised with Curr, who later wrote that squatters from the region regularly met at Maiden's Punt (Moama) for fox hunts and other social gatherings.²⁸

20 Allan McEvey, 'Le Souef, Albert Alexander Cochrane (1828–1902)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1974, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/le-souef-albert-alexander-4013/text6361>.

21 AAC Le Souëf, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria', Typescript, 1895, South Australian Museum.

22 D.H. Pike, 'Cotton, John (1802–1849)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1966, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/cotton-john-1925>.

23 Bain Attwood, *The Making of the Aborigines*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1989: 87.

24 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 37–46.

25 Edward M Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria, Then Called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)*, G Robertson, Melbourne, 1883: 66–67.

26 Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835–86*, 96; Penelope Edmonds, 'The Le Souëf Box: reflections on imperial nostalgia, material culture and exhibitionary practice in colonial Victoria', *Australian Historical Studies* 37(127), 2006: 125, doi:10.1080/10314610608601207.

27 Le Souëf, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria': 18.

28 Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 381–382.

The Le Souëf–Godfrey connection is easier to map. Between 1847 and 1863, Godfrey was in partnership with his brother Henry, who had earlier taken up the Gobur station on the Goulburn River. Gobur was in close proximity to the Seven Creeks station at Euroa, where Le Souëf was based for a time in the early 1850s. After selling Boort in 1863 and moving closer to Melbourne, Godfrey was a prominent member of the Acclimatisation Society of Victoria, to which Le Souëf was appointed secretary in 1870. Le Souëf was also appointed director of the fledgling Melbourne Zoological Gardens. An emphasis on acquiring exotic animals for public display resulted in a name change to the Zoological and Acclimatisation Society of Victoria in 1871, but Godfrey and Le Souëf continued to promote acclimatisation and created a farm for the purpose at Gembrook. Their interest in acclimatisation no doubt brought them into contact with Curr, who by then was the Chief Inspector of Stock, and had firm opinions against the importation of animals and livestock due to the threat of disease.²⁹ Nevertheless, at a conference of Stock Inspectors in 1886, when Curr advocated a blanket prohibition on the importation of exotic animals, he was careful to exempt the Zoological Gardens from his proposed regulations.³⁰

Godfrey, Curr and Le Souëf were appointed to the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in 1875 during a period of conservative government under premier George Kerferd. MacBain later alleged that Godfrey had solicited membership for the three men.³¹ Moreover, Barwick speculates that Smyth might have acted alone in authorising the appointments on behalf of the board. Whatever the circumstances of the new appointments, their effect was considerable, as Barwick explains: 'Three old pastoralists who knew nothing of Kulin history or social organisation – but prided themselves on their knowledge of "the blacks" – began to dictate Board policy.'³² Godfrey soon replaced Smyth as vice-chairman and he and his friends voted together on most issues. It was a watershed moment for the board as Attwood has indicated: 'Control of its affairs was passing from its founding members, who were mostly liberal or radical in politics ... to a small group of like-minded men'.³³

The final member of MacBain's 'little family' was Sherbourne Sheppard, who joined the board in January 1876 as a replacement for George Syme, editor of the liberal *Leader* newspaper, who had ceased attending meetings in 1874 in protest against the dismissal of John Green. Godfrey nominated Sheppard in September 1875, but his appointment was not confirmed during the first brief premiership of the radical Graham Berry.³⁴ Sheppard was eventually appointed

29 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 106–108.

30 *The Argus*, 22 October 1886: 4.

31 Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Session 1876, vol 25: 983–984.

32 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 111.

33 Attwood, *Rights for Aborigines*: 13.

34 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 122, fn 47.

by Berry's successor, James McCulloch, a more cautious liberal who during his first premiership in the 1860s had rapidly promoted Edward Curr to the senior position of Chief Inspector of Sheep.³⁵ The town of Shepparton in northern Victoria is named after Sheppard, who in 1843 had purchased the Tallygaroopna pastoral run on the Goulburn River. Barwick describes him as an old friend of Curr's, which seems likely as both men occupied lands on the Goulburn River in Bangerang territory.³⁶ At the very least they were old acquaintances. There is no doubt, however, that Sheppard was a close friend of Le Souëf, who recorded the nature of their connection in his memoir. Around 1850, Le Souëf had helped Sheppard to reclaim Tallygaroopna by force, after it was illegally sold when Sheppard was overseas. By 1854, Le Souëf had joined Sheppard in partnership at Tallygaroopna.³⁷ In 1877, Le Souëf named his fourth son (who was later the founder of Sydney's Taronga Zoo) Albert Sherbourne Le Souëf.³⁸

When complaining to parliament about the influence of the new board members, MacBain had noted 'they appointed a gentleman as inspector ... for doing what [I do] not know.'³⁹ This man was Christian Ogilvie, a pastoral station manager with strong links to the new board members who appointed him. His closest association was with Albert Le Souëf. They had first met as young men in 1847 when they were both employees at Reedy Lake station; Ogilvie probably met Godfrey and possibly Curr in the same period. In 1852 Ogilvie and Le Souëf entered into a business partnership, borrowing money to buy cattle, which they sold on for a handsome profit during the gold rush. When Le Souëf married in 1853, Ogilvie was his best man.⁴⁰ Ogilvie also shared a close friendship with Edward Curr, who wrote to his son after Ogilvie's death: 'he was one of the few friends I had and I have regretted him much.'⁴¹ Although Ogilvie had experienced pastoral success with Le Souëf, in the 1860s he lost all his money during a drought in the Gawler Ranges in South Australia.⁴² Curr had experienced a similar failure on the Lachlan River a few years earlier, but had rebuilt his career as a stock inspector for the Victorian Government.⁴³ Ogilvie might have been in need of a job and his old friends delivered. He subsequently got a job as an inspector under Curr. For these various reasons, Barwick's suggestion that in appointing Ogilvie the board 'chose one of their own kind' is actually an understatement.⁴⁴

35 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 99.

36 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 122; Barwick does not cite evidence for the Curr/Sheppard friendship.

37 Le Souëf, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria': 30–32, 86.

38 A Dunbavin Butcher, 'Le Souef Brothers', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1986, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/le-souef-albert-sherbourne-7747/text12401>.

39 Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Session 1876, vol 25: 984.

40 Le Souëf, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria': 40–42, 74–75.

41 Edward M Curr to EMV Curr, 19 December 1883, privately held.

42 *South Australian Register*, 2 May 1898: 3; 19 May 1898: 7.

43 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 89–91.

44 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 113.

The principal node in the close network of friends and associates that took control of Aboriginal policy appears to have been Albert Le Souëf, who also had significant connections with two subsequent board appointments, Friedrich Hagenauer and AMA Page. Le Souëf's Moravian education ensured a natural sympathy for the missionary Hagenauer, whose daughter Ellen later married Le Souëf's son Ernest.⁴⁵ Page, who replaced Ogilvie as general inspector and board secretary in 1877, was an elderly farm manager with whom Le Souëf had been partner in a farming property near Gembrook. Page subsequently appointed Le Souëf's son as his clerk, prompting suggestions of nepotism at the 1881 parliamentary inquiry.⁴⁶

The Coranderrk controversy

At their first board meeting on 7 July 1875, Godfrey, Curr and Le Souëf encountered an unprecedented deputation of Kulin men, led by William Barak, who arrived to register their protests regarding the situation at Coranderrk. The Kulin were soon encouraged, however, to ignore the largely intransigent board, preferring to lobby parliamentarians, journalists and other sympathetic Victorians. Attendance at board meetings was poor in this period, partly due to the withdrawal of members concerned at the treatment of Green. This ensured Smyth and his three new colleagues were able to determine board policy. On 4 August 1875, Godfrey, Curr and Le Souëf formed a subcommittee to examine the future management of Coranderrk and visited it three days later. They immediately recommended that the station be closed and its residents moved elsewhere. Curr later recalled: 'We did this on the very first visit. We were all accustomed to blacks; we had no doubt about what we recommended. I knew nothing about the antecedents of the place or even the name of the manager.'⁴⁷ The new members cited health concerns, but it is clear that they were also concerned about the potential for political agitation, due to Coranderrk's proximity to Melbourne. Moreover, they believed that contact between the Indigenous residents and white sympathisers undermined discipline on the reserve.

The board's concern about interference with its management of Coranderrk was magnified by the sympathetic actions of Brother Johann Stähle, a Moravian missionary who had been appointed acting manager after John Green's suspension. On the very day Godfrey, Curr and Le Souëf visited Coranderrk,

45 Butcher, 'Le Souef Brothers'.

46 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 154.

47 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881). 'Report of the Board appointed to enquire into, and report upon, the present condition and management of the Coranderrk Aboriginal Station, together with the minutes of evidence', in Parliament of Victoria, *Papers Presented to Parliament by Command*, Session 1882–3, Vol 3: 120.

Victoria's newly appointed premier and chief secretary, Graham Berry, received a letter from Stähle, who, on behalf of the Coranderrk residents, requested the dismissal of the hops farm master Robert Burgess. Stähle sent the letter by registered mail to the chief secretary because earlier complaints sent to Smyth had been ignored. Despite the fact that Berry was *ex officio* chairman of the BPA, the public servants Smyth and Curr were both furious that a subordinate officer had bypassed their authority, while Godfrey was embarrassed at having to provide an explanation to Berry, a political adversary.⁴⁸

The BPA officially voted to abandon Coranderrk on 25 August 1875.⁴⁹ The new members hoped to convince the government that proceeds from the sale of the land would be more than adequate to meet the cost of setting up a new station. At the same meeting they resolved to employ Christian Ogilvie on a two-month contract to inspect all six Aboriginal stations in company with Curr. Three weeks later, the board dismissed Stähle and permanently appointed Ogilvie as 'General Inspector' of the Aboriginal stations.⁵⁰ Ogilvie was charged with implementing the vision of his friends on the protection board. He toured the Murray River region with Curr and recommended a new location for the Coranderrk reserve at Kulkyne, near Mildura.⁵¹ Curr and Ogilvie thus became the key proponents in the campaign to close down Coranderrk, and their friends on the board supported them. In December, Curr successfully proposed that Ogilvie be promoted again to the position of General Superintendent of Victoria's six Aboriginal stations. Curr's motion, which was seconded by Le Souëf, gave considerable power to Ogilvie, even over those stations run by missionaries.⁵²

The following month, James MacBain returned to the board and attempted unsuccessfully to limit Ogilvie's new powers and to reinstate John Green. He subsequently led a rearguard action by long-serving board members dismayed at the new policy direction. On 17 February, a compromise was reached and John Green was offered a role subordinate to Ogilvie, but he refused.⁵³ Meanwhile, the plans to close Coranderrk attracted protest from the Kulin people. In February 1876, for example, when the Kulin sent a delegation to Melbourne, the local member for Healesville, EH Cameron, was shocked to find Godfrey loudly berating them in the lobby of Parliament House, threatening to remove them from Coranderrk immediately if they dared to meet the chief secretary.⁵⁴

48 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 113.

49 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 25 August 1875.

50 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 14 September 1875.

51 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 21 September 1875.

52 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 14 December 1875.

53 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 12 January 1876, 16–17 February 1876.

54 Cameron to Chief Secretary, 19 September 1876, quoted in Christie, *Aborigines in Colonial Victoria 1835–86*: 185; see also Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 128.

As opposition grew, the new board members lost a nominal supporter in Smyth, who resigned from all his public offices due to a controversy surrounding his management of the Mines Department.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the dominant faction had consolidated its power through the appointment of Sherbourne Sheppard, whose vote was crucial in blocking an unconditional offer of re-employment to John Green, which was supported by longer-serving members at a meeting on 18 February.⁵⁶ Four days later, MacBain sent a letter of resignation to the chief secretary. When he explained his reasons for doing so to the parliament several months later, he noted Godfrey's vehement opposition to the reappointment of Green. In response, Godfrey implied that MacBain had resigned because there were no Presbyterians among the new appointments to the board. In a fiery debate, Graham Berry proclaimed from the opposition benches that the board should be abolished altogether.⁵⁷ By the end of the year, the government had announced a Royal Commission on Aborigines.

The resignation of MacBain, combined with the earlier withdrawal of George Syme and another long-serving member, John Mackenzie, ensured that the new faction on the board was able to determine board policy unhindered. Beyond the board, however, considerable opposition was mounting from the Coranderrk residents and their supporters in the parliament and in the settler community. In a tumultuous period for government in the Colony of Victoria, Coranderrk became one of many issues that defined the political landscape. A young protégé of Graham Berry, John Lamont Dow, took up the Coranderrk cause in the pages of *The Age*, while Coranderrk residents also received considerable support from the philanthropist Ann Bon. The BPA spread counter-propaganda through the more conservative *The Argus*, but even this newspaper was not uncritical of the board's management of Coranderrk.⁵⁸

The Kulin people of Coranderrk played a shrewd political game, using petitions, letters and deputations to government ministers to win support for their cause. Younger men educated at protectorate and mission schools played a prominent role: both Robert Wandin and Thomas Dunolly were authorised to speak on behalf of their leader, William Barak, and exerted considerable influence through their command of written language. Their key role no doubt frustrated board officials, because a protectorate education was intended to further the assimilation of Aboriginal people, not empower them politically.⁵⁹ The board had previously carried out its duties with very little public scrutiny, but the

55 Michael Hoare, 'Smyth, Robert Brough (1830–1889)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, The Australian National University, 1976, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/smyth-robert-brough-4621>.

56 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 122.

57 Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Session 1876, vol 25: 974–986.

58 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 115, 178.

59 Michael Christie, 'Aboriginal literacy and power: an historical case study', *Australian Journal of Adult and Community Education* 30(2), 1990: 118.

politically mobilised Coranderrk residents ensured this would no longer be the case. The board's response to this challenge was notably stubborn: displaying both 'ignorance and a profound paternalism' the newer members dismissed the idea that the Kulin had adapted their traditional culture to accommodate 'a new kind of political expertise'.⁶⁰ The board was so convinced that the various letters and petitions were the result of outside interference that it twice hired detectives to analyse the handwriting on petitions from Coranderrk.⁶¹ The detectives found that Thomas Dunolly had written the relevant documents, which represented the genuinely held views of the Aboriginal signatories.

The controversy peaked in April 1877 when the Royal Commission commenced its hearings. Appointed by the moderate McCulloch ministry, the commission did not seriously challenge the board's authority, although it must have been an unwelcome distraction. Broome has pointed out that Aboriginal voices were barely heard during the hearings, unlike the later parliamentary inquiry.⁶² Moreover, Godfrey (a parliamentary ally of McCulloch) was appointed a commissioner and was the most regular in his attendance. The key spokesman for the board was Edward Curr, who was soon to replace Godfrey as vice-chairman. He was examined at length on 1 June and argued that removal of the Coranderrk residents was necessary for reasons of both health and discipline, as the climate was unsuitable and contact with outsiders was undesirable. Curr further argued that Coranderrk was not the traditional country of its residents and removal to the Murray River was thus perfectly justifiable. He had little sympathy for the views of William Barak, who had said in 1876: 'The Yarra ... is my father's country. There's no mountains for me on the Murray.'⁶³

Although Curr's concern about the health of Coranderrk residents was genuine, he was clearly also motivated by a belief, shared by his colleagues, that 'outside interference' was undermining the discipline of a 'childlike' race. He told the commissioners:

Members of the Board, casual visitors, cricketers, and Members of Parliament have probably little idea of how their visits interfere with

60 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 114–115.

61 Penny van Toorn, 'Authors, scribes and owners: the sociology of nineteenth-century Aboriginal writing on Coranderrk and Lake Condah reserves', *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 13(3), 1999: 335; see also Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia*, Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2006: 123–151.

62 Richard Broome, '"There were vegetables every year Mr Green was here": Right behaviour and the struggle for autonomy at Coranderrk Aboriginal Reserve', *History Australia* 3(2), 2006: 43.6.

63 *Leader*, 19 February 1876, quoted in Christie, 'Aboriginal literacy and power: an historical case study': 118.

discipline. The native is a child, and very little unsettles him and even makes him fractious, and probably the height of pleasure to him would be to get a Member of Parliament to listen to his grievances.⁶⁴

In a final written submission, Curr committed himself to the closure of Coranderrk: 'With the proceeds of the sale of Coranderrk a fitting station might be set on foot, stocked, and possibly made self-supporting.'⁶⁵ When asked if Aborigines should be forced to relocate against their wishes, Curr responded: 'the black should, when necessary, be coerced just as we coerce children and lunatics who cannot take care of themselves. If they are not coerced, they cannot be preserved from extinction.'⁶⁶ Christian Ogilvie also gave evidence, and spoke freely as he had resigned shortly before the hearings to take up a pastoral opportunity in Gippsland. Unlike Curr, he was prepared to revise his earlier views, stating he now opposed abandonment due to the residents 'love of the place'. He did, however, state that 'parliamentary interference' had undermined the board and destroyed discipline at Coranderrk.⁶⁷

The commissioners concluded that Coranderrk should not be closed, but the board's commitment to that course remained firm. Meanwhile, Graham Berry had formed government once more after winning the 1877 election. His protégé John Lamont Dow won a seat in the new parliament, and the following year he wrote a report for Berry on Coranderrk, in which he recommended John Green be reappointed and the BPA disbanded. Berry cautiously stayed his hand, but it was clear that the closure of Coranderrk was not on the new government's agenda.⁶⁸ A stalemate ensued, with the board still favouring abandonment, but Berry's sympathies lying with the Kulin. On 1 May 1878, for example, Berry received another delegation led by Barak, without inviting board members to be present.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, cracks began to appear in the policy consensus promoted by the BPA's 'little family'. Curr's furious reaction to Berry's reception of Barak's delegation, and his intransigence on the Coranderrk issue more generally, began to concern his colleagues, who elected veteran member Henry Jennings to replace him as vice-chairman.⁷⁰ Godfrey resigned in March 1879 to travel overseas and Curr and Le Souëf began to disagree on significant issues, notably

64 Victoria, Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877), 'Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Present Condition of the Aborigines of this Colony, and to Advise as to the Best Means of Caring for, and Dealing with Them, in the Future, Together with Minutes of Evidence', in Parliament of Victoria, *Papers Presented to Parliament by Command*, Session 1877–78, Vol 3: 77.

65 Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 79.

66 Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 78.

67 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 153, 270; see also *Gippsland Times*, 28 May 1877: 3.

68 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 162–163.

69 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 161.

70 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 161–162.

the treatment of 'half-castes' residing on the government reserves. The Royal Commission had not recommended sending 'half-castes' out to work, but Le Souëf proposed as much in December 1878. The liberal Dow had also advocated distinct treatment for 'half-castes' in his 1878 report to Berry. Curr was strongly opposed to such views and became isolated as assimilationist ideology took hold. He once again pushed for the abandonment of Coranderrk in May 1879 and was partially supported by Le Souëf, but the plan he had championed now seemed unlikely.⁷¹

The political situation became more volatile when Graham Berry narrowly lost the March 1880 election, returning to power a few months later at the head of a shaky coalition. There were ongoing protests from Coranderrk residents and in October the manager, Rev. Frederick Strickland, reported that 'not a man on the station' would do anything when ordered.⁷² In March 1881 William Barak once again walked the 67 kilometres to Melbourne leading a deputation of 22 Coranderrk men. Their supporter Ann Bon joined the delegation, who was introduced to Berry by a young Alfred Deakin. The board, which had been warned by telegram of the deputation's mission, demanded representation at the meeting, so Le Souëf (now vice-chairman) and Page were both present. Barak requested the board be abolished and that his people be allowed to manage Coranderrk themselves under John Green's guidance. Le Souëf subsequently told his colleagues that Bon's role would convince Berry that the abandonment of Coranderrk was unavoidable because of 'continual interference'. In fact, Berry assured Barak that he would not be removed from Coranderrk and promised a parliamentary inquiry.⁷³

In July, however, Berry resigned and was replaced by the radical liberal Bryan O'Loughlen. The BPA once again lobbied for the closure of Coranderrk, while Dow called for board reform through the pages of *The Age*.⁷⁴ The new government honoured Berry's promise of a parliamentary inquiry, to which it appointed the local member for Healesville, EH Cameron, as chairman. Despite attempts by the BPA to influence the membership of the inquiry, the new chief secretary, JM Grant, also adopted the recommendations Berry had received from Alfred Deakin, who had suggested the appointment of Ann Bon, among others.⁷⁵ Grant appointed two local landholders recommended by the BPA, but this did not satisfy board members, who protested against the Deakin-inspired appointments in September.⁷⁶ Grant added two further members to the inquiry

71 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 167.

72 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 174.

73 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 178–179.

74 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 183; see also *The Age*, 14 July 1881.

75 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 183–184.

76 BPA, 'Minutes of meetings', NAA, Series B314, 7 September 1881.

after it began collecting evidence; one was a BPA recommendation but the other was John Lamont Dow, whose presence tipped the balance of opinion against the BPA.

Unlike the earlier Royal Commission, the Coranderrk inquiry provided ample opportunity for the people of Coranderrk to express their own views. It heard from 22 Aboriginal witnesses, including Barak, Wandin, Dunolly and four Aboriginal women.⁷⁷ Although Le Souëf was now vice-chairman, the board's spokesman was the confident and forthright Edward Curr, who again displayed his repressively paternalistic attitudes. When asked if he thought it desirable to relocate the Coranderrk residents against their will, he replied:

Anyone who knows the blacks knows their will is nothing, that they might have a serious objection now which they would not remember three months afterwards. I would suggest that they should be moved for their own benefit ... If I saw my child playing on the brink of a well I should remove the child even if he cried. I should remove the blacks from Coranderrk whether they liked it or not. I do not believe they have any strong objection.⁷⁸

Curr maintained his view that the problems at Coranderrk were due to outside interference and he singled out John Green: 'It has been the impression of the Board that Mr. Green has kept Coranderrk in a state of hot water for the last seven years.' He insisted that the key problem was discipline and boldly asserted: 'They are an easy people to manage. I managed four times as many as there are at Coranderrk when I was nineteen years old.'⁷⁹

Reflecting the politicised nature of its appointment, the board of inquiry divided into two factions, but the report unanimously concluded that Coranderrk should not be closed and suggested the station was 'not so well managed as could be desired'.⁸⁰ A majority of five members (including Bon and Dow) signed an addendum, which included the following damning indictment of the board:

The natives appear to have been chiefly stirred into a state of active discontent by the pertinacity of the Central Board in pressing upon successive Governments the gratuitous advice that the Blacks should be

77 Broome, 'There were vegetables every year Mr Green was here': 43.6. For a detailed history of the Coranderrk inquiry, and a verbatim theatre script based on its Minutes of Evidence, see Giordano Nanni and Andrea James, *Coranderrk: We Will Show the Country*. Aboriginal Studies Press, Canberra, 2013.

78 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881): 120. Curr gave evidence to the Inquiry on 8 December 1881.

79 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881).

80 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881): iii–iv.

removed from Coranderrk. The natives also bitterly complained of the removal of Mr. Green, who appears to have won their confidence and respect.⁸¹

The remaining four inquiry members, including the chairman, issued their own addendum, which argued that the problems at Coranderrk 'cannot be so easily laid to the charge of the Central Board'. They noted the board's apparently successful management of other reserves, and gave credence to the board's suggestion of outside interference by noting the access of Coranderrk residents to 'credulous sympathizers'.⁸²

Although not a decisive victory for the people of Coranderrk, the inquiry decreased the likelihood of abandonment. The O'Loughlen Government did not formally respond to the report, but appointed four new members to the BPA in June 1882. One of these was Alfred Deakin, although he resigned soon afterwards in protest against the government's inadequate response.⁸³ These new appointments diluted the power of the 'little family' and increased the likelihood of policy reform, signalling a new era in Aboriginal governance. For Curr, the findings of the Coranderrk inquiry represented a major repudiation of the policies he had championed. He was firmly committed to a paternalistic policy of strict discipline and rejected the emerging assimilationist ideology of the period. He became increasingly isolated on the board, and unsurprisingly resigned in 1883. When Sheppard resigned the following year, Le Souëf was the sole remaining member of the 'little family'.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, he played a prominent role in negotiating the political compromise that resolved the tensions surrounding Coranderrk, although not in a way that benefited its Aboriginal residents.

The 1886 Act: from protection to assimilation

The protests of the Kulin people of Coranderrk corresponded with a period of significant change in Aboriginal policy, as earlier policies of containment on reserves gave way to a commitment to the gradual absorption of Aboriginal people into the white community. This shift culminated in the *Aborigines Protection Act 1886* (Vic), which drew an official distinction between 'full-bloods' and 'half-castes'. It was largely framed in response to the Coranderrk rebellion and it had the direct effect of undermining Indigenous protest, as

81 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881): vi.

82 Coranderrk Inquiry (1881): vii.

83 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 248.

84 Godfrey re-joined the board in 1896. Le Souëf served until 1902, the year of his death, while Godfrey resigned in his eightieth year in 1907.

'half-caste' residents (many of them centrally involved in political activism) were denied further government support and forced to leave the reserve. Penny van Toorn, who has written extensively on the role of literacy in the Coranderrk rebellion, suggests that the 1886 Act separated the 'speaking generation from the writing generation, thus cutting a vital line of communication between Aboriginal communities and white government authorities'.⁸⁵

Although members of the BPA's 'little family' were in furious agreement regarding the need for firm discipline of Aboriginal people, they diverged when it came to this emerging discourse of assimilation. Godfrey was an advocate of apprenticeship schemes and the hiring out of Aboriginal girls for domestic service, an approach that was considered by the 1877 Royal Commission.⁸⁶ Le Souëf supported Godfrey, but Curr did not, as his racist views tended to preclude the possibility of assimilation. In fact, Curr was the only significant voice on the BPA to resist a distinction between 'full-blood' and 'half-caste'.⁸⁷ He remained committed to a strict segregationist policy, which assumed that Aboriginal decline was inevitable and that absorption, if possible at all, would be a long-term project. At the Royal Commission he had revealed the uncomfortable irony of his dual roles as Chief Inspector of Stock and protection board member when he observed: 'To begin, we should remember that as a mob of wild cattle cannot be tamed in a single generation, so we cannot at once civilize these people.'⁸⁸ For Curr, then, assimilation of the Aborigines would be a very gradual process, which would take many generations if it were to be achieved at all.

Patrick Wolfe has proposed three distinct phases in Aboriginal policy – confrontation, incarceration, and assimilation – all of which, he argues, are consistent with the 'logic of elimination' that characterises settler colonialism.⁸⁹ The 1886 Act was the culmination of a shift from the second to the third stage in colonial Victoria. Curr's resistance to such a shift reflected his view that assimilation could not be achieved simply by boarding out Aboriginal children or forcing adult 'half-castes' to leave the reserves. In 1877, he observed: 'This absorption to my mind is a mistake – there is no absorption in the case and I think never can be; substitute eradication for absorption, and I think you will be correct.'⁹⁰ Curr's conclusion was informed by a pessimistic assumption that Aboriginal people were less capable than white people, but also by a realistic

85 Van Toorn, 'Authors, scribes and owners': 341.

86 See, for example, Godfrey's questioning of Curr, Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 77.

87 For a similar argument, see Marguerita Stephens, 'White Without Soap: Philanthropy, Caste and Exclusion in Colonial Victoria, 1835–1888. A Political Economy of Race', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2003: 237, 243.

88 Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 77.

89 Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event*, Cassell, London, 1999: 27–31.

90 Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 77.

view that Aborigines would face discrimination and violence from white colonists: 'The Anglo-Saxon in Australia, as elsewhere, does not foster weakly races. He wants their lands. He is thinking of riches. He tramples them under feet without thinking what he does.'⁹¹ Segregation on reserves was thus the only means of preserving Aboriginal people from extinction, in the interests of scientific inquiry if nothing else. It was not that Curr saw no difference between the categories of 'full-blood' and 'half-caste'; in his ethnological work, *The Australian Race*, he observed that the latter 'have more brains ... and are more difficult to manage'.⁹² Curr was unique, however, in that he did not believe such perceived differences should alter the board's segregationist policy.

Despite Curr's resistance, the new appointments to the BPA in 1882 facilitated a reconsideration of its policy and ultimately enabled the political compromise that ended the Coranderrk controversy. As the sole remaining member of the board's 'little family', Le Souëf was able to find common ground with liberals, such as Dow and Deakin, who advocated a distinction between 'full-blood' and 'half-caste', and the removal of the latter from Coranderrk. Significantly, James MacBain had earlier advocated sending 'half-caste' children away from Coranderrk, so Le Souëf's amenability to the idea represented a solution to the factionalism that had earlier dogged board proceedings.⁹³ For these reasons, Le Souëf played a key role in overseeing the policy shift that culminated in the 1886 Act. Moreover, he continued to exert influence through his close relationship with board employees Hagenauer and Page, who drafted recommendations in 1884 that all 'half-castes' under the age of 35 should be ordered to leave the government stations.⁹⁴ Both were to play a significant role implementing this policy under the 1886 Act.

The ethnographic legacy of Curr and Le Souëf

A necessary precondition to governing Aboriginal people is that Aboriginal people be defined. At a legislative level, definitions such as 'half-caste' and 'full-blood' became crucial; but, more broadly, the disciplines of ethnology and anthropology emerged as scholarly scaffolding for those who aimed to influence Aboriginal policy. The board members of the 1870s were no exception in this respect, with several combining their board careers with ethnographic pursuits. The most notable of these were Smyth and Curr, but Le Souëf also turned his hand briefly to the task of describing Aboriginal culture.

91 Royal Commission on the Aborigines (1877): 77.

92 Edward M Curr, *The Australian Race: Its Origin, Languages, Customs, Place of Landing in Australia, and the Routes by Which It Spread Itself Over That Continent*, John Ferres, Govt Printer, Melbourne, 1886: vol I: 42.

93 Victorian Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Assembly, Session 1876, vol 25: 984.

94 Barwick, *Rebellion at Coranderrk*: 238, 281–282.

Curr included an ethnographic chapter in his 1883 memoir, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*, and followed it in 1886 with a four-volume work, *The Australian Race*, for which he collected hundreds of Aboriginal vocabularies and proposed a theory of Aboriginal origins using the techniques of comparative philology.⁹⁵ The latter work was published by the Victorian government printer, but was controversial among rival scholars; pioneer anthropologist AW Howitt, who had served as a Royal Commissioner in 1877, attacked several of Curr's claims in scholarly journals.⁹⁶ Le Souëf's more modest contribution included an 11-page appendix to R Brough Smyth's *The Aborigines of Victoria* in 1878; he also wrote about Aboriginal people in a memoir he penned in about 1895.⁹⁷

The alliance between Curr and Le Souëf in Aboriginal policy is complemented by their similar approaches to ethnography. Both men witnessed the early stages of European occupation in the Goulburn Valley and the devastating effect this had on Aboriginal livelihoods. Not surprisingly, therefore, each later displayed forms of what Rosaldo has called 'imperialist nostalgia'.⁹⁸ Penelope Edmonds has explored how nostalgia shaped the creation in the 1860s of the 'Le Souëf Box', which featured miniaturised Aboriginal weapons carved by Albert Le Souëf in a box decorated with idyllic pre-contact scenes drawn by his wife Caroline.⁹⁹ In his well-known memoir, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*, Curr also displayed nostalgia at the passing of his so-called 'sable companions' or 'sooty friends', whose jolly ways had entertained him in his youth.¹⁰⁰ Curr attributed the decline of Aboriginal people to the expansion of British 'civilisation', which he viewed as an inexorable process. Such forms of nostalgia routinely deflected personal responsibility for the decline of a colonised people.¹⁰¹

Despite their nostalgic admiration for pre-contact Aboriginal culture, both Le Souëf and Curr reveal a more general disdain for the Aboriginal way of life in their ethnographic writings. An obvious link is their characterisation of gender roles in Aboriginal society. Le Souëf describes Aboriginal women as 'unfortunate creatures [who] lead a wretched life of drudgery'. He recounts, for example, the story of an Aboriginal woman who was sent to the Goulburn River for water at night, noting that her husband was 'too lazy or frightened to go himself'.

95 Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*; Curr, *The Australian Race*; for a detailed analysis of *The Australian Race*, see Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 145–171.

96 AW Howitt, 'On the organisation of the Australian tribes', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Victoria* 1, 1889; AW Howitt, 'The Dieri and other kindred tribes of central Australia', *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 20 (January 1, 1891): 30–104, doi:10.2307/2842347.

97 AAC Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia', in R Brough Smyth, *The Aborigines of Victoria: with notes relating to the habits of the natives of other parts of Australia and Tasmania compiled from various sources for the Government of Victoria*, John Ferres, Govt Printer, Melbourne, 1878: 289–299; Le Souëf, 'Personal Recollections of Early Victoria'.

98 Renato Rosaldo, 'Imperialist nostalgia', *Representations* 26, 1989: 107–122.

99 Edmonds, 'The Le Souëf Box': 117–139.

100 See, for example, Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 435.

101 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 179–183.

The woman suffered a blow to the head during an ambush from an enemy tribe but Le Souëf ironically concluded that 'no doubt used to such treatment, she seemed to care little about it'.¹⁰² Similarly, Curr observed that the Bangerang man was 'despotic in his own mia-mia' and was deliberately nonchalant in his description of violence between Aboriginal women: 'Their little disagreements were settled with their yam sticks, without much injury being done, their husbands interfering with their clubs if matters went too far.'¹⁰³ As Clare Land has recognised: 'Curr appears blind to Koori women's cultural and political power, consistently focussing on men's culture, work, skills and authority while denigrating those of women.'¹⁰⁴

The links between Curr and Le Souëf's ethnographic writings are so extensive, that it is hard not to imagine them as two old friends, chatting about the quaint ways of 'the blacks'. They both, for example, noted the mutual avoidance of mother-in-law and son-in-law, Le Souëf proclaiming, 'I never could get at the meaning of this apparently absurd custom.'¹⁰⁵ Various other close similarities are apparent. Curr wrote, 'Religious worship the Bangerang had none', while Le Souëf observed, 'I never could discover anything among them approaching to religion.'¹⁰⁶ On linguistic origins, Le Souëf had suggested that all Aboriginal languages were probably of common origin, and Curr confirmed this view in his subsequent four-volume work.¹⁰⁷ Both men stressed the prevalence of infanticide.¹⁰⁸ Of particular relevance to their approach to Aboriginal policy was the view Curr and Le Souëf held about Aboriginal government. Le Souëf wrote: 'A good deal has been written and said about chieftainship, but nothing of the kind exists.'¹⁰⁹ Similarly, Curr recalled in his memoir that he did not observe 'anything resembling government' among the Bangerang, while in *The Australian Race* he mounted a spirited rebuttal of James Dawson's assertion that a form of Aboriginal government existed.¹¹⁰ Such views informed, no doubt, the BPA's rejection of the chiefly authority of William Barak in the 1870s.

The theme of cultural disintegration is also strong in the writings of Curr and Le Souëf, leading to a nostalgic admiration for the traditional Aborigine and contempt for the survivors of the frontier times. Le Souëf observed that 'before they became so degenerated by contact with the whites, they were excellent huntsmen', while Curr, after describing a corroboree he witnessed in 1842,

102 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 290.

103 Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 274.

104 Clare Land, 'Representations of gender in E. M. Curr's *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: implications for land justice through the native title process', *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 5(19), 2002: 7.

105 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 291; Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 97.

106 Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 274; Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 295–296.

107 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 291; Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 5.

108 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 290; Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 76.

109 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 295.

110 Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 244–245; Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 56.

argued it was performed 'in a very different spirit from the tame exhibitions got up by our broken-spirited tribes during the last thirty years or more.'¹¹¹ Their nostalgic admiration for pre-contact Aboriginal people, and corresponding contempt for surviving Aboriginal culture, fits neatly with the notion of 'repressive authenticity' proposed by Patrick Wolfe.¹¹² In this formulation, the true Aborigine remains frozen in his 'savage state', leaving surviving Aborigines, and particularly 'half-castes', in a liminal state. The expression in policy of this ideology was the 1886 Act, and while Curr opposed separate treatment for 'half-castes', he certainly viewed them as distinct from 'full-blooded' Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, his resistance to assimilationist discourse is curious. A plausible explanation can, however, be found in his ethnological writings. Based on a linguistic analysis, Curr proposed that the Australian Aborigines were of Negro origin. In this matter he was swimming against the tide of scientific opinion, which generally held that Aborigines were of Caucasian origin.¹¹³ The more prevalent theory of Caucasian origin encouraged Victorian policymakers to be optimistic about the possibility for biological assimilation.¹¹⁴ By contrast, Curr insisted that assimilation, if possible at all, would take several generations.

Although Le Souëf's ethnographic writings were brief and had little impact, Curr's have had an enduring influence.¹¹⁵ In 1975, AP Elkin described him as one of 10 founding fathers of Australian anthropology, although he implied Curr's key contribution was the wealth of material he compiled.¹¹⁶ When one considers international impact, however, Curr pales in comparison to pioneers such as Howitt or Baldwin Spencer. Curr did not publish in international journals. Moreover, the journal of the Anthropological Institute in London did not review *The Australian Race*, despite the fact that the Victorian Government had earlier sent the manuscript to the institute's president, WH Flower, for critical comment prior to publication.¹¹⁷ This lack of international recognition probably would not have concerned Curr, as he was generally suspicious of

111 Le Souëf, 'Notes on the natives of Australia': 297; Curr, *Recollections of Squatting in Victoria*: 140.

112 Patrick Wolfe, 'Nation and Miscegenation: discursive continuity in the post-Mabo era', *Social Analysis* 36, 1994: 10; see also Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism*, Chapter 6.

113 Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic, 2002: 190; Russell McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory, 1880–1939*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, Vic, 1997: 36; Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 154.

114 Stephens, 'White Without Soap': 220–221.

115 The influence extends to a recent native title case; see Samuel Furphy, "'Our civilisation has rolled over thee": Edward M Curr and the Yorta Yorta Native Title case', *History Australia* 7(3), 2010: 54.1–54.16.

116 AP Elkin, 'RH Mathews: his contribution to Aboriginal studies: Part I: the founders of social Anthropology in Australia', *Oceania* 46(1), 1975: 12–15; AP Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1938: 389; see also RM Berndt and CH Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1964: 537.

117 *The Argus*, 3 November 1884: 5; see also Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 149.

anthropological theory and believed the integrity of his evidence and the validity of his arguments hinged on his personal experience of Aboriginal people.¹¹⁸

Curr stressed that his collaborators and correspondents were men with a similar background to his own, as he had sent his *pro forma* questionnaires about Aboriginal custom to 'stock-owners here and there'.¹¹⁹ His text is littered with references to the ultimate authority of the bushman. When refuting certain claims by Howitt's collaborator Lorimer Fison, Curr exclaimed, 'I have never witnessed nor heard any bushman mention such a state of things'.¹²⁰ Similarly, of his erstwhile board colleague he wrote, 'Mr. Smyth as we know is no bushman and has no acquaintance with our Blacks in their savage state.'¹²¹ The general tone of *The Australian Race* suggests that Curr was writing as much for an audience of fellow pastoralists as an audience of interested ethnologists. He assumed his readers would applaud his derision of ludicrous claims by 'new chums' such as Smyth, who had arrived during or after the gold rush and had pretensions to expertise about 'our blacks'. Yet because Curr wrote well, because he collected such a vast quantity of linguistic data, and because the Victorian Government published his work, his reputation in anthropology is not insubstantial. It is clear, however, that Curr's ethnological work is an extension of the coercive policies he pursued, with a little family of fellow pastoralists, while serving on the Board for the Protection of Aborigines in the 1870s.

118 Furphy, *Edward M. Curr and the Tide of History*: 157.

119 Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: xiv; one of Curr's trusted collaborators was Le Souëf; see vol I: 217–218; vol III: 523–524.

120 Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 126.

121 Curr, *The Australian Race*, vol I: 238.

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