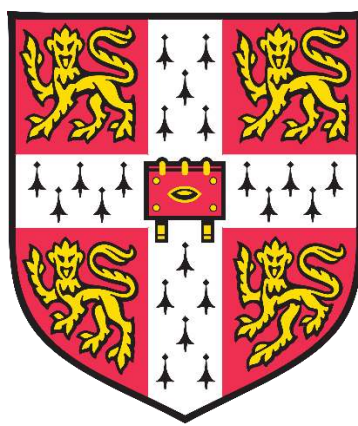


# **Governing Poor Whites**

Race, philanthropy and transnational governmentality  
between the United States and South Africa



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This dissertation is submitted for the degree of  
*Doctor of Philosophy*

*For Milla, of course*

# Declaration

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This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University of similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit of 80,000 set by the Degree Committee for Earth Sciences and Geography.

Edward-John Bottomley

October 2016

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Lastly, and especially, I would like to thank my wife, Milla. My greatest accomplishment has been to marry her.

# Abstract

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Throughout the twentieth century so-called Poor Whites caused anxiety in countries where racial domination was crucial, such as South Africa, the colonies of European empire and the United States. The Poor Whites were troubling for a number of reasons, not least because they threatened white prestige and the entire system of racial control. The efforts of various governments, organisations and experts to discipline, control and uplift the group necessarily disadvantaged other races. These controls, such as colour bars and Jim Crow laws, had an enormous effect on the countries where the Poor Whites were seen as a problem. The results can still be seen in the profoundly unequal contemporary racial landscape, and which is given expression by protest groups such as Black Lives Matter. Yet the efforts to manage the Poor Whites have thus far been examined on a national basis — as a problem of the United States, or of South Africa, to name just the most significant locales and regimes. This dissertation attempts to expand our understanding of the geography of the Poor Whites by arguing that the ‘Poor White Problem’ was a transnational concern rooted in racial interests that transcended national concerns. The racial solidarity displayed by so-called ‘white men’s countries’ was also extended to the Poor Whites. Efforts to control and discipline the population were thus in service of the white race as a whole, and ignored national interests and national borders. The transnational management of the Poor Whites was done through a network of transnational organisations such as the League of Nations and the Rockefeller Foundation, as well as the careering experts they employed. The dissertation argues that these attempts constituted a transnational ‘governmentality’ according to which these organisations and their experts attempted to discipline a Poor White population that they viewed as transnational in order to uphold white prestige and tacitly maintain both global and local racial systems. This dissertation examines some of the ways in which Poor Whites were disciplined and racially rehabilitated. It examines health and sanitation, education and training, housing standards and the management of urban space, and finally photographic representation.

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# Preface

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This thesis uses contemporary historical sources on race and race relations. The racial terminology of the period is unavoidable. These terms — for white and black — are placed in quotations to indicate authorial distance.

The use of Poor White with capitals throughout is intentional. It is to convey the understanding of a distinct racial type shared by experts in the period.

All translations from Dutch and Afrikaans are my own, unless otherwise indicated. So too responsibility for mistakes in translation.

# Introduction

## *Poor Whites and transnational governmentality*

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Poor Whites are not new, but they are often forgotten. They are easily pushed to the edges of awareness, sometimes hiding in plain sight as ‘white trash’ or sometimes purposefully kept out of the public eye. They seem to be continuously on the verge of rediscovery, as different generations become aware of the skeletons in the white racial closet. They are periodically revealed, blinking and blinded by the uncharacteristic attention, and just as quickly returned to obscurity.

The root of their difference is the racialisation of poverty. We all of us, whatever our backgrounds, react differently to Poor Whites than to the poor of other races because, in the context of colonial history and into the post-colonial era, white poverty is exceptional. The long history of white, and Western, economic domination has changed the way we encounter white poverty, and how we are affected by it. In his autobiography Nelson Mandela writes at length of this encounter:

While I was walking in the city one day, I noticed a white woman in the gutter gnawing on some fish bones. She was poor and apparently homeless, but she was young and not unattractive. I knew of course that there were poor whites, whites who were every bit as poor as Africans, but one rarely saw them. I was used to seeing black beggars on the street, and it startled me to see a white one. While I normally did not give to African beggars, I felt the urge to give this woman money. In that moment I realized the tricks that apartheid plays on one, for the everyday travails that afflict Africans are accepted as a matter of course, while my heart immediately went out to this bedraggled white woman. In South Africa, to be poor and black was normal, to be poor and white was a tragedy.<sup>1</sup>

In 2008, similarly, South African president Jacob Zuma made his first visit to a white squatter camp, where conditions ‘shocked and appalled’ him. Zuma admitted that he hadn’t even realised that Poor Whites existed.<sup>2</sup> Just two years later the news service *Reuters* tasked its Pulitzer prize-winning photographer Finbarr O’Reilly to produce a photo essay of the white slums in South Africa. Published in the run-up to the FIFA World Cup held that year in South Africa, the photo essay received considerable international attention. In an interview with *The New York Times* O’Reilly emphasized that white poverty in South Africa is ‘not a new phenomenon, but the numbers seem to be more apparent

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson R. Mandela, *A Long Walk to Freedom* (London: Abacus, 1995), 260.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Williams, ‘Zuma: I Didn’t Know There Were Poor Whites’, *The Mail & Guardian Online*, July 24, 2008, <http://mg.co.za/article/2008-07-24-zuma-i-didnt-know-there-were-poor-whites>.

than they were in the past'.<sup>3</sup> But O'Reilly was wrong. The Poor Whites had existed in far greater numbers, but they had subsequently been forgotten.

A hundred years earlier the so-called 'Poor White Problem' or 'Poor White Question' dominated social and political discourse in South Africa. Although white poverty had, of course, existed in South Africa nearly since the beginnings of the colonial era, the 'Poor White question' referred to a combination of circumstances that resulted in unprecedented white impoverishment in South Africa, seen in parallel to the even worse black impoverishment.<sup>4</sup> During the late 1890s, a series of natural disasters such as drought and the cattle disease rinderpest drove the economically insecure descendants of Dutch settlers, the Afrikaners, from the countryside into the city. Afrikaners had been slow to adapt to modern farming methods and, owing to inheritance law, their farms had become ever smaller and less economically sustainable. Yet many stayed behind on these small parcels of land, able to draw on a cheap reserve of black labour, and seeing no need to become waged farm labourers themselves. School attendance was low, with many farmers seeing no need for their children to learn any skills beyond farming: 'An entire Afrikaner underclass formed on the farms, increasingly unable to feed their large families properly, many stunted in mental and physical development'.<sup>5</sup> In 1892, one school inspector noted that it was 'sad to see a class who were once land-owners ... sinking into the class of unskilled laborers'.<sup>6</sup>

In 1899 the Second Boer War devastated both town and countryside. The scorched-earth policy of the British left many farms unusable after the war as crops were burnt, livestock slaughtered and wells salted. In the Boer republic of the Transvaal, for instance, 80% of cattle and 73% of the sheep were destroyed. Many of the Afrikaners, especially the Poor Whites, left the countryside behind and trekked to the city to find work. In the twentieth century the 'Poor White Problem' was increasingly viewed as an urban one. The newly urbanised Afrikaners were out of their depth in the city, and struggled to find work. The historian Hermann Giliomee points out that: '[b]etween 1875 and 1904 some 400,000 whites entered South Africa, more than the entire white population of 1875. Increasingly the Afrikaners, who began moving to the towns and cities in the 1890s, found that skilled and semi-skilled work, the professions and civil service positions were already filled by local or immigrant English-speakers. The British section had the advantage of better education, better skills and their command of English. Invariably they had longer experience of the cash economy'.<sup>7</sup> A series of depressions, particularly those of 1906-1908 and the post-war depression of 1919 added to Afrikaner misery. In 1916 the government estimated that there were more than 121,000 Poor Whites. By 1924 at least one quarter fell into the poor

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<sup>3</sup> Kerri Macdonald, 'Poverty, and Little Sympathy, in South Africa', *The New York Times*, June 25, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Bundy, 'Vagabonds, Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism', in *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa, 1850-1930*, ed. William Beinart, Peter Delius, and Stanley Trapido (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Hermann Buhr Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People* (Charlottesville, NC: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 322.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst G. Malherbe and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Education and the Poor White* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 471.

<sup>7</sup> Hermann Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 318.

white category and by 1930, as the Great Depression took its toll, about 300,000, or one third, of all Afrikaners were ‘absolutely indigent’. Their numbers were never certain, however, and some estimates put the number of ‘impoverished’ whites at more than half the Afrikaner population by 1932.<sup>8</sup> By the time of the Great Depression, the ‘Poor White Problem’ had become the measure of a national crisis.

South Africa was not alone in its concern with the Poor Whites, however. Half a world away, the United States had its own history of the discovery and management of this liminal group. It was particularly in the slavery-ravaged Southern states where a white underclass formed. The American South was comparatively underdeveloped in relation to the Northern states, and relied heavily on an extractive plantation economy, particularly of cotton. The Antebellum South was also home to the majority of African-Americans, leading to accusations that a reliance on slavery led to the creation of Poor Whites. Yet Southern agriculture did not consist simply of plantations. A great many farms were run on a tenancy basis where subsistence sharecroppers did not own the land they worked, but paid a proportion of their crop to the landowner as rent, a system that encouraged the accumulation of debt as well as a cash-poor economy. This was not an isolated practice. Before the Civil War, the number of landless whites in the South ranged from 30% to 50% of all whites.<sup>9</sup> By 1860, there were between 300,000 and 400,000 white persons living in poverty in the four states of Virginia, North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Within these South Atlantic states, Poor Whites constituted as much as one-fifth of the total white population.<sup>10</sup>

The Civil War devastated the South. Over a quarter of Southern white men of military age died, leaving the workforce crippled.<sup>11</sup> The breakup of the plantation system after the abolition of slavery led to the expansion of the sharecropping system. The South after Reconstruction existed as a ‘low wage region in a high wage country’ until well into the twentieth century, with more than 80% of cotton land farmed under some form of tenancy agreement.<sup>12</sup> Reliance on cotton monoculture brought further problems as the boll weevil insect plague destroyed cotton crops and severely depressed production for decades. Matters came to a head in the 1930s when the Great Depression sent the economically tenuous South spiralling into acute poverty. Dust Bowl conditions throughout the Midwest and the South compounded the misery in agriculture, leading to the largest mass migration in American history as impoverished whites and blacks left the farms and trekked to the cities of California and the North. The struggles of the Poor Whites of the period have been unforgettably portrayed in the literature of Steinbeck and Faulkner, though their representation has a colouration almost entirely missing from that of their South

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<sup>8</sup> John Bottomley, ‘Public Policy and White Rural Poverty in South Africa, 1881-1924’, (PhD diss., Queen’s University Kingston, 1990), 353.

<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1993), 5.

<sup>10</sup> Wayne J. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>11</sup> James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Godden and Martin Crawford, eds., *Reading Southern Poverty between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

African cousins. In the same period that South Africa was struggling with a 'Poor White Problem', the United States was dealing with a 'Poor White Problem' of its own, and the two were indissolubly linked.

This is not to romanticise the white poor, let alone to privilege their suffering. The first decades of the twentieth century were also the period in which white racial domination reached its greatest extent through restrictive legislation such as Jim Crow in the United States, as well as the various colonies of European states in their settler and extractive guises. New technologies of transportation and communication meant that these states were connected as never before into a global set of 'white men's countries' where the maintenance of racial order was of principal importance. Yet this period of white racial superiority was also a period of intense racial vulnerability. Poor Whites were discovered not only in South Africa and the United States but across a newly-drawn global colour line. New scientific theories such as eugenics and social Darwinism held that the Poor Whites were a manifestation of racial degeneration and were a danger to both the physical and social body.

The appearance of large groups of Poor Whites, with their questionable racial status and problematic behaviour, gave rise to efforts to manage their population. Crucially these efforts did not view them as a localised problem, but as a transnational phenomenon, ignoring borders with the same ease and unease as white racial solidarity. Their cause and management were not taken up by any one state, but rather by the transnational organisations, both scientific and moral, that had arisen in the newly connected world. These ranged from the large, such as the League of Nations and the Rockefeller Foundation, to the small, such as the Garden Cities Association. These organisations, philanthropies, and societies deployed a transnational phalanx of experts to 'solve' the Poor White Problem in ways that defined the population as much as they studied them. Their experts were not associated with one state, but moved across the globe, as transnational actors and careerists attempting to solve and manage problems beyond the purview of any one state or people. The key concept employed in this thesis is that of transnational governmentality, a theoretical elaboration of the work of Michel Foucault, which is at the same time a critique. Although governmentality has often been discussed in connection within the confines of the state, it has not typically been expanded further. This was certainly a global biopolitical phenomenon, however, whose concerns could not be restricted to the individual nations of the world: the transnational organisations and their experts were attempting to discipline a Poor White population that they viewed as transnational in order to uphold white prestige and to maintain the racial system at a global scale. The Poor White population was disciplined on medical and moral grounds; their bodies, minds and the spaces they inhabited were all managed in order to create ideal, compliant and productive citizens who at the very least did not disturb or threaten the transnational racial order.

A key insight is that transnational governance was not universal, or even general. It emerged from a set of shared conceptions and practices but was constituted and enacted differently in different places. This ranged from national, to regional and even municipal scales. The Poor White experts in countries as

disparate as India, Australia and South Africa necessarily adapted the frameworks of transnational governance to their local conditions. For instance, strategies to cure or explain Poor Whiteism in the United States, such as eugenics or hookworm, were debated and considered in South Africa but ultimately discarded. Local factors always influenced how the Poor Whites were approached - the principles of transnational Poor White governance were consulted, but not applied haphazardly or without thought. This thesis demonstrates various ways in which Poor White governance was a local adaptation of a transnational framework for control. These differentiated implementations do not negate the existence of transnational governmentality, but confirm it. It is the very fact that experts across the world, in very different circumstances, drew on an existing body of 'best practices' for governing Poor Whites, that illustrates just how transnational the project was. Despite hookworm disease not being present amongst Poor Whites in South Africa, local experts still tried to find the connection, and so fit it into a greater transnational narrative. Transnational governmentality ignored boundaries, but it was not immutable. It changed form across social and political relations and, crucially, it changed form across space. Transnational governmentality was, and is, constituted and effected spatially. Despite its disregard for borders it remains eminently geographical.

This thesis primarily concerns the period 1895, when Johannesburg was founded, to 1945, and the end of the Second World War. It examines some of the key ways in which Poor Whites were disciplined. The first chapter examines the variety of discourses that enabled transnational governmentality. It uses a postcolonial lens to critically examine the construction of race, particularly the different regimes of whiteness that arose in the colonies and settler societies. It then examines different networks — those of white men's countries and racial solidarity; and the imperial networks of experts that were employed to study Poor White populations and attempted to define them. Finally it establishes a framework for transnational governmentality, as well as its use in the thesis.

The second chapter is concerned with the moral uplift of Poor Whites by improving their training. In the United States farm demonstrations and home improvement classes were established in the South to uplift Poor White farmers and their families. Philanthropic and interest-based organisations such as the Rockefeller-financed General Education Board focussed on improving the schooling of the Poor Whites in the South. This included raising the quality of teaching and the construction of better schoolhouses. Furthermore, Progressive educational ideals were first trialled on Poor Whites in the South. The chapter then shows how these ideals, including vocational training for Poor Whites, were transmitted to South Africa by the Carnegie Corporation and applied to the Poor Whites there.

Chapter three looks at the management of Poor White bodies through efforts to improve their health. In the South the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission attempted to cure 'Poor Whiteism' itself by ridding Poor White bodies of lethargy-inducing hookworm — recently discovered and easily removed — and thereby 'whitening' populations. In the period various scientific theories linked Poor Whiteism with

vulnerable white bodies. Eugenicists believed that Poor Whites were physically and morally degenerate on a genetic level, and a danger to the race as a whole. Yet theories of environmental vulnerability linked Poor Whites to the perceived degeneration of whites in the tropics. In South Africa Poor Whites were believed to be long-term victims of malaria, their bodies weak and lethargic due to decades of malarial infection. The disciplining of Poor White bodies, including efforts to improve sanitation, were efforts to whiten the population and 'cure' Poor Whiteism.

Chapter four further examines efforts to 'whiten' Poor White populations by managing the spaces they inhabited. It shows how later efforts to spatially discipline them evolved from Victorian philanthropic efforts to improve the health of factory workers and slum inhabitants, such as the construction of model villages on the micro-level, and the construction of Garden Cities on a regional level. The network of expert planners and architects involved in the construction of these spaces exported their ideas to the United States where they were adapted into new forms by philanthropic organisations intent on eliminating urban 'blight'. After the Great Depression these theories were refined and re-used for the construction of towns to house and discipline Poor White populations in the United States and South Africa. The management of space and efforts to discipline Poor Whites became indelibly linked with whitening these populations. The chapter provides a genealogy of transnational governmentality, showing how successive regimes drew upon transnational framework for the spatial governance of Poor Whites, and added to it in turn. Each section builds upon the last, and the chapter concludes with two cases studies of existing scholarship, showing how these can be reinterpreted using theories of transnational governmentality. It is a structure utilised to varying degrees in the case studies of the preceding and following chapters.

Finally, chapter five shows how the discursive construction of Poor Whites crucially included the work of images, particularly photographs. It shows how the periodic rediscovery of Poor Whites throughout the twentieth century has been accompanied by their continual redefinition, notably from the noble poor of the early twentieth century to the grotesque poor of the century's end. It argues that the photographers of Poor Whites should be regarded as experts on the same level as the medical or educational experts with which we began.

Together, the various chapters offer a coherent and worked example of transnational governmentality in practice, along with the various methods employed in its application. The Poor White are not new, then, but they are often forgotten. This thesis is an attempt to return them to geography as well as to history.

Before we can turn to geography, however, the history must be understood. To better understand the complex social and political place of Poor Whites in the period, it is necessary to give a more detailed overview of their histories in South Africa and the United States. The following section sets out the

major historical developments in the two countries and provides context for how concerns over Poor Whites manifested in the period.

### **South Africa and the Poor White Question**

At the turn of the twentieth century the British colonial government in South Africa had the daunting task of rebuilding the region after the devastating losses inflicted during the Anglo-Boer War. The two Boer republics, the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (ZAR) and the Orange Free State, were now colonies of the Empire, along the Cape and Natal. The country remained bitterly divided between Boers and the English, with their attendant internal factions. The British government tasked Lord Alfred Milner, a career diplomat, with turning the fractured republics into a unified, productive colonial state.

This was no easy task. The war had nearly destroyed the agricultural capacity of the country. The scorched earth policy meant that crops and homesteads were razed, cattle slaughtered, dams destroyed, and fences cut. Many white farms were subsequently occupied by their black farmworkers. To add to the crisis, the British authorities needed to resettle 31 000 Boer prisoners of war, as well as over 116 000 Boer women and children kept in concentration camps. Alongside the Boers were over 115 000 black concentration camp prisoners. The result was that the predominantly agricultural Boers were impoverished and without an easy means of rebuilding their livelihoods. This was in parallel with even worse black impoverishment.<sup>13</sup>

The war, coupled with, amongst others, successive economic depressions and cattle disease, resulted in tens of thousands of impoverished white farmers and Poor White *bywoners* streaming into the cities, along with even more black farmers and farmworkers. To alleviate the situation, Milner unsuccessfully tried to institute the Burgher Land Settlement Scheme, which aimed to make Poor White farmers sharecroppers of the state, and so stem the flood to the cities. The Afrikaners were out of their depth in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Bloemfontein and Cape Town. Their agricultural background and lack of English left them ill-equipped for the urban economy. This was exacerbated by a lack of education, which was not mandatory. In 1905 there were 28 500 white children in state schools, and 9 000 in private schools. Over 25 000 did not attend school at all. And those that did attend were taught in English and Dutch, not in their own language.<sup>14</sup>

The uneducated Poor Whites competed with black South Africans for labour, particularly on the mines, but were unwilling to accept the same low wages. White political and labour groups began agitating for the reservation of skilled jobs to whites. To alleviate labour shortages, amongst others, in the country's burgeoning mining industry the South African Native Affairs Commission recommended the

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<sup>13</sup> Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 316-318.

<sup>14</sup> Hermann Giliomee and Bernard Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika* (Tafelberg, 2007), p. 228.



‘segregation’ of black South Africans, as well as the construction of ‘locations’ where they would be housed away from the white cities. Black education, which was bolstered by missionary schools, was refocussed on training for low-skilled work.

The mobilisation of Afrikaner ethnic interests began in earnest in 1905, after Milner was replaced by Lord Selborne. A number of erstwhile Boer generals travelled to Europe, ostensibly to collect money for Boer widows and orphans. In Switzerland, they met with Paul Kruger, the exiled former president of the ZAR. Kruger granted access to secreted ZAR reserve funds which, instead of being put towards poor widows and orphans, was used to finance the goals of Afrikaner nationalism. This included the founding of two Dutch newspapers as well as various political projects and campaigns. It quickly became apparent to what use the Poor White and relief funds were used: within three years the Boer generals and their allies won elections in the Transvaal, Cape and Orange River colonies. By 1908 three of South Africa’s four British colonies were governed by Afrikaners, or Afrikaner-supported parties. The rise in Afrikaner nationalism was mirrored by the rise in the number of Poor Whites, prompting the Transvaal Colony to launch the first Poor White investigation, the Transvaal Indigency Commission of 1906, to investigate the matter. Its conclusions were troubling for continued white dominance in Southern Africa. The historian Liz Lange argues that this commission ‘did more than investigate the extent of indigency in the Transvaal. It established the existence of indigency as a question. And it did so through a process of classification and theorization aimed not only at explaining white poverty but acting upon it.’<sup>15</sup>

Following electoral defeat by the Afrikaners, Britain hastened to unify the colonies. Two colonial commissions - the Selborne memorandum and the Langden Commission - had supported unification, arguing that a united South Africa would be of more military and economic value to Britain. Political tensions in Europe also meant that Britain was uneasy with Afrikaner colonies sympathetic to German interests. Afrikaners also supported unification. Nationalists, such as the Free State politician JBM Hertzog, believed that it would increase nationalism by unifying Boers against the British. Globalists such as Boer generals Jan Smuts and Louis Botha believed that it would provide greater opportunities for self-governance. Thus, on 31 May 1910, the Union of South Africa was established with Louis Botha and his South African party at its head.

Britain’s hopes of a docile colony were soon dashed. Following unification, Botha’s government was perceived to be too sympathetic to British interests. Afrikaner nationalism, led by Hertzog, then minister of native affairs, continued to rise. Hertzog, supported by young Afrikaner intellectuals, campaigned against strengthening imperial ties and strongly supported Afrikaans, and not Dutch, as an official language. When Hertzog was removed from Botha’s party in 1914, he founded the National Party with

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<sup>15</sup> Liz Lange, *White, Poor and Angry: White Working-Class Families in Johannesburg* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), p. 144

Hertzogism, or Afrikaner nationalism, as a guiding principle. Colonial suspicions of Afrikaner sympathies towards Germany were also proved correct, to a degree. With the outbreak of the First World War, South Africa was ordered to invade German South West Africa, or Namibia as it later became known. Although the attack was supported by a significant parliamentary majority, it was opposed by several popular Boer generals, including C.F. Beyers, Christiaan de Wet and Koos de la Rey.

In 1914, the Boer generals seized their chance, and the short-lived Afrikaner Rebellion broke out. The established interpretation of the Rebellion was that thousands of Afrikaners, led by their erstwhile generals, and still bitter over the Anglo-Boer War, rebelled against a weakened Britain in the hopes of founding a new Afrikaner republic. Yet, as the historian John Bottomley notes, the motives of many of the rebels were less idealistic. A great many of the rebels were Poor Whites – tenant farmers and *bywoners* who were drawn from the drought-stricken parts of the Free State and Transvaal. The drought, coupled with plummeting produce prices, and rising consumer prices, meant that the rebellion was, for many, a way out from becoming labourers in the cities and, more simply, starvation. As Patrick Duncan, a later Governor-General of South Africa, put it: ‘rebellion does not seem such a serious thing to desperate men’.<sup>16</sup> The hopes of a new Afrikaner republic were soon dashed, however. The generals could field on about 12 000 men against a Union force of 32 000, and their horseback guerrilla tactics were simply no match for the Unions’ new fleet of motorcars. The rebellion was over within four months. South Africa subsequently marched on, and easily captured, German South West Africa.

In the aftermath of the war, inflation, stagnant gold prices, economic depression and repeated droughts put further pressure on South Africa’s beleaguered economy, and the flood of Poor Whites to the cities increased. The SAP government attempted to investigate the problem through the 1913 Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Women and the Unemployment Commission of 1921, but it was the Dutch Reformed Church, which was closely linked to Afrikaner nationalism, that made Poor Whites a priority. The church’s 1916 conference in Cradock is seen as a blueprint for the country’s welfare system and it is notable that prominent Afrikaner nationalists, such as Hertzog, spoke at these conferences.<sup>17</sup> Afrikaner nationalism was steadily gaining ground and cost the SAP, now under Smuts, significant Afrikaner support. The party was also undone by Smuts’s violent repression of the 1922 mineworker’s strike in Johannesburg. Wage agitation caused by the economic turmoil, and the SAP’s refusal to further extend the colour bar, resulted in 70 000 mineworkers striking, many of them poor and working class whites. Smuts responded with artillery, air support and tanks. About 120 people were killed, 650

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<sup>16</sup> John Bottomley, ‘The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whiteism’, in *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940*, ed. by Robert Morrell (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Robert Vosloo, ‘The Dutch Reformed Church and The Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations’, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae* 39, no. 2 (2011): 67-85.

injured, and the strike leaders executed. It cost Smuts much working class support. His footsteps, said Hertzog, were ‘wet with blood’.<sup>18</sup>

In the run-up to the 1924 election, Hertzog’s National Party (NP) campaigned strongly on a nationalist and Poor White ticket. Prior years had seen further church conferences (1922 in Stellenbosch and 1923 in Bloemfontein) to address the problem of Poor Whites. The redemption of the Poor White elements of the *volk* to unify Afrikaners was a top Nationalist priority. To ensure Smut’s defeat, the NP and the Labour Party agreed to form a ‘pact’ by supporting each other’s candidates. The SAP suffered a humiliating electoral defeat and a new Afrikaner nationalist Pact government, led by Hertzog, was now in control of the country.

The NP’s goal was the economic revival of Afrikaners, and they had much work to do. Nearly 50% of the Afrikaner population was urbanised, yet they were unschooled and had little experience in business. In 1939, nearly 40% of Afrikaner men fell into just four professions: unskilled worker, mineworker, railway-worker and mason.<sup>19</sup> The number of Poor Whites continued to increase and, by the time of the Great Depression (1929-1933), had become a crisis. In 1932, a joint US-South Africa commission, financed by the Carnegie Corporation, found that there were 300 000 (poorly defined) Poor Whites in South Africa – 17% of the white population and over a quarter of the Afrikaner population. The Great Depression and prolonged drought had impacted both the urban and rural populations. The government embarked on a series of relief measures. These included the establishment of trade and industrial schools, hostels for poor children, agricultural loans and massive relief works. The government’s spending on poor relief increased from 2,6% of the budget in 1930 to a massive 15,6% just three years later. The rescue of Poor Whites became a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalist ideology, exemplified by the motto ‘*n volk red homself*’ – a nation must save itself. National conferences on Poor White relief were organised in the wake of the Carnegie commission, the most notable being in Kimberley in 1934. These conferences were attended by a cross-section of church and political leaders (including future Apartheid prime ministers D.F. Malan and Hendrik Verwoerd) and had the task of devising a national action plan to solve the Poor White problem.

For the Nationalists, the most direct method of uplifting with Poor Whites was by raising their standard of living. For this to happen, the impoverished *volk*, as a whole, had to become economically active and literate. A form of Afrikaner nationalist economic empowerment that emphasised investment in Afrikaner-owned and operated businesses had begun after the First World War with the establishment of an Afrikaner publishing company, Nasionale Pers, and two assurance companies, Santam and Sanlam. These were soon followed by manufacturing, utility and agricultural companies such as KWV, Iskor and Eskom. The pace of Afrikaner economic development accelerated after the Great Depression,

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<sup>18</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, p. 245.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, p. 279.

thanks to the support of the Hertzog government. In 1938 Afrikaners celebrated the centenary of the Great Trek, the migration of thousands of Afrikaners into the interior of South Africa. As part of the celebrations Afrikaners were encouraged to invest their money in companies and financial institutions that would help Poor Whites. New investment companies were set up to invest exclusively in Afrikaner businesses, and to finance the creation of new ones. The idea behind this *volkskapitalisme* was that companies should not serve as vehicles to enrich owners and shareholders through profits but that profits should be used to economically develop the *volk* and uplift Poor Whites. Thus, between 1938 and 1975, the share of the mining industry owned by Afrikaners increased from 1% to 18%. In manufacturing, the share increased from 3% to 15%.<sup>20</sup>

Naturally the economic development of Afrikaners, encouraged and financed by an Afrikaner Nationalist government, excluded black South Africans. Coupled with a colour bar that reserved skilled work for whites and limited black wages, as well as an inherited colonial framework that disenfranchised black South Africans and prohibited their movement in white areas, the foundations for the later system of Apartheid were firmly laid. At the heart of Afrikaner Nationalism lay the Poor Whites. The resultant system of Apartheid has been called, not unfairly, ‘an anti-poverty program for whites.’<sup>21</sup>

### **The United States and the Southern Question**

It is tempting to draw parallels between South Africa and the United States, particularly the Southern states in the period after the Civil War until the Second World War. Both regions were heavily dependent on an agricultural economy, and relied on increasingly outdated agricultural methods. Both regions suffered devastation – of their economies, productive capacity and, simply, of their citizens and societies, in the large-scale conflicts of the Civil War and Boer War. The South and South Africa were culturally different from the metropolises and were characterised by deeply entrenched racist attitudes and a yearning for nationhood and independence – *folk* and *volk*. Crucially both regions were subjects of their respective empires. In the British and American empires, these far-flung regions were characterised as different, with exotic climates and non-white populations. Until the Great Migration, the majority of African Americans were concentrated in the South and, like South Africa, the region was defined by tensions between black and white to a degree unknown in more racially homogenous societies like the metropolises of London or New York. In the latter tensions were largely focussed on immigrants whose whiteness was in contestation. The economies of the South and South Africa were thus both able to rely on a cheap and easily available pool of black labour. Finally, both regions were

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<sup>20</sup> Giliomee and Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid-Afrika*, p. 291.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Wilson, Untitled Video Interview, *Carnegie Corporation Oral History Project*, accessed 5 June 2017, [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/oral\\_hist/carnegie/video-interviews/](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/digital/collections/oral_hist/carnegie/video-interviews/).

home to the Poor Whites, who existed in greater number in the American South and South Africa than anywhere else in the world.

Yet despite these parallels the regions were quite different, not least because of the sheer scale and economic power of the United States. Despite the South's cultural distinctiveness, it was still a part of an economy orders of magnitude greater than South Africa. And, although African Americans lived in the South to a far greater degree than anywhere else in the United States, the Southerners were always part of a numerical majority. They did not exhibit the 'island of white' mentality that characterised other settler states such as South Africa and Rhodesia. In South Africa, black South Africans were always present in the minds of the elites investigating Poor Whites – in competition for labour, government support and education. In the United States African Americans are present in their omission, not an existential threat.

Yet racism defined the South. In the period following the Civil War, racial tensions escalated during the period known as Reconstruction. In 1863 Abraham Lincoln attempted to coax rebel states back into the Union if they pledged to uphold the U.S. constitution and emancipation. Reconstruction continuing through the 1870s when the South regained 'home rule' under Rutherford Hayes. It was a period of intense social and economic adjustment.<sup>22</sup> Despite emancipation, Southerners were determined to restrict the rights of African Americans. This manifested not only in legislation such as the Black Codes, but also in racist movements such as the Ku Klux Klan and outright violence such as race riots and lynchings. Race relations deteriorated as Southern populism increased over the following two decades. By the 1890s African Americans were disenfranchised in virtually every state of the former Confederacy. Although the U.S. Constitution forbade outright racial discrimination, measures were more subtle, such as requiring potential voters to be able to read, or interpret a section of the constitution. These requirements were waived for white voters.

The South also changed economically. With the collapse of slavery and the plantation system, sharecropping gradually became the accepted labour system. The region remained desperately poor following the Civil War. A series of droughts and profound economic depressions meant an increase in the number of Poor Whites and poor African Americans.<sup>23</sup> Although there were efforts to increase education, such as through the creation of a public-school system, investment in education remained far below the national average. Industrialisation also increased, spurred by the discovery of the cotton gin. Mill towns, with their low wages and low-skilled work, sprang up across the region and, by the end of the century, the South's chief exports were lumber and textiles. The result was a region that offered

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<sup>22</sup> Godden and Crawford, *Reading Southern Poverty between the Wars*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*, 5.

little opportunity for social or economic advancement, filled with Poor White and black sharecroppers and millworkers. By 1890, the South ranked lowest in per capita income, public health and education.

The United States government, unlike South Africa, did not have commissions or conferences that focussed explicitly on Poor Whites. Efforts to uplift the group came primarily through the attention of Gilded Age philanthropists, such as Henry Ford and John D. Rockefeller, who were interested in the moral and economic revitalisation of the South. These industrial elites attended conferences on ‘Southern uplift’ and education, and advised commissions into the decline of ‘country life’. Many of their initiatives, such as Rockefeller’s agricultural initiatives, formed the basis for subsequent federal programmes, such as the agricultural extension service. Although many of these philanthropic projects achieved considerable success, by the time of the United States’ entry in the First World War, the South remained desperately poor.

The First World War saw the massive mobilisation of economic resources in service of the war effort, and brought with it much-needed employment. To coordinate the war effort the federal government set up a large number of temporary agencies which employed up to 1 million people for manufacturing, production and communication purposes. In 1918 there were 85 000 U.S. troops in France. A year later the troop count increased to 1,2 million. The system of federal payments to dependents of servicemen was an important part in the development of the American welfare system and benefits, especially in the South, often exceed pre-war family income.<sup>24</sup> To achieve the staggering increase in troop numbers, the federal government instituted a national draft, eventually fielding 4 million troops. This was by no means uncontroversial – draft boards in small towns were staffed by the local elite, and their class and racial biases favoured the white middle class. As the historian Jeanette Keith points out: ‘Southern draft boards certainly practiced racial discrimination, but during World War I racism cut in peculiar ways.’ While African-Americans were disproportionately drafted, they were deemed too unreliable for front-line combat. Thus, in the South, the burden of conscription fell on the Poor Whites. ‘World War I was not just a poor man's fight’, writes Keith. ‘It was a poor white man's fight.’<sup>25</sup> Southern Poor Whites were suspicious of fighting a war they believed only served distant interests. Unlike South Africa, they did not choose a popular armed rebellion but instead resorted to ‘widespread evasion, desertion, and (in places) armed resistance.’ It is estimated that between 2,4 million and 3,6 million men avoided the draft and about 12% of those drafted ultimately deserted.<sup>26</sup>

As in South Africa, the end of the First World War heralded an economic depression that was particularly acute in the agricultural economy of the South. After the collapse of the plantation system,

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<sup>24</sup> K. Walter Hickel. ‘War, Region, and Social Welfare: Federal Aid to Servicemen's Dependents in the South, 1917-1921’, *The Journal of American History* 87, no.4 (2001): 1362.

<sup>25</sup> Jeanette Keith. ‘The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance, 1917-1918: Class, Race, and Conscription in the Rural South’, *The Journal of American History* 87, no.4 (2001): 1351

<sup>26</sup> Keith, ‘The Politics of Southern Draft Resistance’, 1338



Southern agriculture transitioned to a cash-crop economy reliant on tenant farmers, cotton and tobacco. Cash crops and outdated farming methods depleted the soil and precluded any long-term prospects. Although the United States, as a whole, enjoyed a manufacturing boom in the 1920s, it was off-set by overproduction, foreign competition and the discovery of synthetic fabrics. Cotton prices plunged even as cotton production was depleted by the devastating effects of a widespread plague of insects called boll weevils. In the decade following the end of the First World War, cotton prices decreased from 28,8c per pound to 17,9c per pound. By 1931, the price of cotton was a meagre 5,6c per pound. Small farmers, both black and white, could not make a living, and abandoned rural life for the cities, hastening urbanisation. Even more successful farmers, who had borrowed extensively to fund mechanisation, could not keep up with their repayments due to falling prices. They too had to abandon their farms due to foreclosure. and become sharecroppers on larger farms. By the end of the 1920s, two-thirds of the farmland in Georgia was cultivated by sharecroppers. The majority of these were Poor Whites surviving on an annual income of less than \$200. On the eve of the Great Depression, the South was the poorest region in the United States by a significant margin – per capita income only half that of the national figure.<sup>27</sup>

In 1929 Wall Street crashed. Stock prices, which had risen more than fourfold since 1921, plummeted, and industrial production soon followed. The resulting financial crisis sent a shockwave throughout a world connected by a reliance on the gold standard. The causes of the Great Depression are various: the slow collapse of agriculture, overextended financial institutions, stretched consumers and trade protectionism, amongst others. The financial panic resulted in a run on U.S. banks and, by 1933, a fifth of these banks had failed. President Herbert Hoover tried to stabilise the economy by establishing the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to lend money to banks, but the crisis soon spread across the globe. The international community abandoned the gold standard, and the resulting currency devaluation had a devastating effect on the international trade system. Mass unemployment followed and, by 1933, at least a quarter of the U.S. work force was unemployed.<sup>28</sup>

The Great Depression is a defining moment in 20<sup>th</sup>-century U.S. history, conjuring memories of emergency resettlements, ‘Hooverville’ shantytowns and unprecedented migration. It drastically altered the state’s relation with its workforce: both labour unions and welfare expanded significantly during the 1930s. At the same time a series of catastrophic droughts devastated agriculture: the South in 1931, and the notorious Great Plains drought of 1934, coining the name ‘Dust Bowl’. As a result, more than 2,5 million people fled the Great Plains region for better living and working conditions in California. Unfortunately, the best many could hope for was poorly-paid migrant work. The number of Poor Whites

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<sup>27</sup> William Harris Bragg, ‘Reconstruction in Georgia’, *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed 5 June 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/reconstruction-georgia>

<sup>28</sup> Christina D. Romer and Richard H. Pells, ‘Great Depression’, *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accessed 5 June 2017, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Depression>

surged. Those in cities fared little better. The 1938 ‘Report to the President on the Economic Conditions of the South’ found that more than half of the workers in the South’s largest cities could not afford an adequate diet and that among ‘white nonrelief families’ with annual incomes of less than \$500, ‘one-third did not have indoor running water, one-half did not have a kitchen sink or drain, and none had gas or electricity for cooking.’<sup>29</sup>

Hoover’s response to the Great Depression was deemed insufficient. In 1932 Americans voted overwhelming for the Democratic nominee Franklin D. Roosevelt who promised a ‘new deal’ for the ‘forgotten man’. His New Deal programmes, conceived as an emergency response to the depression, radically overhauled the American government’s approach to labour and employment and greatly expanded the provision of welfare. A dizzying array of new federal agencies were created to tackle unemployment through, amongst others, public works, resettlement, financing and infrastructure. The Public Works Administration, for instance, provided long-term employment on construction projects and the Civilian Conservation Corps employed over 2.5 million men in planting and improving forestland. By 1934 the Civil Works Administration employed over 4 million men and women. The Rural Electrification Administration brought electricity to rural homes, and the Federal Housing Administration provided loans and insurance. The Social Security Act brought unemployment insurance and provided federal relief for the aged and disabled. Huge public works initiatives, such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), provided employment, trade and infrastructure improvement in poverty-stricken regions of the Southern states.

The New Deal has a mixed legacy in the South.<sup>30</sup> It vastly improved education, repaired and rebuilt schools, resurfaced roads and provided much-needed infrastructure improvements. The TVA provided power and water for the region’s industry. Southern States were forced into welfare reform and New Deal financing programmes energised Southern entrepreneurs. Yet the South received far less New Deal spending than any other region of the United States due to the government’s principle of matching funds. Poor White Southern farmers benefited from New Deal resettlement and tenant-purchase programmes. However, the government’s approach to agriculture was to encourage modernisation and mechanisation. New Deal agricultural financing packages made the purchase of modern equipment possible. Initiatives designed to rescue agriculture did just that – but at the eventual cost of tenant farmers displaced due to mechanisation. The New Deal, as a whole, alleviated, but did not solve the Great Depression. This would not happen until the Second World War provided universal employment for Americans. Thus, by 1940, the South was still a poor, rural region, where low wages and rigid segregation ruled.

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<sup>29</sup> Jamil Zainaldin, ‘Great Depression’, *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed 5 June 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/great-depression>

<sup>30</sup> Louis Mazzari, ‘New Deal’, *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, accessed 5 June 2017, <http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/new-deal>



# Mapping the Poor White

## *An ambiguous geography*

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Our contemporary notions of race and class have come to us only quite recently, and have been profoundly influenced by European colonialism. In fact, it can be argued that it was in the ‘laboratories of empire’ that modern Western race relations were forged.<sup>1</sup> This was not only a confrontation with the colonial ‘Other’, however. Relations between the colonisers themselves were equally inflected by race. Colonials who did not conform to tacit and explicit standards for racial conduct, such as vagrants, orphans, deserters and drunks, for example, were forced continuously to negotiate their racial status in regions where every ‘white’ was crucial to a larger project of domination.

This chapter will explore relations between race and class through a discussion of whiteness studies and their use by postcolonial scholars interested in a closer understanding of the inhabitants of the margins of empire, such as the Poor Whites who are the central focus of this thesis. It then examines how self-appointed Poor White experts struggled to define the group at the same time as they constituted themselves as part of a transnational network of experts that studied the Poor Whites. This co-constitution of racial subjects and racial experts is placed in the context of the profound tension between a globally extensive but select group of ‘white men’s countries’ and the phenomena of increasing globalisation, leading to the creation of an international arena inhabited by decidedly transnational organisations. These include the large philanthropies of Rockefeller and Carnegie, which despite their origins in the United States, found their field of activity, their methods, and indeed their *raison d’être* in the transnational arena. Focussing on this work, this chapter forwards the concept of ‘transnational governmentality’ as a way of understanding how an alliance of expert networks and transnational organisations conceived of and constructed the Poor Whites, and sought to manage them along colonial racial lines.

### **Race and the margins of empire**

It is now largely accepted that race is a social construct and that race relations are ‘historical products of human activity ... brought about by the concrete actions of human beings’.<sup>2</sup> So too is it accepted that certain race categories, particularly the category of ‘white’, gift people and groups with certain invisible

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<sup>1</sup> Prakash, *Another Reason: Science and the Imagination of Modern India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Teresa J. Guess, ‘The Social Construction of Whiteness: Racism by Intent, Racism by Consequence’, *Critical Sociology* 32, no. 4 (2006): 649—673.; Peter Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America’, *The Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 392—403.

but notoriously influential rights. Popular discussions of such ‘white privilege’ can be traced to a change in the theory and study of race in disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. The burgeoning field of whiteness studies examines the ways in which whiteness claims and exercises power and authority. This is certainly not a new idea — the origins of ‘whiteness studies’ can be traced back to early twentieth-century African-American scholars such as W.E.B. du Bois — but in the 1990s, beginning with the work of labour historians such as David Roediger and Theodore Allen, scholars began systematically to examine the ways in which whiteness and ethnic identity were entangled, and how historic claims to ‘whiteness’ were used both as a means of social control and to limit access to scarce material and cultural resources.<sup>3</sup> Access to a ‘white’ identity was jealously guarded, as Noel Ignatiev illustrated via the struggles of Irish immigrants to New York to claim white status.<sup>4</sup> The immigrant Irish were persistently defined as something other than white — as ‘Celtic’, drunk and savage, for instance — not black, certainly, but still lower in the scale of civilisation than the older immigrant community. Similarly Matthew Jacobson illustrated how other European immigrants — Italians, Poles and Germans — underwent the same struggle to claim a white identity, often in the context of securing privileges from black migrants and immigrants.<sup>5</sup>

The so-called ‘third wave’ of whiteness studies that emerged from these historical analyses focusses on the nuanced ways in which modern white identity is refashioned in the wake of the Civil Rights movement and the end of Apartheid. This includes paying close attention to cultural practices as well as the contemporary claims to whiteness by immigrant communities, such as Latino communities in the United States, or debates in the Netherlands about what constitutes a ‘true Dutch’ person.<sup>6</sup> A good example is Ruth Frankenberg’s examination of the multifaceted ways in which white middle-class women came to understand themselves as ‘white’.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of ‘whiteness’ as currency or property has been enthusiastically embraced by other disciplines such as history. Radhika Mohanram, building on Deana Heath’s work on moral regulation, has shown how whiteness was closely related to ideas around sanitation and cleanliness: ‘The labouring class, like the blacks, was dirty, unhygienic, unwashed, illiterate, sexually perverted, inferior’, she argued. ‘They were a double metaphor for blackness in that their dirty labour made them literally black every day ... They too became the white man’s burden, ultimately unequal to the bourgeoisie’.<sup>8</sup> In

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<sup>3</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso Books, 1991); Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*. (London: Verso Books, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup> France Winddance Twine and Charles Gallagher, ‘The Future of Whiteness: A Map of the ‘third Wave’’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 31, no. 1 (2008): 4–24.

<sup>7</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Deana Heath, *Purifying Empire: Obscenity and the Politics of Moral Regulation in Britain, India and Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Radhika Mohanram, *Imperial White: Race, Diaspora, and the British Empire* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

Geography, Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake initiated a sustained debate about the construction of 'white spaces' and geographies of whiteness via an analysis of the media representation of the Columbine shootings in the United States.<sup>9</sup> Partly in response to such arguments, however, Alistair Bonnett has accused whiteness studies of being, essentially, an American project, and has attempted to reframe it as an international issue by examining the claim to white identity in Brazil and elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Whatever the cultural geography of whiteness studies, accounts of white identity have been crucial to our understanding that, far from being a static quality, 'white' is a cultural commodity. It can be won or lost. It can be negotiated for, it can be maintained and managed, and it can be rehabilitated. Ethnic groups can become more or less white. Although it may seem obvious to contemporary observers, the twentieth-century idea of race consciousness as being limited to non-white groups has been shown to be false.<sup>11</sup> The trick is that 'white' has appeared to be an empty quality. Whiteness has essentially been allowed to hide in plain sight by virtue of its normative qualities.

For historical researchers an awareness of whiteness has led to a re-examination of the past to understand the impact of efforts to maintain a white racial identity. There has been a particularly fruitful collaboration with postcolonial studies where ideas of whiteness have contributed to a reconsideration of the term 'empire'. This reconsidering of empire is due, at least in part, to postcolonial studies' concern with the dissonance between marginalised voices and ruling narratives. Postcolonial studies take as their starting point that the colonies profoundly influenced their metropolises, not simply economically, but also culturally and through the complex creation of identity and identities. Edward Said, for instance, showed how colonial identities of coloniser and colonised were constructed in relation to one another — both in the dominions and in the metropole.<sup>12</sup> The creation of identity is intimately connected with race. More recent work has emphasised the problematic racial identity of the colonisers, particularly in settler societies. 'The white settler subject is peculiarly located, in that he or she doesn't fit neatly within the binary opposition of coloniser/colonised', argues Radhika Mohanram. 'The white settler's relationship to the metropolitan society, that is, at the settler's point of origin, is marked by the discourse of degeneration that is attributed to colonised society'.<sup>13</sup>

The work of postcolonial scholars is, however, fraught with tension over the true nature and power of empire. Said's work, for instance, tends to picture empire as monolithic and omniscient — a meticulous and unstoppable force. In contrast, the historian John Darwin, especially in his recent work, argues that the British Empire, to take one example, was not nearly as pervasive and directed as sometimes

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<sup>9</sup> Audrey Kobayashi and Linda Peake, 'Racism out of Place: Thoughts on Whiteness and an Antiracist Geography in the New Millennium', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90, no. 2 (June 2000): 392—403.

<sup>10</sup> Alistair Bonnett, *White Identities: An Historical and International Introduction* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*.

<sup>12</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980).

<sup>13</sup> Mohanram, *Imperial White*, 132.

imagined. The Empire was a hugely complex affair with a multitude of differing agenda.<sup>14</sup> In that aspect it was no different from those that had come before; ‘Empires were not made by faceless committees making grand calculations, nor by the “irresistible” pressures of economics or ideology. They had to be made by men (and women) whose actions were shaped by motives and morals no less confused and demanding than those that govern us now’.<sup>15</sup> Hugely powerful, the British Empire was nevertheless a product of compromises and treaties, settlers and diplomats. It was a ‘private-enterprise empire’ and its business was conducted not only through formal channels and imperial proclamations but via private interests such as missionaries and shopkeepers. This extended to broader networks of cooperation such as mercantile expansion. The Empire, or the idea of empire, was conveyed through a network of newspapers and periodicals and telegraph lines. Fittingly, Darwin likens the empire to a ‘project’, one that was continually being planned, formulated and reformulated.

Postcolonialism brings about a renewed emphasis on the colonies, and their importance, economically and culturally, to the empire project. Yet despite the variety of colonies scholars of colonialism have devoted much of their attention to the Indian subcontinent. This has arguably resulted in a superficial treatment of the other territories, and particularly of the ‘settler colonies’ and the settlers themselves:

At best the overseas British have appeared in the guise of ‘pre-fabricated collaborators’, copying the habits and consuming the products of industrial Britain in whose mould they were formed ... Revision is certainly long overdue. The dominions cannot be fitted into the Procrustean bed of ‘imperial collaboration’. Nor can their contribution to British world power be treated as less important than India’s.<sup>16</sup>

In fact, James Belich argues that it was not European imperialism, but rather its by-product which had the lasting effect on world history. It was not conquest but settlement which has proved more influential, in the long run: ‘European empire dominated one and a half continents for a century or so. European settlement came to dominate three and a third continents, including Siberia. It still does’.<sup>17</sup> Although the legacy of European imperialism is deeply inscribed into the minds of colonisers and colonised, substantive European rule arrived late, and did not last very long. The true power behind the dramatic Anglophone expansion between 1790 and 1939, he argues, was the settler societies — places such as the United States, Canada, Australia and South Africa. These societies provided a blank slate — a new world — where the problems of the old could be set aside and society rebuilt. The United States also justifies a postcolonial reading on other grounds: the historian Natalie Ring argues that, after

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<sup>14</sup> John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> John Darwin, *Unfinished Empire: The Global Expansion of Britain* (London: Penguin Books, 2013), xi.

<sup>16</sup> Darwin, *The Empire Project*, 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> James Belich, *Replenishing the Earth: The Settler Revolution and Rise of the Anglo-World, 1783-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 23.

Reconstruction, the economic and cultural differences between the prosperous North and the backward South were so great that the South was essentially treated as a colony — an occupied territory that needed both aid and civilizing zeal.<sup>18</sup>

Postcolonial scholars have persuasively argued that it was in the colonies — settler or otherwise — where twentieth-century notions of race, identity and governmental power were incubated — ‘the colonies ... were underfunded and overextended laboratories of modernity’, writes Gyan Prakash. ‘There, science’s authority as a sign of modernity was instituted with a minimum of expense and a maximum of ambition’.<sup>19</sup> Our understanding of the histories of empire and its colonies has further been enriched by academics embracing the work of Michel Foucault and his theories of power, knowledge and discipline. This work has recently been energised by the publication of Foucault’s development of the concept of ‘governmentality’, originally adventured in the lectures at the Collège de France.<sup>20</sup> In Geography and History, scholars of ‘colonial governmentality’ have examined the ways in which colonial governments developed and used technologies of the state to discipline their populations: Peter Redfield, for instance, has shown how Foucault’s theories of disciplinary power, memorably represented by the Panopticon, can be carried through to colonial prison colonies such as French Guiana.<sup>21</sup> David Arnold has demonstrated the ways in which ideas of ‘Western medicine’ became both a tool of state control and a key battleground between colonisers and colonised in India.<sup>22</sup> Timothy Mitchell has argued that the disciplinary logic of the liberal state has a non-Western basis while Jean and John Comaroff have analysed the struggles of British missionaries in South Africa to remake their charges as both Christian and British.<sup>23</sup>

Geographers have long benefitted from the realisation that colonial states had to abstract space and populations in order to govern — a type of gaze that encourages disciplinary power, as Mary Poovey has argued.<sup>24</sup> Outside the discipline of Geography, James Scott has shown that this abstraction is necessary for a state to make its society legible ‘to arrange the population in ways that simplif[y] the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion’.<sup>25</sup> Patrick Joyce also argues

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<sup>18</sup> Natalie J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880 - 1930* (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 84.

<sup>19</sup> Prakash, *Another Reason*.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Lemke, ‘Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique’ (paper presented at the Conference on Rethinking Marxism, University of Amherst, MA, 2000); Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>21</sup> Peter Redfield, ‘Foucault in the Tropics: Displacing the Panopticon’, in *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 50—82.

<sup>22</sup> David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1991). Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> Mary Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 31.

<sup>25</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 2-3.

that ‘fundamental to the transportation of the idea of space into the social sciences was the idea of functional equivalence, the notion that space was reducible to formal schemata or grid ... Homology and seriality made classification, comparison and counting possible’.<sup>26</sup> This recognition of the role of space in the business of colonial government has re-emerged in historical geography. Thus geographers such as Stephen Legg have shown how the British colonial government in India remade urban space in the interests of salubrity and surveillance.<sup>27</sup> Both Philippa Levine and Philip Howell have, in different colonial contexts, examined how governments attempted to sexually discipline their citizens by policing prostitutes and, more particularly, the spaces they inhabited.<sup>28</sup>

Race was, of course, a defining concern of the colonial regimes under such review. Importantly, scholars have shown how the maintenance of the race of the colonisers, and their racial privileges, were just as important, if not more, than the management of the racially different colonised. James Duncan, in his study of colonial Ceylon, has demonstrated how the colonial government carefully managed its white citizens to stop them from ‘going native’ in the tropics and to preserve white prestige in the eyes of the colonised.<sup>29</sup> Here whiteness is treated as currency that can be won or lost — ‘going native’ meant losing status as a white coloniser and becoming something else. Most importantly, perhaps, Ann Laura Stoler extrapolates this insight into the fluidity of identity by arguing that ‘coloniser’ and ‘colonised’ were not fixed identities, but categories that had to be continually renegotiated and reinforced.<sup>30</sup>

In such work, the putative degeneration of the white settler occupies a central place in narratives of rule and government. The Poor Whites were of particular concern to the colonial racial project. The popular conception of the colonial empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is that they were a project of the middle classes and the elites — that the far-flung outposts of empire were peopled by bureaucrats, governors and soldiers. Yet historians have begun to emphasize that these empires had a very large component of Poor Whites, although the definition of this group, always vague, varied nationally. David Arnold has calculated, for instance, that ‘nearly half the European population [living in India by the end of the nineteenth century] could be called poor whites’.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, there were nearly 60,000 ‘mixed-

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<sup>26</sup> Patrick Joyce, *The Rule of Freedom: Liberalism and the Modern City* (London: Verso, 2003), 35.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism: Delhi’s Urban Governmentalities* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).

<sup>28</sup> Philip Howell, *Geographies of Regulation: Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Britain and the Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Philippa Levine, *Prostitution, Race, and Politics: Policing Venereal Disease in the British Empire* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> James S. Duncan, *In the Shadows of the Tropics: Climate, Race and Biopower in Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> David Arnold, ‘European Orphans and Vagrants in India in the Nineteenth Century’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 7, no. 2 (1979): 104.



blood' Poor White children in the Dutch East-Indies by end of nineteenth century, and in South Africa nearly a third of the European population by the 1930s were regarded as Poor Whites.<sup>32</sup>

Stoler provides an exemplary example of the often subtle ways that race and class were ordered in the colonies. According to her, the 'civilizing mission' of colonial governments was directed as much at the colonisers as the colonised, and this was especially directed at the intimate spaces of the home, the family and sexual relationships: 'It was in the domestic domain, not the public sphere, where essential dispositions of manliness, bourgeois morality, and racial attribute could be dangerously undone or securely made'.<sup>33</sup> Thus colonial governments attempted to foster a bourgeois European identity in domains as varied as pedagogy, children's sexuality, servants, and hygiene.

This governmental fostering of white racial identity was not unique to the empires of the nineteenth century. David Lambert, in his study of colonial Barbados in the eighteenth century, characterises Poor Whites as 'liminal figures' — inhabitants of the margins alongside mixed-race children, orphans and prostitutes: 'Situated on the boundary between coloniser and colonised, they were both markers of the limits of colonial acceptability and potentially destabilising loci of hybridity and transgression'.<sup>34</sup> Poor Whites were seen as the most likely group to develop interracial relationships. They were the most likely to work for, or alongside, other races; they were the most likely to fall into drinking, crime and prostitution. These subalterns and liminal figures were another battlefield of colonialism, not because of their colour, or profession, or lack thereof, but because they demonstrated a disturbing willingness to defy colonial authority and thus threaten to undermine the entire project. According to Lambert, Barbados became a site where white subjectivities were contested. The Poor Whites were the subject of intense debates about whether they could be, essentially, 're-whitened' or 'racially reinscribed' by raising their living standards. Lambert's conclusion is that colonial white identity was continually in flux: 'Whiteness may have been as critical a trope within colonial societies as many have suggested, but this involved no singular or pure form of subjectivity but a variety of projects and readings'.<sup>35</sup> Whiteness was produced by various groups — the colonial government, the colonial elite, the Other, and the Poor Whites themselves.

This was a debate with very real consequences, and it would require not only that Poor Whites be defined, but the experts to define them. The studies that have rightly focussed on the anxiety that Poor Whites posed have to some degree neglected the injunction to know the problem subjects they represented, and the emergence of a body of experts authorised to pronounce on their failures as well

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<sup>32</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's 'History of Sexuality' and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 107.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>34</sup> David Lambert, 'Liminal Figures: Poor Whites, Freedmen, and Racial Reinscription in Colonial Barbados', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 19, no. 3 (2001): 335.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 347.

as the promise of their salvation. Just as crucially, these experts were not confined to national academies, but called into being by the imperial networks and by globalised circuits of knowledge. Both the Poor White and the Poor White expert were products of the age of colonialism and its consequences.

### **Imperial networks and imperial expertise**

The nature of the problem facing the Poor White expert may be illustrated with a brief example. In the 1930s, a young Dutch academic named Arie den Hollander received a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation to undertake a study of the rural Poor Whites of the American South. In the study, published in 1933, Den Hollander was frustrated by his inability to accurately describe the subjects of his research. The term ‘poor white’, he found, came from the antebellum South where it was used as a derogatory term by freed slaves, but it was just one of many terms used in the region, most of which could hardly pretend to the classificatory rigour and objectivity of modern science. These other terms included pore-white, poor white trash, peckerwood, whicker bill, bark-eater, hillbilly, redneck and cracker. Moreover, different groups used the term in different ways. ‘In depictions by the abolitionist North, and thus what was written and read in Europe, [poor white] meant nearly every w colohite in the South, with the exception of the privileged slave owners; for the slaves it meant every white who was poor and without social standing. Civilised Southerners used the insulting term in a more limited fashion, although the borders of the group were never well defined’.<sup>36</sup> As to what group constituted these different terms, Den Hollander said, there was simply no definition to provide:

It is clearly nearly impossible to define with any certainty what does and what does not constitute a ‘poor white’. In general it encompasses not only those who possess nothing or little, but also those whose characteristics and mental attitude predisposes them to a proletarian life. They are irresponsible and without ambition, barely scraping by yet seeing nothing wrong with their way of life and accepting it as their fate. It is a social figure that is by no means exclusive to the South: however historical social and economic factors peculiar to the region have given them certain unique traits.<sup>37</sup>

Furthermore, the term did not apply only to the rural poor but to ‘manual workers in different vocations in the city, the towns and the villages, roadworkers, mineworkers, the lumber camps and sawmills of the Southern forests, who all live independent lives and who include many “poor white” elements’. For support Den Hollander turned to a debate between Broadus Mitchell, a well-known American sociologist, and the editorial staff of *The State* newspaper. According to Mitchell ‘[t]he term poor white is not easily defined, although every Southerner knows pretty accurately what it means’. *The State*

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<sup>36</sup> Arie N.J. den Hollander, *De Landelijke Arme Blanken in Het Zuiden Der Vereenigde Staten: een Sociaal-Historische En Sociografische Studie* (Groningen: J.B Wolters uitgevers-maatschappij, 1933), 408.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 411.



objected that '[a] man may be white and poor and yet resent, rightly, being described as a "Poor White", for he knows the user of the term associates with it attributes and habits that are not socially or economically desirable'.<sup>38</sup>

If Den Hollander can stand for the problems of one European researcher confronting the racial and class politics of the American South, another set of researchers — a group that will be important throughout this thesis — represents the possibilities in translating this concern into something that passed for science. In the same period that the Rockefeller-funded Den Hollander was researching Poor Whites in the United States, a group of experts drawn from academic and church circles was researching Poor Whites in South Africa, their funds provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Johannes Grosskopf, the group's economic expert, also acknowledged the central problem of terminology from the outset: '[a] word so popularly used as poor white cannot have a very clearly defined meaning, and so the investigators, before beginning their work, discussed its different aspects but decided not to formulate a hard and fast definition'. Seeking academic support for the vague racial terminology employed by the commission he also turned to the work of Broadus Mitchell and quoted the very same passage used by Den Hollander.<sup>39</sup>

The work of both Den Hollander and Grosskopf illustrates a reliance on transnational experts to define the Poor Whites as well as how the group was defined through publications, inquiries and commissions. Although the term 'poor white' is generally accepted and used today, this ill-defined group was called different things in different places — 'domiciled' whites in India, 'poor burghers' in the Transvaal Republic, mean whites, lubbers, dirt-eaters, crackers, and 'poor white trash' in the United States. This extends to older terms such as redlegs and redshanks in eighteenth-century Barbados, and to even broader terms such as indigents and undesirables in the African settler colonies. A succession of governments in countries such as the United States, South Africa, colonial India and Kenya investigated white poverty. They each brought their own definitions — defining the Poor Whites as urban or rural, deserving or undeserving. 'Poor Whiteism' was viewed as a process, a moral condition, a disease or even an inherited trait. The Poor White was a work in progress, never a fixed identity.

As the work of postcolonial scholars shows, the 'white' of the Poor White was constantly being negotiated, lost and won. Complicating the term is that it was equally fluid when it came to the 'poor' of Poor White. A person could be employed, and own property and still be regarded as a Poor White, such as poor farmers, transport drivers and certain members of the working class. Depending on who was doing the defining it was not employment that mattered, but dependence. The Carnegie-funded report relied on the definition provided by South Africa's Dutch Reformed Church. 'What is a poor

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<sup>38</sup> Den Hollander, *De Landelijke Arme Blanken*, 410.

<sup>39</sup> Johannes F.W. Grosskopf and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 18.

white?’ the church asked. ‘A poor white is a person who has become dependent to such an extent, whether from mental, moral, economic or physical causes, that he is unfit, without help from others, to find proper means of livelihood for himself or to procure it directly or indirectly for his children’. Yet ‘[n]ot every poor person is necessarily a poor white. A man may be poor and yet have kept his independence and his ability to improve his position’.<sup>40</sup>

Thus if the Poor Whites weren’t always white, and weren’t always poor, then what were they? Part of the answer is who they were defined against — a racial Other who might take different forms in different contexts, but who functioned in the same way to represent all the dangers of white poverty. Whiteness scholars such as Roediger have shown that the racial consciousness of the white working class in the U.S. originated as an attempt to define themselves as ‘not-slaves’. Similarly the Poor Whites could be defined as ‘not-natives’ or perhaps as ‘not-yet-natives’. The Carnegie study noted that the term ‘Poor White’ could only have originated in a region with a racial Other that competed for labour and resources. It acknowledged that ‘the name itself indicates that poverty among the whites is felt to be something more or less exceptional’.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, Den Hollander argued that the chief factor distinguishing the Southern Poor Whites from the destitute in other regions was, quite simply, ‘the presence of a large mass of African-Americans’.<sup>42</sup> Poor Whites and the Other were therefore inextricably linked. This is especially true in the case of the ‘pass-whites’ in apartheid South Africa. In the period race was closely scrutinised and monitored by the South African government, which formally classified its citizens and thus granted them access to a privileged or impoverished existence. The ‘pass-whites’ were light-skinned and of mixed race, but represented themselves as white to others, and lived in areas reserved for whites. In order to pass as white, these individuals often had to move to a different part of the country — a region where they were not known as ‘coloured’ and where it was possible to establish a respectable way of life.<sup>43</sup> ‘The pass-whites existed in the remotest boundary of the white race, in constant danger of being expelled from it’, argues social scientist Annika Teppo; ‘Conversely, it was dangerous for a dubious-looking white to be seen as a pass-white. Therefore it is important to examine how and on what grounds they were included or excluded from the racial category white’.<sup>44</sup>

The somewhat grasping attempts at a definition by Den Hollander and others were not in the end an obstacle to action; indeed, quite without paradox, they were a means for governments and transnational organisations to intervene into the lives of the Poor Whites. And for this to be possible they first had to realise they had a Poor White Problem. The historian Hermann Giliomee notes that for a ruling class to regard poverty as a political problem, it first had to ‘discover’ the poor, adding that ‘[i]n South Africa

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<sup>40</sup> Grosskopf, *Rural Impoverishment*, 18.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Den Hollander, *De Landelijke Arme Blanken*, 409.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Coloured’ is an official racial and cultural category in South Africa, similar to ‘mixed-race’.

<sup>44</sup> Annika Teppo, ‘The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town’, (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2004), 94-95.

this development occurred when the proponents of white supremacy concluded that a consolidated white group was needed to dominate the black majority'.<sup>45</sup> In order to discover, understand and locate the Poor Whites the South African state used technologies such as the mapping of poor areas to define the issue. These technologies were articulated principally through various official commissions of inquiry that were part of a sustained attempt to discover the country's poor. In Foucault's 'governmentality' terminology, it was essential to know before one could govern properly. Governments of various stripes needed to know the Poor White before any amelioration of his or her misery might be attempted.

Just as crucial to the broad discourses that permeated the investigations are the ways in which soi-disant 'expert' witnesses obtained their knowledge of the poor. In South Africa the commissions and investigations were heavily reliant on testimony of those familiar with the field. They relied on a pool of local experts to investigate the problem and these, in turn, shared social-science expertise derived from transnational discourses and experts — the reliance on Broadus Mitchell, for example. The experts — whether witness or investigator — were instrumental in shaping the state's knowledge of the poor. The experts brought before commissions, and the commissioners themselves, were crucial sources of knowledge to the state but, more importantly, they established the discourse in which this knowledge would be framed. Their interests, networks and moral universes were crucially important to the state's discovery of the poor. These experts chose what knowledge to include, or leave out, in their testimonies, and the commissioners chose what knowledge to include, or leave out, in their reports. The commissions established what the state would see when it looked at the poor. Their views of the Poor White Problem were debated, drawn upon, cited, criticised and confirmed, and elaborated and developed, over decades. The Poor White was constructed as much by discourse as found in reality.

A similar process was at work internationally as colonial governments sponsored their own inquiries into the phenomenon of white poverty. Crucially this did not take place only on the level of the state. It included transnational organisations and philanthropies as well as through looser groupings of experts such as amateur scientific clubs, churches and medical groups who were interested for their own reasons and also contributed to defining the Poor White. The political theorist Timothy Mitchell, writing about the construction of the Aswan dam in Egypt, refers to a 'concentration and reorganisation of knowledge rather than an introduction of expertise where none had been in use before'.<sup>46</sup> In his work, Mitchell has aptly demonstrated how experts seized authority from the colonial state — that the 'rule of experts' and the emergence of modernity are closely tied together.<sup>47</sup> The increased reliance on expertise by states

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<sup>45</sup> Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 315.

<sup>46</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 41.

<sup>47</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1991).

meant that a class of professional experts soon formed, and offered their services to governments eager to obtain more information about their citizens.

These experts did not function in isolation, however, but rather formed part of networks of personal and professional connections that drew on new technologies of communication such as telegraph lines and shipping lanes. Alan Lester has suggested the concept of ‘imperial networks’ to help our understanding of empire. Here the clear distinctions between metropole and periphery fall away and are replaced by a postcolonial geography of interconnection: ‘In this conception, places are not so much bounded entities, but rather specific juxtapositions of multiple trajectories. These trajectories may be those of people, objects, texts, ideas and even of rock, sediment, water, ice and air’.<sup>48</sup> This somewhat Deleuzian view regards the metropole and the colonies as meeting points for trajectories — ‘a coming together of them in specific ways at a specific time’.<sup>49</sup> As experts moved — careered or careened — between these places they brought with them policies, ideas, and discourses from elsewhere in the network, and which were often applied to their new surroundings.<sup>50</sup> These careering experts left an imprint behind when they moved on to somewhere else in a world that was growing increasingly connected.

These networks of experts, leaders, ideas, policies and opinions together constructed a specific discourse, and this was often in opposition with rival conceptions. Lester, for instance, has shown how the British colonial struggle to control the Eastern Cape frontier in nineteenth-century South Africa was composed of three main discourses — governmentality, humanitarianism, and settler capitalism. Each insisted upon very different conceptions of the frontier and each drew upon its network of experts and influence to affect policy change and public opinion in the metropole. Crucial to each conception was the ‘disputed figure of the African’. Yet this was hardly unique to South Africa. ‘Discursive regulation of capitalist practice took place across an extensive imperial terrain connecting Britain’s colonies, and its settler colonies in particular, to the metropole’, argues Lester.<sup>51</sup> Here the fringes of empire and the heart of empire are closely connected.

These discourses were not only between a colonial state and the metropole but could encompass a number of different colonies. Settler identity, for instance, was not limited to South Africa. The product in part of new technologies of communication, a shared settler identity could be forged that transcended national boundaries — especially when confronted with a rival critical discourse such as missionary responses to the treatment of the Xhosa or the Aborigines. According to Lester ‘[i]t was in the ways that settlers in each colony responded to humanitarian criticisms of their activities that a trans-imperial

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<sup>48</sup> Alan Lester, ‘Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire’, *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (2005): 135-136.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, eds., *Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

<sup>51</sup> Alan Lester, *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3-4.

settler capitalist discourse, founded on a rationale for racially exploitative material practice, was constructed.<sup>52</sup> All of which leads to the question: if trans-imperial discourses could be formed around different conceptions of ‘the African’ or ‘the native’, could the same not be said for ‘the Poor White’? This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that not only did a transnational discourse on Poor Whites exist, but that they formed part of an attempt at governance that stretched beyond the confines of any single state.

### **White men’s countries and philanthropic empires**

In 1910, the great African-American academic and activist W.E.B. Du Bois published an article in New York in which he noted that ‘the world, in a sudden emotional conversion, has discovered that it is white, and, by that token, wonderful’.<sup>53</sup> In an era of racial competition, the colonies and the centre of British Empire developed an awareness of each other as ‘white men’s countries’. In his strident, sensationalist book *The Rising Tide of Color*, Lothrop Stoddard, a near-contemporary of Du Bois and a notorious racial anthropologist and eugenic advocate, enthused that ‘[n]othing was more striking ... than the instinctive and instantaneous solidarity which binds together Australians and Afrikanders, Californians and Canadians, into a “sacred Union” at the mere whisper of Asiatic immigration’. This was transparently a defensive whiteness, a ‘transnational form of racial identification, that was ... at once global in its power and personal in its meaning, the basis of geo-political alliances and a subjective sense of self’.<sup>54</sup> These ‘white men’s countries’ were part of an imagined community whose members identified in a shared sense of heritage, culture, values and, invariably, gender.<sup>55</sup> ‘At the core of this process of identification was the cultural and historical imagination, its key instruments the novel and the newspaper’.<sup>56</sup> Although stretching beyond the confines of the traditional state in its conception, this imagined transnational body — ‘global whiteness’ — had, through its economic and cultural power, severe consequences for those on the outside.<sup>57</sup>

Until the Second World War, this geo-political alliance vigorously defended its whiteness — not only physically, but through various means such as immigration restriction. It was in this period that the Great Depression plunged millions into poverty and resulted in a decade of breadlines and racial shock. It was also a time when eugenicists were making bold claims about the future of the white race — it

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Lester, ‘Colonial Settlers and the Metropole: Racial Discourse in the Early 19th-Century Cape Colony, Australia and New Zealand’, *Landscape Research* 27 (2002): 44.

<sup>53</sup> Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the International Challenge of Racial Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1.

<sup>54</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>56</sup> Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*, 5-6.

<sup>57</sup> Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of A White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2015).

was either to be overwhelmed by the ‘less civilised’, or it would be diluted by the weaker members of its own race.<sup>58</sup> Although theories of racial degeneracy fell out of favour after the Second World War, or at least were publicly disavowed, the previous decades saw eugenic explanations of racialised poverty achieve an unrivalled prominence and reach. Recent scholarship has shown that, during this period, the Poor Whites were a concern, not just in South Africa and the United States, but in, amongst others, Rhodesia, Kenya, the West Indies, Barbados, Malaysia, Australia, Sri Lanka and India.<sup>59</sup> In short, the eugenic arguments about white poverty were global in vision and reached a global audience in turn.

This was also a period in which our modern notion of an international arena was formed. Daniel Gorman has also looked at how international society emerged after the First World War. According to Gorman, the creation of large transnational organisations typified by the League of Nations and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) were manifestations of ‘internationalist spirit’.<sup>60</sup> For the first time advances in technology and communication enabled the creation of a sustainable international society that transcended — but did not ignore — national barriers. Yet this new international imagination had race at its very core. For the sociologist Frank Füredi, the twentieth century was defined by its changing perception of racial identity: ‘Today, when racism has been discredited, it is difficult to understand that early in the twentieth century race was a source of public pride for the Anglo-American elite’.<sup>61</sup> In this period, race was a central notion of Western identity, and closely linked with the notion of ‘civilisation’. This informed international relations in a period of international encounters. Here is the American historian Jack Temple Kirby, for example:

The years of South African accommodation, American colonial expansion and the southern racial settlement witness increased communications and a heightened sense of comradeship among whites on three continents. English men, Boers, English South Africans and Americans paid close attention to developments on either side of the Atlantic, read and

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<sup>58</sup> There is also work on modern transnational whiteness (and South Africa), such as Max J. Andrucki, ‘“There’s a Drumbeat in Africa”: Embodying Imaginary Geographies of Transnational Whiteness in Contemporary South Africa’, *Geoforum* 49 (October 2013).

<sup>59</sup> John G. Butcher, *The British in Malaya 1880—1941: The Social History of a European Community in Colonial South-East Asia* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1979); Will Jackson, ‘Dangers to the Colony: Loose Women and the ‘Poor White’ Problem in Kenya’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 14, no. 2 (2013); Dane Kennedy, ‘Climatic Theories and Culture in Colonial Kenya and Rhodesia’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10, no. 1 (1981); C. Forster, ‘Unemployment and the Australian Economic Recovery of the 1930s’, in *Recovery from the depression: Australia and the world economy in the 1930s*, ed. Robert Gregory and Noel Butlin (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jill Shepard, ‘A Historical Sketch of the Poor Whites of Barbados: From Indentured Servants to ‘Redlegs’’, *Caribbean Studies* 14, no. 3 (1974); Elizabeth Buettner, ‘Problematic Spaces, Problematic Races: Defining ‘Europeans’ in Late Colonial India’, *Women’s History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000); Hilary McD. Beckles, ‘Black over White: The ‘poor-white’ Problem in Barbados Slave Society’, *Immigrants & Minorities* 7, no. 1 (1988); Lanver Mak, *The British in Egypt: Community, Crime and Crises, 1882 - 1922* (New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>61</sup> Frank Füredi, *The Silent War: Imperialism and the Changing Perception of Race* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 1.



reviewed each other's books and took comfort in comparing each other's racial problems and solutions.<sup>62</sup>

Yet it was not only nations, or even vast organisations such the ILO, that encountered each other in this new 'international' space. Indeed, in many ways, the portrayal of this period in terms of the emergence of international society and of internationalism ignores the complexities of political, philanthropic, and 'progressive' activity in the first half of the twentieth century. A host of actors may be involved. For Gorman, this includes 'international voluntary organisations, church groups, and international networks of academics, sportsmen, women, pacifists, humanitarian activists and other private actors'.<sup>63</sup> Of particular interest here are the great variety of organisations focussed on moral reform that were established in the period, and that drew on existing humanitarian networks to advance — knowingly or unknowingly — Western cultural hegemony.

This is not an argument against the role of the nation in its sponsoring of activity. The historian Ian Tyrrell argues that, in the United States, these groups formed part of America's imperial expansion in the early twentieth century. 'It is clear that the United States did have an empire in the years before World War I', he states.<sup>64</sup> Even if it did not last very long, or stretch very far, U.S. expansion and conquest in the Caribbean and near-Pacific are analogous to the much more ambitious imperial appetites of the Old World.<sup>65</sup> And even if U.S. Empire was typically not characterised by formal subjugation, 'American actions encompassed a "conscious ... desire to conquer" and a persistent pattern of political and economic domination that arguably conforms to common-sense definitions of informal empire'.<sup>66</sup> Making up part of this informal empire were the moral reform groups who contributed in exporting American cultural values and standards, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Young Men's Christian Association, and the more obscure such as the international Anti-Cigarette League. 'Moral reform groups and missionaries often thought of their work as analogous to empire — but a kind of Christian moral empire that rose above "nation", and one nobler in aspiration than the grubby motives of gold and glory'.<sup>67</sup> In this they were joined by a wide variety of religious and missionary organisations. Even though their aims, impacts and motives differed, 'they networked and overlapped extensively in their strategies, tactics, and ideologies'.<sup>68</sup>

There is, of course, a long history of the relationship between empire, religion and its missionary movements. Western moral ideas both fostered a sense of responsibility for distant peoples, and gave

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<sup>62</sup> Quoted in Füredi, *The Silent War*, 27.

<sup>63</sup> Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society*, 3.

<sup>64</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009).

<sup>66</sup> Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

authority to intervene in their lives.<sup>69</sup> Only recently, though, has there been a sustained interrogation of the history of humanitarian movements that arose, worked alongside, and supplanted missionary organisations.<sup>70</sup> The relationship between humanitarianism and governance is now being directly examined. This is particularly interesting in the context of empire, where humanitarianism and colonial imagination are intricately related.<sup>71</sup> In Geography, Alan Lester and David Lambert have called specifically for a reconsideration of humanitarian acts — particularly colonial philanthropy — as both networked and spatialised.<sup>72</sup> Colonial philanthropy, they argue, was not a ‘vener’ for exploitation, but a significant discourse in its own right, and which constructed its own imagined (and moral) geographies of regions and people that could and should be saved. An examination of colonial philanthropy ‘should proceed within a culturally *and spatially* extensive and sensitive conceptualization of imperialism as a set of discourses and practices both producing, and produced by, bundles of imaginative and material networks connecting people in distant places, always unevenly and always in contested ways’.<sup>73</sup>

Geographers have also recently begun paying attention to the links between society and modern ‘super-philanthropy’.<sup>74</sup> Over the last decade much media attention has been given to pledges of enormous sums of money by the super-rich to philanthropic organisations which they control, or can influence to a large degree, such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. According to Iain Hay and Samantha Muller, in the twenty years between 1998 and 2017, the amount expected to be given to charities is between \$5.5 trillion and \$7.4 trillion. ‘This is a vast sum, put into some perspective by comparison with US federal spending for the fiscal year 2012 —including defence, Medicare/Medicaid and social security — budgeted to total \$3.7 trillion’.<sup>75</sup> Through concepts such as ‘philanthrocapitalism’ the motivations and independence of these organisations and individuals is now being fiercely interrogated — not only in academia but in the media.<sup>76</sup> Kathleen Newland points out that organisational independence from government concerns and priorities is central to the conceptualisation and functioning of modern philanthropic organisations, yet they are ‘inextricably linked to public policy, in particular when

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<sup>69</sup> Alan Lester, ‘Obtaining the ‘Due Observance of Justice’: The Geographies of Colonial Humanitarianism’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 20, no. 3 (2002): 290.

<sup>70</sup> Michael Barnett, *Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> Rob Skinner and Alan Lester, ‘Humanitarianism and Empire: New Research Agendas’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 40, no. 5 (2012).

<sup>72</sup> David Lambert and Alan Lester, ‘Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy’, *Progress in Human Geography* 28, no. 3 (2004).

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 338. Original emphasis kept.

<sup>74</sup> Iain Hay and Samantha Muller, ‘Questioning Generosity in the Golden Age of Philanthropy: Towards Critical Geographies of Super-Philanthropy’, *Progress in Human Geography* 38, no. 5 (2013). See also Chay Brooks, ‘The Ignorance of the Uneducated’: Ford Foundation Philanthropy, the IIE, and the Geographies of Educational Exchange’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 48 (2015).

<sup>75</sup> Hay and Muller, ‘Questioning Generosity in the Golden Age of Philanthropy’, 2.

<sup>76</sup> John Cassidy, ‘Mark Zuckerberg and the Rise of Philanthrocapitalism’, *The New Yorker* December 2, 2015, accessed February 6, 2016, <http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/mark-zuckerberg-and-the-rise-of-philanthrocapitalism>.



philanthropists are strategic in their giving and aim to influence the decisions and actions of policy-makers'.<sup>77</sup>

Yet, as some have begun to point out, philanthrocapitalism is surely not a new phenomenon sweeping the contemporary world of billionaires, but perhaps the return of the philanthropic attitudes of the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>78</sup> The 'old' philanthropy arguably reached its height in the first decades of the twentieth century when Gilded Age magnates gifted considerable fortunes to large philanthropic organisations under their control. Of these, the largest and most well-known are John D. Rockefeller, Sr., Andrew Carnegie, and Henry Ford. Rockefeller, co-founder of the Standard Oil Company, is the wealthiest American in history — his personal fortune at the time of his death in 1937, and adjusted for inflation, reaching into the hundreds of billions of dollars.<sup>79</sup> Carnegie, who built his fortune on steel, devoted a significant part of his life to philanthropy. His influential tract on philanthropy, *The Gospel of Wealth*, opens with the assertion that 'the problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth'.<sup>80</sup> Carnegie exhorted the elites to invest their fortunes wisely for the betterment of society, and in a way that did not encourage waste. As such, these men gifted their considerable fortunes to foundations and corporations that would wisely and efficiently re-invest and utilise them to help society. Yet, as this thesis will demonstrate, the organisations were products of their age. They were a major part of America's empire of moral reform and they relied heavily on networks of 'key men' and experts to judge where to invest the funds at their disposal. As others have shown, the geographical imagination developed by and relied upon by these key agents has been crucial to the development of philanthropic policy — particularly in their conception of the transnational arena.<sup>81</sup> These were significant geographies of philanthropy that determined and defined regions that needed development and moral uplift. These regions, and their citizens, did not conform to national boundaries and these corporations — richer, more determined and more flexible than many national governments — occupied a supremely transnational terrain that they could intervene in and manage nearly at will. What is more, in an era before significant transnational governing organisations such as the United Nations, giant organisations such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation had an unrivalled ability to imagine, create and extend the philosophies of their empire. Whether they realised it or not, these organisations were part of an imperial and racialised system and they actively upheld these values by governing the citizens of their transnational realm.

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<sup>77</sup> Kathleen Newland, Aaron Terrazas, and Roberto Munster, *Diaspora Philanthropy: Private Giving and Public Policy* (Washington, DC.: Migration Policy Institute, 2010), 18.

<sup>78</sup> Linsey McGoey, 'Philanthrocapitalism and Its Critics', *Poetics* 40, no. 2 (April 2012).

<sup>79</sup> 'The Wealthiest Americans Ever', *The New York Times*, July 15, 2007, [http://www.nytimes.com/ref/business/20070715\\_GILDED\\_GRAPHIC.html#](http://www.nytimes.com/ref/business/20070715_GILDED_GRAPHIC.html#).

<sup>80</sup> Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth and Other Writing* (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

<sup>81</sup> Chay Brooks, 'The Apostle of Internationalism: Stephen Duggan and the Geopolitics of International Education', *Political Geography* 49 (2015).

Our attempts to understand the role of progressive social and moral reform movements, and the kinds of governance they envisage, have certainly been hampered by methodological nationalism, which is the habit of scholars to view ‘the state as the pre-eminent unit of governance’. This is particularly evident in studies making use of Foucault’s concept of governmentality, which relies heavily on the capability of the state to exercise power — direct or indirect. In response, a number of theoretical approaches have attempted to broaden the picture and expand our analytical framework. Ulrich Beck suggests for instance that modern citizens are members of a new sociological paradigm called ‘cosmopolitanism’ and that in times of international crisis, such as 9/11, they become global citizens.<sup>82</sup> Rosi Braidotti takes this much further and suggests that modern citizens may ‘dis-identify’ with their traditional identities and instead embrace a ‘nomadic’ conception of themselves as existing in a Deleuzian assemblage of interactions — essentially becoming world citizens in identity as well as thought. Another useful route is to place the emphasis on the granularity of ‘governance’.<sup>83</sup> As Aseem Prakash writes, ‘governance is not limited to governments since other social institutions may provide governance services as well. As societies become more complex with modernization and industrialization, the opportunities for both governmental and non-governmental governance increase’.<sup>84</sup> In a globalised twenty-first century it is easy to gesture at the United Nations, the World Bank or the structural reforms insisted upon by the International Monetary Fund as examples of governance beyond the state. Historians quite rightly point to the empires of the British or Spanish or Dutch as examples of governance that exceed the scope of single states — although, as discussed earlier, this was a much messier project than earlier depictions suggested. Yet there is a clear gap in the twenty-first century, between the height of imperial hubris and the far-reaching technologies of globalisation, a gap where our understanding of transnational governance and governmentality is still quite limited. In the years between the Second Boer War and the Second World War, for instance, when the British Empire reached its height, and subsequently began to fade, recent research suggests that subtle and intricate forms of transnational governance developed and exercised significant power over populations in disparate corners of the globe, and which in key ways anticipated contemporary ‘granular’ forms of governance.

The keyword here is ‘transnational’ — something that reaches beyond, and indeed sometimes simply ignores, national boundaries. As has been discussed, it is now increasingly accepted that a major locus of governance outside the state in the early twentieth century was that not only of international organisations such as the League of Nations, but also the transnational work of humanitarian organisations such as the Rockefeller Foundation. As contributors not to the ‘international imagination’ but to a transnational one, and of complex spatial imaginaries in their own right, such organisations

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<sup>82</sup> Ulrich Beck, ‘The Cosmopolitan Condition: Why Methodological Nationalism Fails’, *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 7-8 (2007).

<sup>83</sup> Rosi Braidotti, ‘Nomadism: Against Methodological Nationalism.’ *Policy Futures in Education* 8, no. 3 (2010).

<sup>84</sup> Aseem Prakash and Jeffrey Hart, eds., *Globalization and Governance* (London: Routledge, 2000), 3.

have been the focus of much discussion by geographers, particularly around questions of scale and power.<sup>85</sup> Here, the actions of the international states system together with the work of transnational organisations might be considered. Stephen Legg notes here that many attempts have been made to answer just what, and who, is transnational.<sup>86</sup> Legg has examined, for instance, how ‘international hygiene’ — an alliance of governments, individuals and international organisations — opposed prostitution in New Delhi and created ‘spaces of moral and social hygiene’.<sup>87</sup> For some geographers this is a reconsideration of political scale; of how policies in one city, or affecting one street corner, were related to the policies of an empire as a whole. There is a long and vigorous debate in human geography on the nature and applicability of concepts of scale.<sup>88</sup> While important, this debate has not been relied upon here, which takes as a level of analysis the activities, movements and productions of experts in a transnational arena. The discourse they both participated in and constructed was an attempt to control a population that was equally, and problematically, transnational. As an alternative to scalar debates, this thesis elaborates on the concept of transnational governmentality.

### **Transnational governmentality and other methodologies**

Michel Foucault’s ‘history of governmentality’ is of course unfinished; his project left in frustratingly rudimentary forms, though its lineaments are increasingly being revealed by the publication of his Collège de France lecture series.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the explanatory power of governmentality continues to be explored well beyond its original confines, particularly with regard to international dimensions. For although governmentality has typically been associated with singular sovereign states, a number of important studies have attempted to broaden the concept to take in an array of global governmental phenomena such as colonialism and imperialism, philanthropy and humanitarianism, international cooperation and mediation.<sup>90</sup> Perhaps the most useful recent forays, however, have resulted in an expanded conception that has been termed ‘transnational governmentality’.

At its simplest, Foucault’s concept of governmentality is an awareness of the ‘art of government’, whether it is of a state’s relation to its citizens, or that of parents to their children, or that specific

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<sup>85</sup> Akira Iriye, *Global Community - the Role of International Organisations in the Making of the Contemporary World* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002); Sallie Marston, John Paul Jones, and Keith Woodward, ‘Human Geography without Scale’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 30, no. 4 (2005).

<sup>86</sup> Stephen Legg, ‘Transnationalism and the Scalar Politics of Imperialism’, *New Global Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 2010).

<sup>87</sup> Stephen Legg, ‘Governing Prostitution in Colonial Delhi: From Cantonment Regulations to International Hygiene (1864—1939)’, *Social History* 34, no. 4 (November 2009).

<sup>88</sup> Sally Marston, ‘The Social Construction of Scale’, *Progress in Human Geography* 24, no. 2 (June 2000); Neil Brenner, ‘The Limits to Scale? Methodological Reflections on Scalar Structuration’, *Progress in Human Geography* 25, no. 4 (December 2001).

<sup>89</sup> Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke, ‘From Foucault’s Lectures at the College de France to Studies of Governmentality: An Introduction’, in *Governmentality: Current issues and future challenges*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>90</sup> James Ferguson and Akhil Gupta, ‘Spatializing States: Toward an Ethnography of Neoliberal Governmentality’, *American Ethnologist* 29, no. 4 (2002).

combination of complementary or overlapping jurisdictions typical of modern governmental reason in its 'liberal' guise.<sup>91</sup> This is closely (but sometimes confusingly) related to the older concept of biopower, which is the application of the will to power visited on bodies (that is, disciplinary power) or populations (regulatory power), typically to maximise efficiency, security or health.<sup>92</sup> The exercise of this power can be seen in diverse techniques such as the classification of populations, the incarceration of the deviant, and the use of urban planning to increase surveillance. Although governmentality is often associated only with the reason of state, in the singular, various studies have attempted to expand the concept to, amongst others, international civil society, 'grassroots activism', and a wide range of social movements and identities.<sup>93</sup>

The 'Poor White Problem' is, I argue, an exemplary instance of such transnational governmentality, as it was nestled within national regimes, and transmitted by emergent Western transnationalism, but also broadcast by transnational networks of reformers interested in, amongst others, health, housing and sanitation. It reached its peak at the same time as distinctive transnational organisations arose concerning themselves with health, education, disease and 'social hygiene', such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. Their interests, and the interests of their experts, dovetailed with the perceived causes for 'poor whiteism' and, in this way, a transnational network came into being that was concerned with the management of the Poor Whites at a global scale. Taken by themselves, however, the parts are lacking. The transnational organisations, although facilitating governance, were, for instance, rarely specifically concerned with the Poor Whites and more interested in broader issues such as the prevention of disease, fostering education and moral reform. Much of the interest in the Poor Whites came instead from networks of experts — doctors, reformers, amateur scientists and missionaries — who studied the group. Yet these latter networks do not by themselves exercise significant governance. Their policies and practices did not necessarily carry across international borders or outside their specific field of interest. Rather, there was another option: a convergence of interest between organisations and the expert networks they relied upon — a layer which calls for the conception and methods of 'transnational governmentality'.

In order to demonstrate this form of governmentality, there should clearly be the potential for the transnational application of 'biopower'. It is in the proposed management of the Poor Whites by these transnational groups and their experts that this application can be seen. Secondly, for transnational governmentality to make sense, the target 'population' must be demonstrated to be transnational. A

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<sup>91</sup> Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009)

<sup>92</sup> Thomas Lemke, 'Beyond Foucault: From Biopolitics to the Government of Life', in *Governmentality: Current issues and future challenges*, ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Robert Andolina, Sarah Radcliffe, and Nina Laurie, 'Development and Culture: Transnational Identity Making in Bolivia', *Political Geography* 24, no. 6 (2005). Huub Van Baar, 'The European Roma: Minority Representation, Memory and the Limits of Transnational Governmentality', (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2011).

clear form of this application is the biomedical gaze of experts as applied to the Poor Whites. As will be discussed in greater detail below, the 1932 Carnegie Report on South Africa invokes a network of doctors, experts and policy-makers who were transnational in composition, and through their focus on Poor Whites, transnational in practice. Although the discourse differed for each expert and reformer — whose concerns ranged from eugenics to sanitation — this group communicated with each other and regarded the management of the Poor Whites as crucial to realising their brand of moral and physical reform. For eugenicists this meant segregation, or even sterilisation, to keep the white ‘race’ strong and healthy. For experts on tropical disease, on the other hand, this meant finding a cure to stop the contagion of ‘white poverty’ or to stop white degeneration in the tropics. In testing, classifying, cataloguing and sterilising their subjects, this network of individuals and organisations was exercising its biopower on what it viewed as its transnational citizens.

The focus here is mainly on expert networks between South Africa and the United States, although it is not a comparative study. The reliance on transnational networks precludes this. Poor Whites were found across the globe and careering experts drew on theories developed and refined in varied regions. The United States and South Africa were, however, the two main reservoirs of Poor Whites, partly due to similarities in their history such as white colonial settlement, large black populations, and economically debilitating wars. This does not mean that their situations were the same: South Africa’s ‘Poor White Problem’ captured the attention of the state and became both a key element of Afrikaner nation-building and a political occupation that lasted until the introduction of Apartheid. In the United States, with its white majority, the Poor Whites were a cultural concern, but their management was far less overt and fraught. Crucially, as a major world power with a far longer history of slavery, the United States exported its theories of racial management to South Africa. Organisations such as the Rockefeller Foundation or Carnegie Corporation had the capacity to research Poor Whites and implement solutions to manage their population on a scale that far outclassed anything South Africa could do prior to capturing the full attention of the state. Thus the focus on the two countries provides an opportunity to see how theories of the governance of Poor Whites developed in the United States, were transmitted via expert networks, and adapted and repurposed in South Africa. Although Poor Whites were present in India or Surinam or Kenya, the transnational discourse on Poor Whites remained centred on the two white settler countries.

It is also useful to consider the transnational discourse on Poor Whites using Foucault’s concept of *dispositif* or apparatus. According to him an apparatus has three important characteristics. The first is that it is ‘the system of relations’ that can be established between heterogeneous elements such as discourses, laws, regulatory decisions, moral and philanthropic propositions. Second is that these elements are not static but dynamic: ‘Thus, a particular discourse can figure at one time as the programme of an institution, and at another it can function as a means of justifying or masking a practice which itself remains silent, or as a secondary re-interpretation of this practice, opening out for it a new

field of rationality'. Thirdly, an apparatus has as its major function an urgent need — a 'dominant strategic function'.<sup>94</sup> The discourse on Poor Whites, in these terms, was part of a system of relations of transnational racial domination taking in colonial and settler regions — the 'white men's countries'. At times its racist nature was overt, such as in South Africa. At others it was masked by humanitarian and development concerns such as education and sanitation. Finally, it was formed in response to increasing anxiety over racial degeneration and the continued feasibility of racial domination.

As part of their efforts to understand and locate this group of Poor Whites, the state — and transnational organisations — used technologies such as the mapping of poor areas to define the issue. Like all governmentalities, transnational governmentalities were predicated on the injunction to 'know' in order to govern well, and indeed to construct out of this knowledge 'quasi-objects' that both restrain and facilitate intervention. One obvious example here is that these technologies of rule were articulated principally through the various commissions and investigations that were part of a sustained attempt to discover the country's white poor. Relying on these commissions, however, warrants a sensitivity to their context — located in archives the reports are, inevitably, products of their time, and the investigations undertaken products of the interviewers and witnesses, and more generally by the political situation both local and global. They cannot, of course, be taken merely as repositories of fact. Stoler rightly calls such commissions of enquiry 'stories that states tell themselves', and emphasizes their prescriptive role: 'By definition commissions organised knowledge, rearranged its categories, and prescribed what states officials were charged to know'. They 'produced new truths as they produced new social realities'.<sup>95</sup> The commissions designated the types of people who warranted state interest and they showed how the issue of unemployed Europeans became a generic problem known as 'Poor Whiteism'.

## Conclusion

The two related studies of the Poor Whites discussed earlier provide a good illustration of the methods described in this chapter — the U.S. research of the Dutch academic Den Hollander and the South African research of the Afrikaner academic Grosskopf. Both academics produced commissions and reports that simultaneously described and defined the Poor Whites, however daunting their initial etymological and epistemological challenges. Both were financed by large transnational philanthropic organisations. Both were accepted as experts, and assumed that role in their studies. Both recognised the ambiguous racial position of Poor Whites and both relied on extensive networks of knowledge defined by contacts, conferences, newspapers, journals and professional organisations. This is

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<sup>94</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Confession of the Flesh', in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

<sup>95</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (March 2002): 104.

evidenced by their mutual reliance on the American scholar Broadus Mitchell. As such the Poor Whites were defined as much in discourse as in practice. Both experts viewed the Poor Whites through a pre-existing racialised discourse that emerged from colonial regimes and took as self-evident the importance of upholding white prestige. Both were members of, and advanced the interests of, white men's countries. In this regard, we aim to consider the similarities between these studies of white poverty in two very different sites and settings, rather than see their national contexts as determining. Nor can we say that this interest in the Poor White existed in the space 'between' nations, as the concept of 'international' suggests. Only the concept of transnational takes us to the nature of the inquests and enquiries, the diagnoses and solutions, and the governmental response to the Poor White problem. Together with experts in education, religion, amateur scientific organisations, the medical profession and moral reforms, Grosskopf and Den Hollander were part of a transnational attempt to control the Poor Whites — a project that was financed and given reach, urgency and impetus by new transnational philanthropies. Their goal was governance — and they harnessed technologies to act upon the body (disease, health, sanitation), the mind (education, training, morality) and the reform of the built environment (urban planning, architecture). The goal of this thesis is to show that, taken together, these networks and technologies constituted a distinctive and exemplary form of transnational governmentality, and that the Poor Whites were the pioneering subjects of this transnational impetus towards moral and social reform.

# Training the Poor White

## *Philanthropy, education and rural poverty*

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The transnational governance of the Poor Whites proceeded through a number of distinct discourses, such as health, sanitation and urban space. This chapter examines the discourse of training, and takes as its initial focus the southern states of the US, before moving to a consideration of South Africa, not as a comparative study but as a transnational tracing of the work pioneered in the American South. It shows how a network of experts disciplined the group by reforming rural pedagogy and the attendant spaces of instruction: the habits and habitats of the farm, the home and the school. The chapter shows how the reform of outdated agricultural methods to improve living standards in the U.S. South was also used as a basis to reform farm life and teach middle-class standards of life. It then examines how the success of this method resulted in a call to reform Southern education, particularly for the sake of Poor Whites. Educational reformers' interest in the group was tied to racial nationalism. By uplifting the Poor Whites through better training, they would be strengthening the white race as a whole. It shows how educational propaganda was translated into actual policy on the ground through a case study of two Poor White schools in the South. Finally, the chapter examines how the efforts of U.S. educational reformers were picked up by a transnational network of experts and transmitted across the globe. The chapter moves to South Africa, as the most important locus of this transnational concern with training rural white communities, and shows how a major study of white poverty in the 1930s was directly influenced by reformers' efforts in the U.S. South. Taken together the chapter argues that transnational efforts to reform education originated in a concern for Poor Whites, and that this was another method of governing a transnational population — in this case by disciplining the mind.

### **The Country Life Commission and rural decline**

In 1908 Theodore Roosevelt became very worried about farmers. In certain circles a growing number of experts and philanthropists had turned their attention to the American countryside, particularly the South, and were disturbed by what they found. Massive urbanisation, outdated farming methods and an exploitative tenant farming system, as well as the lingering damage of the Civil War created the perception of a fallen Eden. An idyllic rural paradise now depopulated and impoverished, where Poor Whites and poor blacks eked out a miserable existence as sharecroppers and dirt farmers. 'Nothing is more important to this country than the perpetuation of our system of medium-sized farms worked by



their owners’, said the U.S. president. ‘We do not want to see our farmers sink to the condition of peasants in the Old World, barely able to live on their small holdings’.<sup>1</sup>

In response Roosevelt created the Country Life Commission to investigate the causes of rural decline and identify the best means of rehabilitating the countryside, which was viewed as the moral counterpart to a corruptive urban existence. The commission was financed by the Russell Sage Foundation, and staffed by a mixed bag of urban educators, journalists and conservationists. According to the commission the goal of rural reform was ‘to develop and maintain on our farms a civilization in full harmony with the best American ideals’. But in order to ‘retain this civilization’ agriculture had to be made sustainable and profitable ‘and life on the farm must be made permanently satisfying to intelligent, progressive people’.<sup>2</sup> The commission was distressed at the extent of tenant farming, which had increased from 25.5% of all farms in 1880 to 37% by 1910.<sup>3</sup> And poverty was a barrier to the development of ‘civilised’ morals and values. ‘[H]igh ideals cannot be realized’, said the commission, ‘without at least a fair degree of prosperity, and this can not be secured without the maintenance of fertility’.<sup>4</sup>

According to the commission a chief cause of rural poverty was rural schools which, in contrast to developed urban institutions, were characterised as teaching an irrelevant and outdated curriculum in deplorable conditions: barely literate teachers in tumbledown shacks with no chairs and no heating. These schools were ‘largely responsible for ineffective farming, a lack of ideals, and the drift to town’.<sup>5</sup> But education was more than schools, said the commission. The country was ‘alive with educational activity’ and the little country schools could yet be reformed. In this the commission was part of a broader campaign known as the Country Life Movement, a broad and disparate group with the goal of rural reform and which had, at its core, a desire to reform rural education.<sup>6</sup>

In their aspiration to restore high ideals and ‘civilisation’ to rural regions, Country Life reformers were attempting to ‘whiten’ the countryside and rehabilitate the Poor White tenant farmers. The education of African-Americans would not be a consideration for at least another decade and, even then, it would be under repressive Jim Crow legislation. In their attempts to uplift Poor Whites, reformers enlisted the help of large Northern philanthropies, chief among these the Rockefeller organisation. Education and training was regarded as a key method and, in the South, educational reform and racial rehabilitation became nearly synonymous.

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher W. Shaw, ‘“No Place For Class Politics”: The Country Life Commission and Immigration’, *Agricultural History* 85, no. 4 (January 1, 2011): 525.

<sup>2</sup> Scott J. Peters and Paul A. Morgan, ‘The Country Life Commission: Reconsidering a Milestone in American Agricultural History’, *Agricultural History* 78, no. 3 (July 2004): 302.

<sup>3</sup> Shaw, ‘“No Place For Class Politics”’, 525.

<sup>4</sup> Peters and Morgan, ‘The Country Life Commission’, 305.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>6</sup> David B. Danbom, ‘Rural Education Reform and the Country Life Movement, 1900-1920’, *Agricultural History* 53, no. 2 (April 1979): 462—74.

## **Farm demonstrations and home improvement**

At the turn of the twentieth century agriculture in the U.S. South suffered from anachronistic farming techniques, decreasing yields and shrinking farm sizes. Farming in the region was dominated by a single commodity: cotton, a cash crop that employed many of the Poor White and poor black sharecroppers in the region for their labour. Yet, at the time, cotton yields were being devastated by a pest that, to some, had assumed near-biblical proportions. The Mexican boll weevil prompted a ‘mass panic’ in the Southern states and led the U.S. Congress to earmark an additional \$40,000 for the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to combat the insect.<sup>7</sup> The boll weevil had been steadily making its way from Central America, through Texas, where, in 1903, Seaman Knapp, a retired commercial farmer and special agent for the USDA, described the aftermath: ‘I saw a wretched people facing starvation; I saw whole towns deserted; I saw hundreds of farmers walk up and draw government rations, which were given to them to keep them from want. Their rich lands dropped in price from forty dollars to five dollars per acre’.<sup>8</sup>

In that same year a number of Texas farmers invited Knapp to advise them on the best method of combating the boll weevil. After Knapp spoke, a farmer rose to his feet and declared it ‘impossible to fight the weevil’ and that it ‘was proof against everything that had been tried’. And he had tried. A few days earlier, the farmer explained, he had caught a few live weevils and trapped them in a jar of 95% pure alcohol. When he opened the jar four hours later, the weevils emerged unharmed but ‘staggering drunk’. The shaken farmer collected the insects, ‘sealed them in a tin can, threw them into a brush heap and set it on fire’. Shortly thereafter he was astounded as ‘the solder melted and the red-hot weevils flew out and set the barn on fire’.<sup>9</sup>

As the boll weevil crept over Texas and began to overwhelm the South, panic increased substantially. The following year an article in the journal *Science* stated that ‘[w]e know of no single subject that contains more of importance to the entire country’s economic interests than the devising of measures to arrest and, if possible, eradicate this scourge’. Although inflated through the efforts of reformers and opportunists, the damage the boll weevil did was real. In the 1890s, when it was first being discovered in Texas, some counties reported cotton harvest losses of 70%. In 1903, nearly a fifth of the entire cotton crop of Texas was wiped out. Other southern states showed similar losses. And the devastation continued for decades — in 1921 Georgia lost just under a half of its crop. ‘At the end of the twentieth century, researchers estimated that the beetle had destroyed tens of billions of pounds of cotton since

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<sup>7</sup> Judith Sealander, *Private Wealth and Public Life: Foundation Philanthropy and the Reshaping of American Social Policy from the Progressive Era to the New Deal* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> ‘An Agricultural Revolution’, Folder 7154, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>9</sup> James C. Giesen, *Boll Weevil Blues: Cotton, Myth, and Power in the American South, 1892-1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 5.

its arrival in the United States, the value of which approached one trillion dollars'.<sup>10</sup> The impact, real and imagined, of the Mexican boll weevil contributed not only to the introduction of modern mechanised agriculture and crop diversification, but also to the Great Migration of African-Americans out of the Southern states and into Northern cities.<sup>11</sup> And, as people like Knapp realised, the boll weevil, and the panic it induced, resulted in one thing above all: an unprecedented opportunity to reform the rural South.

Unbeknownst to Knapp, the Rockefeller philanthropies were looking for someone just like him. In 1903, John D. Rockefeller, Sr. formally chartered the General Education Board for 'the promotion of education within the United States of America, without distinction of race, sex, or creed'.<sup>12</sup> The GEB was established through an initial gift of \$1 million and grew to \$43 million by 1907 — at the time the largest philanthropic donation in U.S. history.<sup>13</sup> One of the first tasks of the GEB was to undertake a general survey of educational conditions in the South with the aim of stimulating and supporting a public school and college system in the region. As the officers and agents of the organisation visited the South, it soon became clear to them that rural regions, agriculturally undeveloped, beset by boll weevil and still recovering from the Civil War and Reconstruction, were simply too poor for the organisation to consider building and staffing schools. 'School systems could not be given to them, and they were not prosperous enough to support them. Such was the situation reduced to its simplest terms', the organisation wrote.<sup>14</sup>

The Board of the GEB, under Frederick T. Gates, chief advisor to the Rockefeller family, tasked Wallace Buttrick, the board's secretary and executive officer, with finding a way to modernise farming so that the work of building schools could begin. Buttrick travelled extensively and solicited advice from members of the Country Life Movement, but was unable to find a model that suited the organisation. In 1906 he met David Houston, president of the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas, who remarked: 'Buttrick, you came at the right time. We have two universities in Texas. One is at Austin and the other is Dr. Seaman Knapp. He is here now'.<sup>15</sup> The two-day meeting sent Buttrick back to New York 'singing with joy' and espousing Knapp's doctrine of 'farm demonstration'.

Knapp had been employed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture since 1898 to teach 'scientific agriculture' as a way of counteracting the devastating effects of the boll weevil. Instead of trying to eradicate the insect with pesticide, which had little effect as the weevil spent most of its lifecycle inside

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<sup>10</sup> Giesen, *Boll Weevil Blues*, vii.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Higgs, 'The Boll Weevil, the Cotton Economy, and Black Migration', *Agricultural History* 50, no. 2 (April 1976): 335—50.

<sup>12</sup> General Education Board purpose and program, Folder 145, Box 15, Series O, OMR.

<sup>13</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, '100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation | The General Education Board • Education', accessed 8 September 2015, [http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/education/general\\_education\\_board](http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/education/general_education_board).

<sup>14</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities 1902-1914* (New York: The General Education Board, 1930), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond B. Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving: The Story of the General Education Board* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 41.

the plant, Knapp set out to outproduce the pest, and thereby lessen the damage. He popularised a method of ‘teaching-by-doing’ that later became known as farm demonstrations. Essentially Knapp approached leading farmers, community leaders and businessmen in the district with a proposal: he would provide them with high-quality seed if, in exchange, the farmer agreed to follow his instructions exactly. At the end of the season the significantly improved yield would lead the farmer and community leaders to become missionaries of this new type of farming, and they would proceed to convert their neighbours. At the same time other farmers in the district, comparing their own meagre harvest, would eagerly want to know how it was done. Demonstration farms would radiate their influence outward into the surrounding countryside.

Knapp’s agreement with the USDA stipulated that the farm demonstrations be confined to areas affected by the boll weevil. Yet Buttrick saw far greater application for such improved agricultural techniques. Many farmers in the South still held to archaic farming methods passed down through generations. Farm demonstrations could reform their practices. The techniques were valid for many other crops. It essentially doubled the yield of corn and cotton.<sup>16</sup> In 1906 the GEB made an agreement with the USDA to pay the salaries (phrased as ‘supplements’) of field agents to conduct the demonstrations. In the first year of GEB involvement the demonstrations were trialled on 545 farms in Texas and Alabama. The scale of operations expanded rapidly and massively: the number of field agents increased from 49 in 1907 to 700 in 1912.<sup>17</sup> In the twelve years of GEB-supported farm demonstrations the organisation paid out nearly \$1 million in salaries to agents. By 1912 farm demonstrations were conducted on 106,621 farms in fifteen Southern states. The same year more than 15,000 people in each state viewed the results of ‘scientific agriculture’. ‘At the very least the farm demonstrations exposed hundreds of thousands of rural Americans to methods that promised to boost their incomes’.<sup>18</sup>

Knapp’s method revolved around training, not teaching — a tenet which Buttrick endorsed. Teaching agriculture in elementary schools was ‘hardly less than absurd’ and, he observed, ‘book agriculture is not farming’.<sup>19</sup> In an effort to simplify his method as much as possible and thus reach more rural farmers Knapp advertised ‘Ten Commandments’ as the key to scientific agriculture:

1. The removal of all surplus water on and in the soil.
2. Deep fall plowing; and in the South a winter cover crop.

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<sup>16</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board*, 50.

<sup>17</sup> Roy V. Scott, *The Reluctant Farmer; the Rise of Agricultural Extension to 1914* (United States: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 226.

<sup>18</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board*, 37-38; Judith Sealander, *Private Wealth and Public Life*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 40.

3. The best seed, including variety and quality.
4. Proper spacing of plants.
5. Intensive cultivation and systematic rotation of crops.
6. The judicious use of barnyard manure, legumes, and commercial fertilizers.
7. The home production of the food required for the family and for the stock.
8. The use of more horsepower and better machinery.
9. The raising of more and better stock, including the cultivation of grasses and forage plants.
10. Keeping an accurate account of the cost of farm operations.<sup>20</sup>

To Poor White tenant farmers, the instruction to buy better machinery and stock would have been irrelevant, and Knapp's farm demonstrations have been criticised for being more helpful to large commercial farmers than to the Poor Whites or poor black sharecroppers.<sup>21</sup> Yet Knapp's 'commandments' are better understood as scalable recommendations. He was keenly aware of the opportunity agricultural reform held for improving the lives of Poor White tenant farmers. 'It would be the height of unwisdom', he wrote, 'to commence the rural uplift by establishing a public library or even a school. The rural toilers must first be properly nourished, clothed and housed'. Their earning capacity was still 'insufficient to sustain a high civilization'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board*, 29.

<sup>21</sup> Sealander, *Private Wealth and Public Life*, 51.

<sup>22</sup> 'Effect of Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work on Rural Improvement', Folder 7156, Box 964, GEB.



Fig. 1. Contrast between cotton under demonstration methods (L) and older methods (R). Troy, Alabama.<sup>23</sup>

Although field agents selected prominent demonstration farms in a bid to reach as many people as possible, their visits were accompanied by advice, lectures and practical demonstrations which catered to Poor White tenant farmers as much as to commercial farmers. Knapp hoped that, by employing his techniques, tenant farmers would be able to sell enough produce to buy their own farm. In *An agricultural revolution*, Knapp made this explicit: '[t]here are some sections that object to our efforts to make the average farmer independent, fearing that he will soon have a farm of his own. These sections want poor whites and more of them'.<sup>24</sup> His method of agricultural reform was concerned not only with uplifting already impoverished farmers, but to prevent them from falling even farther and becoming Poor Whites. For Knapp the farm demonstrations were not only a programme of rural uplift, but also a programme of prevention.

Knapp's demonstration agents did not restrict themselves only to the fields, but also instructed farmers on sanitation and yard appearance. The 'farm demonstration' method was aimed at reforming farm habits, as much as reforming farm habitats.<sup>25</sup> Agents were 'instructed to insist upon a general clearing up of the farm and an improvement in all farm equipment, especially comfortable houses'.<sup>26</sup> In 1912, at the programme's height, the annual report for Virginia boasted that '[t]he influence of the work is clearly shown in the improvement of home surroundings, the erection of better farm homes and

<sup>23</sup> Folder 559, Box 48, Series 105.4, GEB.

<sup>24</sup> 'An agricultural revolution', Folder 7152, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>25</sup> David Nally and Stephen Taylor, 'The Politics of Self-Help: The Rockefeller Foundation, Philanthropy and the 'long' Green Revolution', *Political Geography*, May 2015, 4.

<sup>26</sup> 'Report of the farmers' cooperative demonstration work', May 21, 1908, Folder 7156, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.



buildings, and the installation of farm conveniences, such as water, light and heat'.<sup>27</sup> The GEB had a great stock of colourful testimonials as to the effect that better farm output and farm conditions had on rural inhabitants. One farmer in Texas wrote that, before being visited by farm demonstrators, '[w]e were in a deplorable condition; white tenants had practically all left the County ... Our houses were old, dilapidated, fences rotting down and a great many field laying out. Rural schools running from three to four months in the year and they were very scattering'. After the demonstration agents taught them modern farming methods and to 'rebuild [their] old worn farms', the farmers in the county 'are making from two to ten times better yield on the same soil; we are getting good church houses, good roads, good school houses and longer terms, good farm houses, and our towns are doubling in population and building finer and better buildings'.<sup>28</sup> As another farmer put it that same year: 'to sum it all up it means civilization, and this means a good deal for Uncle Sam'.<sup>29</sup>

Knapp tied the moral and social improvement on the farms directly to the energising effect of the farm-demonstration work, which not only provided poor farmers with desperately needed income, but gave them a sense of self-worth. A sceptical farmer, upon seeing his good crop, felt pride in his work, and that pride uplifted his entire character. 'Immediately the brush begins to disappear from the fence corners and the weeds from the fields; the yard fence is straightened; whitewash or paint goes on to the buildings, the team looks a little better and the dilapidated harness is renovated', wrote Knapp; 'He made a great crop, but the man grew faster than the crop'.<sup>30</sup>

The GEB's programme of farm demonstrations did not limit itself to the farmer but aimed at training the entire family. Boys in every state where farm demonstrations took place were encouraged to join 'corn clubs'. Under the scheme the children were given an acre of land to work and instructions on how to work it according to the new scientific method. The farm agents provided instruction and kept tally. These clubs had an intense competitive element, with boys being encouraged to compete for the highest corn yield. Knapp wrote approvingly of boys in one state challenging boys in another: 'I think this beats base ball'.<sup>31</sup> The corn clubs proved a startling success. By 1913, Mississippi alone had 91,000 acres of corn being worked by 91,000 corn-club boys.<sup>32</sup> The clubs served a number of different aims, the first of which was purely economic: the boys could sell their crops, or use it to supplement their family food stocks. Secondly, as they saw the success of Knapp's methods, they encouraged their fathers and neighbours in the district to adhere to the farm-demonstration method, even if only because they were outproducing them — in 1910, the average yield in Holmes County, Mississippi of boys' corn clubs

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<sup>27</sup> Bradford Knapp. Virginia: Annual report of Progress, 1912, Folder 7154, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>28</sup> N.R Tisdale to Bradford Knapp, November 1, 1911, Folder 7154, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>29</sup> W.F. Messer to Bradford Knapp, November 2, 1911, Folder 7154, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>30</sup> Effect of Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work on Rural Improvement, Folder 7156, Box 964, GEB.

<sup>31</sup> 'General Report of the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work for 1909-1910', Folder 7155, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>32</sup> T. R. Mitchell and R. Lowe, 'To Sow Contentment: Philanthropy, Scientific Agriculture and the Making of the New South: 1906-1920', *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 2 (December 1, 1990): 328.

was sixty-six bushels. The average of adult farms only sixteen.<sup>33</sup> Lastly, the boys were trained early in the social and moral doctrines of the demonstration movement: they were encouraged to keep their acres clean, to keep civilized standards of sanitation and to save and spend wisely the money they received from crop sales and prizes. ‘Under our plans the Boys’ Corn Clubs is a school of instruction of great value’, declared Knapp.<sup>34</sup>

Reforming and monitoring the working habits of rural men and boys was only part of the work. The demonstration movement had more ambitious aims. ‘The demonstration work has proven that it is possible to reform, by simple means, the farm method, the economic life and practically the personality of the farmer on his farm’, Knapp told the GEB.<sup>35</sup>



Fig. 2. Jerry H. Moore, of Winona, S.C., with the 229 bushels of corn grown on his plot. Corn club champion in 1910.<sup>36</sup>

Yet these reforms had thus far missed a crucial part of rural life: the domestic sphere, which was then regarded as solely the domain of women. In motivating his plans Knapp wrote of the need for subterfuge:

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<sup>33</sup> Mitchell and Lowe, ‘To Sow Contentment’, 328.

<sup>34</sup> ‘General Report of the Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work for 1909-1910’, Folder 7155, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>35</sup> ‘General Report of the Farmers’ Cooperative Demonstration Work, May - October 1910’, Folder 7155, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>36</sup> Author unknown, in General Education Board. *The General Education Board: An Account of Its Activities 1902-1914*. New York: The General Education Board, 1930.



There remains still the home itself upon the farm, and the women and girls of the home, as one of the problems of rural uplift. This problem, in my judgement, can not be approached directly. No matter how earnest and enthusiastic the reformer, he who goes directly to the country home and tells the farmer and his wife that their entire home system is wrong and that they ought to change, will meet with failure and even well merited opposition....But what can not be accomplished by direct means can usually be accomplished indirectly.<sup>37</sup>

Female agents now began recruiting farm girls into 'canning clubs' where they learnt how to cultivate a small tomato plot and to preserve the harvest — either for home use, or to sell. Tens of thousands of rural farm girls were annually recruited and monitored through the programme. 'The direct object is to teach some one, simple, straightforward lesson to the girls on the farm, which will open the way to their confidence and that of their mothers, and will at the same time open their eyes to the possibilities of adding to the family income through simple work in and about the home', wrote Knapp.<sup>38</sup> Canning clubs quickly diversified into cultivating other vegetables, fruit and raising chickens. If nothing else these projects diversified diets in a region where many tenant farmers were unable to afford nutritionally balanced diets. Excessive reliance on corn, for instance, led to rural inhabitants contracting pellagra, a potentially lethal disease caused by vitamin deficiency and strongly associated with Poor Whites. One country doctor reported that, after examining the teenage son of a tenant farmer who suffered from both pellagra and rickets, he had asked the boy's mother what she had been feeding him. She replied that 'she was glad none of her family had glass stomachs so people could see what had gone in them'.<sup>39</sup>

Canning clubs were also an economic help to tenant farmers. In 1915, over 32,000 girls in the U.S. South were enrolled in canning clubs. Of these girls 14,810 reported back a total yield of over 5 million pounds of tomatoes, more than 1.2 million pounds of other vegetables and fruits, nearly a million containers packed and an average profit of \$24.01 per tenth acre (the size of the typical girls' demonstration plot). Additionally, over 9000 girls worked in poultry clubs and 3000 attended demonstrations for baking bread. To small farmers struggling with boll weevil, canning activities could be a significant boost to farm income. One of the demonstration agents boasted of a girl who had put up more than 3000 cans of fruits and vegetables in a season. Her father told the agent: '[t]he boll weevil may eat up my cotton but it can't get inside these cans and jars so we are sure to have plenty to eat and some ready money'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> 'General Report of the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work, May - October 1910', Folder 7155, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>38</sup> 'General Report of the Farmers' Cooperative Demonstration Work for 1909-1910', Folder 7155, Box 694, Series 1.4, GEB.

<sup>39</sup> Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 159.

<sup>40</sup> Mary. E. Creswell, 'The Home Demonstration Work', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67, no. 1 (September 1916): 245.

In the winter, the girls' canning clubs were replaced by 'projects' such as home cleaning and table settings, which the demonstration agents regarded as 'our wedge to the home'.<sup>41</sup> The girls initiated their mothers into the demonstration movement and thus the domestic space was opened to reform. Agents introduced 'home economics' and gave classes on home cleaning, budget control, hygiene, dressmaking and drapery. They espoused the advantages of labour-saving devices. These ranged from inexpensive devices such as eggbeaters and 'fireless cookers' — akin to crock pots or slow cookers and accessible to poor women who did not have access to stoves — to indoor water systems. These devices promoted a modern consumer culture in rural regions which had hitherto been isolated.<sup>42</sup> At the same time labour-saving devices were also sold to sceptical farmers on racial grounds. Farm demonstration agents were concerned that the heavy workloads and poor diets of poor farm women degraded them to the level of blacks and racially ambiguous immigrants.<sup>43</sup> The home economist Mary Gearing warned that 'the woman is the mother of the race and only in proportion to her strength will the race be strong'. She cautioned that, by working too long in the fields and too hard at home, the strong, white Anglo-Saxon stock would begin to resemble 'flat-breasted, heavy-faced, splay-footed' country women of Europe, who 'work with no more hope or ambition than dumb, driven beasts. God forbid that America should produce such a race at such a cost!'<sup>44</sup>

The GEB's direct involvement in farm demonstrations came to an end in 1914 after the controversy that arose when it was discovered that the organisation was not just supporting, but effectively subsidising government employees. The demonstration work continued, however, and expanded through the extension service of the USDA, which was specifically created to replace the farm demonstrations, but without private intervention. Farm demonstration was a scalable method that taught hundreds of thousands of Southern farmers, as well as their tenants and sharecroppers, how to farm more efficiently, and it drastically increased the yields of their cash crops and food intended for home consumption. Yet many of the economic improvements farmers experienced in the period were independent of the farm demonstration method. Raymond Fosdick, president of the GEB in the 1930s, admitted as much. 'The demonstrations were deeply significant in helping many farmers to improve their production and their income, but we have to remember that this was a period of gradually rising farm prices and of increasing farm prosperity. It was a time of soaring land values and of an easing of the tight credit policy which had characterized the 1890s. The Knapp programme, although highly influential, was but one contributing factor in a complex of many others'.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Mary S. Hoffschwelle, '“Better Homes on Better Farms”: Domestic Reform in Rural Tennessee', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 22, no. 1 (2001): 51—73.

<sup>42</sup> Mona Domosh, 'Practising Development at Home: Race, Gender, and the 'Development' of the American South', *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (January 19, 2015): 915—41.

<sup>43</sup> Foley, *The White Scourge*, 159.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 61-62.

It should not be forgotten that the original involvement of the GEB was to improve the economic condition of the rural South to such a degree that it could support an extended school system. Why then did the organisation so actively, and for so long, support a method that only indirectly advanced education? Even Fosdick seemed confused: '[O]ne is tempted to ask this question: What, in terms of better educational facilities for the South, came out of the farm demonstration movement?' The GEB could only offer that the demonstration movement had resulted in 'interest and activity' which could bring about material and social change. Fosdick mused that '[t]here are no scales on which these imponderables can be weighed'.<sup>46</sup>

If the organisation seemed unsure of its goals in instituting farm and home demonstrations across the South, it was because economic improvement was only part of the reason. The other goals were tacit. The demonstration work also served as a means of disciplining and monitoring rural bodies — poor and Poor White — by instilling civilized standards and ethics on the farm, both in the yard and in the home. It recruited adults and, especially, children to the cause of rural reform. It not only helped uplift Poor White sharecroppers from falling further from the standards of their race, but helped prevent struggling rural farmers from swelling the ranks of the Poor Whites. Farm and home demonstrations were as much about moral reform and racial uplift as the improvement of economic standards.

### **Southern education reform and the General Education Board**

Despite having determined the South too poor to support a public education system the GEB continued lobbying for business and government support in the same period that they were conducting farm demonstrations. In this they were assisted by the 'propaganda' campaign of the Southern Education Board (SEB) which, among others, sought to encourage a widespread public campaign for tax-supported public schools.<sup>47</sup> No mere offshoot of the General Education Board, the SEB was the intellectual and emotional engine of early Rockefeller efforts in education philanthropy. The trustees of the two boards were virtually identical and, in the twelve years of its existence, it was the Southern Board that laid the groundwork for GEB efforts in the reform of Southern and, especially, Poor White education.

The early years of the GEB are usually studied in reference to its efforts to shape the education of African-Americans.<sup>48</sup> The board took a racist paternalist stance which encouraged the industrial education of blacks, such as through its support and funding for the Tuskegee Institute of Booker T. Washington. And it discouraged or, at least, did not encourage, the higher education of African-

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<sup>46</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 61.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Eric Anderson and Alfred A. Moss, *Dangerous Donations: Northern Philanthropy and Southern Black Education, 1902 - 1930* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1999).

American education in areas such as the liberal arts. Yet, in an era where support for the education of African-Americans was politically and physically dangerous, the Rockefeller philanthropies were unusually progressive and, through the GEB, contributed millions of dollars of funding for black schools and colleges. What is often forgotten is that the education of blacks was not a priority of the early years of the GEB. Instead, as W.E.B. Du Bois confirmed, 'it put stress on and gave precedence to the education of whites'.<sup>49</sup> In the early years of Rockefeller educational philanthropy, the Southern and General Boards of Education made sure that the focus was on Poor Whites.

It started with a train dubbed the 'Millionaires' Special'. In 1901 Robert Ogden, an affluent New York businessman, hired a special train from the Pennsylvania Railroad and invited fifty high-profile guests to attend a conference on education in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. At the Conference for Christian Education in the South the year before, various prominent Southerners and Northerners, including bankers, newspaper owners, philanthropists and college presidents, had already declared their intention to establish an organisation devoted to the uplift of Southern education. The Ogden trip would formalise their declaration. Guests on the Millionaires' Special included John D. Rockefeller, Jr., publisher Walter Hines Page and George Foster Peabody. Along the way, the party visited various struggling Southern schools and colleges, including the Hampton Institute for African-Americans. Ogden shrewdly advertised the problems of the rural South to his wealthy guests as they made their way to the conference. They networked and discussed and listened to lectures on rural decline. Rockefeller, Jr., who had been contemplating a philanthropy devoted to African-American education, called the trip 'one of the outstanding events of my life'.<sup>50</sup> At the conference delegates resolved to form the Southern Education Board (formally the executive arm of the Conference of Education in the South) to campaign for public schools. It was supported by an initial gift of \$30,000 from George Foster Peabody and in subsequent years by the GEB. The board of the new organisation included Ogden, Peabody, Page (who was later a member of the Country Life Commission) and a professional acquaintance of the Rockefellers, Wallace Buttrick. On the return journey Rockefeller was dissuaded from restricting any philanthropic gifts only to African-Americans by, amongst others, an address on the train by Henry St. George Tucker, president of Washington and Lee University. 'If it is your idea', Tucker said, 'to educate the Negro, you must have the white of the South with you. If the poor white sees the son of a Negro neighbor enjoying through your munificence benefits denied to his boy, it raises in him a feeling that will render futile all your work. You must lift up the "poor white" and the Negro together if you would approach success'. The applause that followed this statement 'drowned even the noise of the train'.<sup>51</sup>

Soon after his return, Rockefeller, Jr. met with, amongst others, Ogden, Peabody, Page and Frederick Gates, the family's chief advisor, to form the General Education Board. Buttrick was made executive

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<sup>49</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, 'The Cultural Missions of Atlanta University', *Phylon* 3, no. 2 (1942): 107

<sup>50</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 7.

secretary and, two years later, Ogden became chairman. Writing to Ogden in 1907 Rockefeller, Jr. confided that '[w]henver I think of the work of the General Education Board and the magnificent future which is before it, I always remember that its conception and foundation were to a large extent the result of the Southern trip which I made as your guest'.<sup>52</sup>

The SEB, as the propaganda arm of the General Board, had to defend against accusations of racial favouritism right from the start. The organisation had made it clear that it was also promoting African-American education. Walter Hines Page, in reply to a journalist's question as to whether there was a 'negro in the woodpile', said that '[y]ou will find when the wood pile is turned over not a negro, but an uneducated white boy. That is what we are after'.<sup>53</sup> On the defensive, Edgar Gardner Murphy, executive secretary of the SEB, put it in an address at Washington and Lee University: '[t]his movement has assumed that when philanthropy comes into the South with an exclusive interest in the Negro, it is likely to fail in its service both to the South and to the Negro ... Racial favouritism makes for interracial hatred'.<sup>54</sup> The organisation, he said, was, in point of fact, deeply concerned for the welfare of Poor Whites:

I chafe under the contempt, which is sometimes expressed in high quarters, for the poorer and humbler white people of our Southern states. You may call their representative a 'country-man', a 'hill-Billy' or a 'cracker', you may ply him with ridicule even more caustic than that visited upon the Negro of the cotton patch, but the fact remains that the merchant who scorns him is usually the first to ask his trade and that the politician who derides him is always the first to seek his vote. He represents a great actual power, a greater potential power in the rehabilitation of our land. He is the primary resource of the industrial South.<sup>55</sup>

He was certainly not alone in his concern for Poor Whites. G.S. Dickerman, agent and later board member of the SEB, pleaded with attendees to advance the cause of education for Southerners — black and white. This was especially true in an era of increased immigration, he said. 'Why, as an American, should I be more interested in the children of Boston or of New Haven than those of the Carolinas and Georgia? Who are the children of Boston? Sixty-seven per cent of them are of parentage from beyond the sea...' There was nothing wrong with providing education for immigrants, he said. 'I only speak of what we are doing for them to emphasize what we ought to do for those of our own blood'. Americans

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<sup>52</sup> JDR Jr. to Robert C. Ogden, February 1, 1907, Folder 1899, Box 200, series 1.2, GEB

<sup>53</sup> Southern Education Board, 'Some Reports Denied', *Southern Education* 1, no. 8 & 9 (May 7, 1903): 116.

<sup>54</sup> 'The Task of the South', Folder 7418, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB, 5.

<sup>55</sup> 'The Task of the South', Folder 7418, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB, 26.

were neglecting their own people. The ‘whites of the South are the children of colonial pioneers ... The cracker is of the same blood with the merchant prince’.<sup>56</sup>

The annual Southern conference organised by the SEB served as a sort of clearing house for ideas on how to uplift education in the region, but it soon expanded to include a number of smaller conferences with the general theme of rural decline. In 1914 thousands of delegates could attend lectures on farm demonstrations, canning clubs, the country home, the education of African-Americans and Sunday schools. There were demonstrations of bread-baking, sanitation and pest-control. The organisers led day trips to Poor White and poor black schools in the region. And, for the influential visitors, the Ogden train continued nearly until his death in 1913. The conference had the air of a religious revival. Delegates attended sermons and prayer meetings. There was even a dedicated music programme for attendees to sing songs and hymns.<sup>57</sup>

The leaders of the SEB were right to be concerned over the school situation in the South. Although most Northern states had instituted mandatory school attendance laws by the turn of the century, only one of the Southern states, Kentucky, had followed suit. Fewer than half of the children of school-going age were regularly enrolled. Buttrick, during his regional fact-finding trips, reported that in rural regions the school term was about four months long and, when cotton picking began, attendance dropped by 70%.<sup>58</sup> The schools themselves were isolated one-room structures and generally in poor repair. Teachers were poorly paid and generally the product of the same rural schools that they taught in. Conditions in African-American schools were even worse.

The SEB was particularly concerned over the illiteracy of rural white Southerners. According to Murphy ‘[a]mong the whites of the South we have as large a proportion of illiterate men over 21 years of age as we had fifty years ago. In a half century we have made no progress in lifting the dark cloud of ignorance from our own race ... Notice that these are not Negroes, but grown white men, the descendants of our original Southern stock’.<sup>59</sup> Similar warnings, along with calls for racial pride and racial solidarity, were annually made at the SEB conference and then picked up by the press, which avidly followed the proceedings. In 1903, *The New York Times* reported the speech of Charles Dabney, president of the University of Tennessee, who warned of an ‘army of illiterates’, particularly in Appalachia. ‘Shall we permit another generation of these mountain boys and girls to grow up in ignorance? In the mountain counties nearly one-fifth of white males cannot read or write. These are our brethren, fellow-citizens of these States and of the great Republic ... How dare we permit so large a portion of our fellow-citizens to live any longer under these conditions?’<sup>60</sup> *The Churchman* reported

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<sup>56</sup> Conference for Education in the South, Proceedings of the Fourth Conference for Education in the South (Committee of the Conference for Education in the South, 1901), 27-28.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Gathering at Louisville, KY’, Folder 7424, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB.

<sup>58</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 18.

<sup>59</sup> ‘The Task of the South’, Folder 7418, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB, 40.

<sup>60</sup> *The New York Times*, 24 April 1903, Folder 7425, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB.

that Southern states contained nearly three million ‘mountain whites’ whose ‘arrested civilization has brought many districts lower in ordinary appliance and environment of life than any other part of the English-speaking race’. The *Mail & Express* noted that the ‘dark army’ of illiterates ‘disgrace the States and the whole nation’.<sup>61</sup> Partly this was also a concern over possible labour unrest. Julian Ralph, a reporter for the *Mail & Express* who was assigned to the conferences, reported that ‘this is a movement born of pity and compassion for both poor whites and blacks, but not of affection in the fraternal sense. They have not yet come to know that we believe the illiteracy of the “cracker” and the negro is in our opinion a menace to the safety of the republic’. He reminded readers of an address by the governor of North Carolina, Charles Aycock, wherein he warned that ‘there lies, in the mass of illiterate people in our rural districts, a greater danger of ... a flood of ignorance that may devastate our entire Southern land, engulfing whole commonwealths’.<sup>62</sup>

The SEB and many of the delegates to its annual conference were part of a major movement to promote industrial and vocational education. The 1901 Conference for Education in the South adopted a resolution to the effect: ‘With the expansion of our population and the growth of industry and economic resources, we recognise in a fitting and universal education and training for the home, for the farm and the workshop ... the only salvation for our American standards of family and social life’.<sup>63</sup> At the same conference James Russell, dean of Teacher’s College at Columbia, argued for the urgent institution of vocational education. Society, he said, had to balance a desire for individualism with a desire for stability. For the latter, there was ‘no other way given under heaven or by man whereby this result can be obtained but by bringing the individual communities up to the social standard of the times and keeping them there until the necessary habits of thought and conduct are fixed and pleasurable’.<sup>64</sup>

Rapid industrialisation and urbanisation had put strain on an education system which, in the period, was devoted to teaching Latin and Greek rather than the workplace skills an industrial economy needed. Reformers were convinced that the task of the school was to train youths for jobs and they proposed replacing the standard literary curriculum with practical courses.<sup>65</sup> The movement encompassed a broad range of reformers, from those who opposed child labour to those who supported compulsory education. It attracted labour unions, philanthropies, businesses and academics. Public support grew in kind. ‘We are besieged’, declared one State School Superintendent in 1908, ‘with public documents, monographs, magazine articles, reports of investigations too numerous to mention...’ Another called it a ‘mental

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<sup>61</sup> *Mail & Express*, March 25 1905, Folder 7425, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB.

<sup>62</sup> *Mail & Express*, April 26 1905, Folder 7425, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB.

<sup>63</sup> Conference for Education in the South, *Proceedings*, 11.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>65</sup> Kantor, Harvey. ‘Work, Education, and Vocational Reform: The Ideological Origins of Vocational Education, 1890-1920’. *American Journal of Education* 94, no. 4 (August 1986): 401—26.



epidemic', like Klondike gold fever.<sup>66</sup> The same year Theodore Roosevelt called for education to be 'directed more and more toward directing boys and girls back to the farm and shop'.<sup>67</sup>

The old school system was in rapid need of reform and the SEB had no shortage of ideas on how to adapt it for rural whites. The organisation compiled a list of constructive lectures that had been given at its conferences. This included a talk by David Houston, president of Texas A&M, entitled 'The problem of educating 80% of our people in schools adapted to their needs'. Another, by professor P.P. Claxton of the University of Tennessee, was called, more directly, 'The country school must prepare for life in the country. It should have a farm or at least three acres, and a house for the teacher'.<sup>68</sup> Reformers often pointed to vocational reforms in Europe, such as farm and agricultural schools in France and Belgium.<sup>69</sup> In particular they were taken by the Danish folk high-school movement started in the 1830s by Bishop Nikolaj Grundtvig and which quickly spread to other Nordic countries. The folk high-schools were primarily conceived as a way to educate the rural poor. They combined a sense of romantic nationalism with a focus on vocationalism and spirituality. They set no exams and conferred no degrees.<sup>70</sup>

In the United States there was often a distinct racial component to vocational education. Although only some whites needed dedicated vocational training, African-Americans as a whole could not rise beyond it. Seaman Knapp, in a speech to agricultural agents in Georgia, advised that '[w]hen I talk to a negro citizen I never talk about better civilization, but a better chicken, a better pig, a whitewashed house'. Black schools were doing a great harm in trying to teach Latin and Greek, he said, as they 'were teaching every child that knew anything at all to get away from that country' instead of helping people on the farm. 'You are doing a great wrong', Knapp told them. 'Why don't you get at the people themselves and teach them something practical?'<sup>71</sup> Yet this same sort of language was also applied to the Poor Whites, best typified by a memo of Gates to the Rockefeller Board: 'We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning or of science ... nor will we cherish even the humble ambition to raise up from among them lawyers or doctors, for the task that we set before ourselves is a very simple as well as a very beautiful one ... to train these people as we find them for a perfectly ideal life just where they are'.<sup>72</sup>

In its efforts to improve rural Southern education, the General Education Board's central methodology did not change drastically from the farm demonstration method. In 1905 the GEB began subsidising the

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<sup>66</sup> Sol Cohen, 'The Industrial Education Movement, 1906-17', *American Quarterly* 20, no. 1 (1968): 96

<sup>67</sup> William R. Ogden, 'Vocational Education: A Historical Perspective', *The High-school Journal* 73, no. 4 (1990): 247.

<sup>68</sup> 'The conference is a constructive body', Folder 7424, Box 721, Series 1.5, GEB.

<sup>69</sup> Representative work from the period would be Edwin G. Cooley, *Vocational Education in Europe*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The Commercial Club of Chicago, 1915).

<sup>70</sup> Danish Folk High-schools, 'A Brief History of the Folk High-school', *The Danish Folk High-schools*, accessed 16 September 2015, <http://www.danishfolkhighschools.com/about/history>.

<sup>71</sup> Hoffschwelle, 'Better Homes on Better Farms', 195.

<sup>72</sup> 'The Colleges and Rural Life', Folder 198, Box 19, Series O, OMR.



salaries of professors of secondary education at state universities in the South. These so-called education agents were to travel the region, survey conditions and, most importantly, lobby for the establishment of public high-schools. In the period most high-schools were private and intended for the children of wealthy elites. The professors acted as ‘high-school evangelists’, in part because the lack of decent public education had resulted in a dearth of well-trained teachers in the rural South.<sup>73</sup> The high-school campaign also highlighted a lack of state oversight of rural education, which was something the GEB sought to fix in its subsequent, far more ambitious, campaign.

In 1908 the SEB, with Peabody funding, began a campaign to appoint ‘rural supervisors for schools’. The project was managed by the general agent of the Peabody Fund, Wickliffe Rose, who had spent most of his career as a philosophy lecturer in Tennessee. Rose was also a member of the SEB’s fact-finding department and advised Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission. The new campaign adapted the technique the GEB had used when lobbying for high-schools. The organisation attached officials to the office of each state superintendent for education in the South. The officials reported to the superintendent, but were chosen by Rose and funded by the SEB. The result would give modern politicians and philanthropies legal nightmares. The Southern Education Board (and by extension the GEB) had an agent surveying rural education in the office of every state education superintendent in the South. Peabody and, later, Rockefeller money underwrote the rural interests of state education departments. According to the GEB these agents had a broad function:

They would have to show the local officials how to go about building better schoolhouses and how to organize the innumerable little one-room crossroads schools into more effective consolidated units. They would have to find ways of training the rural teachers on the job, until the teachers’ colleges could turn out a better prepared generation of instructors. They wanted to evolve a wholly fresh curriculum with significance to farmers’ sons and daughters. And since all this would take money, they would have to campaign for more and higher local tax levies.<sup>74</sup>

The reformers campaigned especially for the consolidation of small rural schools into larger and centrally located public elementary schools that would serve an entire community. In the period many rural schools were in isolated regions and not always accessible when, for instance, hard rain made the poorly-drained dirt roads inaccessible. Unlike modern schools these single-room schools usually had only one teacher who divided his or her attention between children in a range of ages and grades. According to one pamphlet from the period, such schools were an ‘insignificant factor in the life of the community’. The rural school was ‘a little building on a little piece of land where a little teacher for a

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<sup>73</sup> General Education Board, *The General Education Board*, 83.

<sup>74</sup> Fosdick, *Adventure in Giving*, 67.

little while teaches little children little things'.<sup>75</sup> Consolidating a number of rural schools into a larger, central school meant more teachers and more children, enough to divide into classes based on age. Consolidation also meant the building of a new school with new facilities — a blank slate for education reformers to project their ideals of cleanliness, sanitation and an adapted curriculum. The consolidated school, much like the demonstration farms, was a centre for reform and it would radiate its influence outward into the countryside. By teaching the children to be clean, to be healthy, and to learn a vocation, they would gradually reform the parents, and so uplift the Poor Whites of the rural South.

The campaign for new and better schools was laced with a strong helping of environmental determinism. The physical environment instilled moral values: clean spaces made for clean souls. And the converse was also true. A 1915 survey of rural schools in Tennessee found 'unattractive, uncomfortable, unsanitary' rural schools, with outhouses 'such as you might expect to find at a construction camp', and which produced 'physical and mental cripples, and moral perverts'.<sup>76</sup> Better and cleaner schools 'would encourage students to associate academic progress with orderly, efficient ways of learning and living'. Thus 'the new rural school, better constructed, furnished and cleaned, could provide a physical model of the ideal rural dwelling'.<sup>77</sup>



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<sup>75</sup> 'The one and two-room country schools of Virginia', Folder 1766, Box 188, Series 11, GEB, 9.

<sup>76</sup> Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 36.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

Fig. 3. An old, unimproved rural school, with stove in middle of classroom.



Fig. 4. The same classroom after being improved. Clean, painted and neat.<sup>78</sup>

The rural school agents, active as they were, could not hope to adequately monitor and inspect even a majority of rural schools in the state. In particularly rural and problematic regions the SEB funded female county agents who reported to the county supervisor. In contrast to the whirlwind visits of state agents, who were engaged in lobbying whole communities, these female agents inspected local schools and suggested improvements. These ranged from introducing vocational elements such as cooking or gardening, to cleaning grounds, painting walls, fixing privies and monitoring health. Some arranged summer schools or ‘moonlight schools’ in the evening which were aimed at eradicating adult illiteracy. Their task was certainly not easy. The female agent for Dorchester County, South Carolina, Caroline Dickinson, described a visit to two poor rural schools on the same day. The schools had ‘[n]o grounds, no outbuildings, no water, rough, unlined, no paint of white-wash, and with cracks in the door through which you can see the passers-by. No fire in either. A few rough benches and a stove in each instance constituted the entire equipment’. One school contained eight children, the other nine. ‘In the Lebanon School I found a local farmer presiding, stolid and patient. They sat amidst dirt, soot, and papers’.<sup>79</sup>

The campaigns of the rural agents, and the ideologies and interests of the SEB, fed into state efforts to improve rural education. In a 1916 pamphlet distributed to rural schools in Virginia, R.C. Stearnes, the

<sup>78</sup> School improvement, Folder 411, Series 1054, Box 42, GEB.

<sup>79</sup> ‘Leaves from a Supervisor’s Notebook’, Folder 1198, Box 131, Series 1.1, GEB, 6.

state superintendent of public instruction, exhorted readers to ‘help the weak as well as the strong’. By this he was referring to poor country schools. On the other side of the pamphlet was a ‘score card for country schools’ which schools were expected to put up in the classroom. Schools achieving at least 90% on the scorecard were entitled to appropriations from state funds, as well as a certificate. The card, which scored schools out of one hundred, gave points for cleanliness, neat grounds, sanitary outhouses and painted buildings. Points were awarded for a teaching salary of at least \$40. Further points were given if the floors were swept daily and free of trash paper. A water cooler, instead of common drinking cups, also helped. The teaching of manual training and domestic science was encouraged, as well as elementary agriculture. Finally, it awarded points if some of the schoolchildren were members of corn, canning, poultry or other clubs.<sup>80</sup>

By 1914 the SEB campaigns had led to some measure of reform. Teacher salaries were higher, many counties had appointed full-time superintendents of education, as well as attendant school and country supervisors. ‘The South is coming to believe in education’, said Buttrick. ‘At times one encounters a freshness, vigor and confidence that recalls the middle west and northwest of twenty years ago; one meets teachers, administrators, laymen aglow with what to them is a new discovery ... Four years ago there was not a consolidated school in Mississippi; there are now one hundred and seventy-five. In Louisiana only twelve-hundred one-room schools are left’.<sup>81</sup> In 1913 Ogden passed away and the following year the Peabody Fund was dissolved. The Southern Board was left with only a fraction of its resources. The GEB, which had been part-funding the SEB for years, stepped in to take over the bulk of the SEB’s projects, including the continued funding of state agents for rural education. The agents continued lobbying for consolidation and rural reform. The programme continued until 1928, when the states themselves assumed responsibility for the position.

In many respects the GEB’s stewardship of the Southern programme remained unchanged, although it began increasingly to focus on efforts to promote African-American education as state and public support for rural white schools increased, but African-American schools were ignored.<sup>82</sup> The essential character and reformist vision of the SEB carried over into the larger organisation which, after all, was overseen by almost the exact same people. At its various conferences, in its wide-ranging publications, in the offices of every state superintendent for education and in the schools and communities it wanted to reform, the SEB had promoted a vision of the ideal rural school — one that not only educated, but uplifted its students. The organisation would consolidate the poor little one-room schools into one large, modern building, with classrooms and teachers for every grade. The school would be warm, clean, light and newly-painted. It would be healthy, airy, and sanitary. The teachers would be well-trained and well-paid. It would support community uplift initiatives like poultry and canning clubs. It would teach not

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<sup>80</sup> ‘Score card for country schools’, Folder 1765, Box 188, Series, 1.1, GEB.

<sup>81</sup> General Education Board Minutes for 28 May, 1914, Folder 56, Box 23, Series 3, GEB.

<sup>82</sup> Wallace Buttrick to Seth Low, January 25, 1908, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

only algebra and Latin, but skills to help in the home and on the farm: domestic science and agricultural science. It would set students on the path to a trade by teaching carpentry and metalwork. The new school would teach its students not only how to learn, but how to live. It would be a centre of reform in the community, evangelising the students and sending them to convert their parents and neighbours, teaching them habits of cleanliness and sanitation and convenience. And in due course the South would be made modern, prosperous and white.

### **Poor White country schools and implementing racial rehabilitation**

The campaigns of the Southern and General Education boards were not mere rhetoric, but contributed significantly to the wide-reaching Progressive reform of U.S. education in the first decades of the twentieth century. The educational lobbyists paid for by the Rockefeller philanthropies led the way in improving rural school conditions. The ideology behind the reformist push was not glossed over or paid lip service, but taken seriously by educational reformers on the ground. In their search for ways to alleviate rural poverty and keep Poor Whites from drifting to the cities, reformers experimented with ideas of vocational training, discipline and hygiene. The little country schools were laboratories for racial uplift.

Two of these country schools are presented here as case studies. Both are still operating today, but the narrative concerns only their operation from the turn of the century to the Second World War. Both were intimately connected with the Education Boards and the people who administered them. They arose out of the propaganda for Southern rural uplift and concerned themselves with the betterment of Poor Whites. They were certainly not isolated examples, but representative of similar schools throughout the region in the era of Jim Crow. Importantly, they illustrate the network of educational reformers who transmitted ideas on the ‘correct’ education of Poor Whites throughout the South and beyond.

Both of these cases studies are supplied as illustrations of the overall argument of this thesis. They attempt to demonstrate, first, that transnational governmentality was implemented and, second, how it was implemented, principally by drawing upon ‘best practices’ for Poor White governance. They demonstrate that transnational governmentality was not fixed and universal, but constantly shifting, adapting and learning. Its implementation varied in different regions and at different times as experts tailored it to their specific needs.

*Rabun Gap-Nacoochee school*

In 1902 a Harvard-educated teacher named Andrew Jackson Ritchie wrote to Wallace Buttrick of the newly-established Southern and General Education Boards with an idea. Ritchie was concerned about the illiteracy and ‘backwardness’ of the Southern Appalachian mountain region, an area known for its isolation and poverty. At some stage he had shared his concerns with George Foster Peabody, who encouraged him to approach Buttrick. While visiting Rabun County, Georgia, Ritchie wrote that ‘the people of this county, and of all this section are very poor ... They are, however, of pure Anglo-Saxon stock’.<sup>83</sup> Ritchie hoped the GEB would consider establishing a series of schools for the Poor Whites of the mountains, starting with Rabun County and then expanding outward. Ritchie pledged to dedicate himself to the new school. After all, he and his wife were natives of the region. ‘Here my own father made “moonshine” whiskey’, Ritchie wrote later. ‘Here my grandfather had killed a man in a mountain brawl and bequeathed to me a feud between two clans that set one-half of the country against the other...’<sup>84</sup>

The GEB was, however, unable to help, as the organisation restricted itself to funding colleges and so Ritchie solicited donations from other sources to establish the Rabun Gap Industrial School in 1903. The organisation had contributed in other ways, however, as Ritchie wrote in a letter to Peabody: ‘I want you to know that I am one of the workers called forth by the propaganda of the General Education Board’. This propaganda inspired him ‘more than any thing else to take the final step in undertaking this work’. Ritchie regarded himself as part of the ‘educational renaissance in the South which has grown out of the propaganda which the General Education Board has put forth in spirit and purpose. I mean to say that my spirit and my sympathies are national, not sectional in the narrow sense’.<sup>85</sup>

The Rabun Gap School combined elements of farm demonstration and vocational education to create a type of farm school. The school accepted only Poor White children and divided classes between academic and agricultural training. Its grounds were big enough that it contained demonstration farms on which the boys were taught modern farming methods. In exchange for their farm and kitchen labour the children were allowed to study free of charge. According to the school the farm system not only ‘gave the boy students an opportunity to earn their education but also served as a kind of laboratory since the school had for its purpose educating boys and girls who wanted to live in the country’.<sup>86</sup> In a region characterised by the one-room schools so hated by the SEB, the farm school, with its tailored curriculum and emphasis on hard work, had a near-miraculous effect on the children. According to E.R. Hodgson, a Southern philanthropist who visited the school in 1912, one ‘cannot convey in words the change which comes over a shy and timid mountain girl, or a wild and reckless mountain boy, but the wild spirit is tamed and made gentle. The girls become thoughtful, domestic, refined and industrious.

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<sup>83</sup> Andrew Ritchie to Wallace Buttrick, June 26, 1902, Folder 433, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>84</sup> ‘An Appeal for 100 Founders’, Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.

<sup>85</sup> Andrew Ritchie to George Foster Peabody, April 13, 1907, Folder 434, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Education — family style’, Folder 438, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.



The boys become law abiding, capable, useful and industrious citizens'. The school was 'an institution capable of making sturdy American citizens, good farmers, capable wives and home-makers, out of this fine mountain stock'.<sup>87</sup>

The First World War nearly closed the school as charitable donations dried up and the older children became part of the war effort. Faced with a struggling school and no-one to work the farms, Ritchie developed a Farm Family Programme which radically changed the direction of the school. Instead of Poor White children, the school now accepted Poor White families. Ritchie consciously modelled the programme on the tenant farmer system. 'Just as a farmer settles a tenant on his place, allows him land for a crop and garden and pasture for a milk-cow, and employs him as hired help for his surplus time, we have taken families from hard places back in the mountains who are themselves practically illiterate and have the usual large number of children, and settled them on the school farm'. In the region there were thousands of families 'which are illiterate in books and ignorant of things that go with thrift, industry, and proper standards of living', said Ritchie. By teaching families middle-class white values, the school '[sent] forth each household into the surrounding country to make better farms, better homes, and better citizens'. These families would 'regenerate' the region and make for 'a superior type of rural people'.<sup>88</sup>

Families spent five years living on the school grounds and where, at least once a week, they were taken for periods of 'training' in which '[e]very foot of land, every garden every kitchen, every barn, and every corn-field [became] part of the school-curriculum'.<sup>89</sup> The training was not limited to modern farming methods. The families were assisted in marketing their farm products, purchasing their supplies and keeping their farm accounts. According to the school '[s]tress is placed upon high standards of work and habits of industry, economy, and good citizenship'. The school required farm families to hold to middle-class standards and, if not, 'there is the gentle pressure of the knowledge that he must make good if his lease is to be renewed at the end of the year'.<sup>90</sup> In a brochure aimed at potential donors, the school noted that it expected tenants to keep their home and farm in good order, showing proper care and attention to their entire boundary as well as being responsible for minor repairs to buildings, fences and roads. Tenants had to keep a record of what they made and spent, as well as do an annual inventory. In order to monitor and discipline the farmers, the school required that tenants 'be found at home and at work regularly ... parents must keep their children in school regularly and train them at home to habits of work and good conduct'. They were also expected to attend Sunday church services.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> E.R. Hodgson to Millie Rutherford, March 26, 1912, Folder 434, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>88</sup> 'An Appeal for 100 Founders', Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.

<sup>89</sup> 'An Appeal for 100 Founders', Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.

<sup>90</sup> 'Education — family style', Folder 438, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>91</sup> 'The family plan', Folder 438, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

The tenant farmers were actively measured on their adherence to white and middle-class values. According to the school the success of each family was rated on three broad courses of study. A scorecard measured their progress in: farming (including farm management and care of farm boundary); home making (which included care of the home, health, cooking, sanitation and budgeting); and citizenship (enterprise, industry, thrift and dependableness).<sup>92</sup>

In his appeals for philanthropic aid Ritchie emphasized racial solidarity with the mountain whites. There was no stronger plight in America, he said, ‘than the plight of this solid group of its original stock who live in the isolated places of this Appalachian region ... They were among the Nation’s founders. They were its first frontiersmen - the pioneers of its independence’. Despite being raised as a Poor White in the region, Ritchie also displayed a curious racial distancing in his appeal. How strange it was, he wrote, to find ‘a population whose isolation had preserved in their blood the purest remnant of a race that settled a continent, and had made them its only backwoodsmen — “the fragments of a forgotten people”’.<sup>93</sup>

Ritchie’s programme and appeals, coming after the First World War, attracted significant philanthropic attention, and the discipline he enforced on Poor Whites was particularly welcome in an era of labour unrest. ‘If we had more Ritchies in the country, we would have fewer Bolsheviks’, wrote one prominent Southern philanthropist.<sup>94</sup> George Vincent, then president of the Rockefeller Foundation, was particularly taken with the school. By the 1920s the GEB had begun contributing directly to secondary schools, but only for African-Americans. In a letter asking for the help of W.S. Richardson, director of the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial Fund, Vincent argued that the Poor White mountain schools should be made an exception to GEB policy. Rabun-Gap School, he said, raised the ‘question of policy of the different foundations and funds toward a small group of schools which are rendering a fundamentally important service to remote communities in the Appalachian Mountains’. The Poor White mountain schools, he said, should rather be ‘classified not so much as conventional educational institutions as social centers for introducing ideals and raising the levels of domestic and social life’.<sup>95</sup> The GEB did not budge but, in the period, the school was able to solicit significant financial aid from Andrew Carnegie and, especially, Ernest Woodruff, president of the Coca-Cola Company. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. also made large donations in his personal capacity: \$10,000 in 1920, and \$5,000 in 1924.

In 1926 Rabun-Gap merged with the nearby Nacoochee Institute Public School after fires gutted both buildings. The school was again in need of financial aid to rebuild. After a Rockefeller representative visited the school to examine conditions Thomas B. Appleget, Rockefeller Jr.’s secretary, recommended

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<sup>92</sup> ‘The family plan’, Folder 438, Box 48, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>93</sup> ‘An Appeal for 100 Founders’, Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR, 5.

<sup>94</sup> George J. Baldwin to George Vincent, 7 December 1920, Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.

<sup>95</sup> George Vincent to W.S. Richardson, 10 December 1920, Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.



a large donation of \$50,000. The result of Ritchie's family plan, he said, 'has been the economic regeneration and education of the entire family'.<sup>96</sup> The merger with a public school assured income for the farm school programme and the new Rabun Gap-Nacoochee School was able to survive and expand. It is still functioning today.

### *The Berry Schools*

In the 1890s Martha Berry, daughter of a wealthy Georgia businessman, discovered that the Poor White children that lived in the mountains around her father's land did not attend church or school, and had no knowledge of Bible stories. She began offering Sunday school lessons to the local children in a small cabin she used as a retreat. As demand grew, she constructed a small whitewashed school, appropriated a nearby church, as well as two other facilities, and expanded to offer a limited amount of day-schooling to the children.<sup>97</sup> In 1902, at the suggestion of GEB board members, she contacted Wallace Buttrick to interest him in funding a new school for Poor Whites that she had recently built. In the region, she said, the 'crying need was the establishment of a practical industrial school for the Georgia Cracker'. She had in mind not an academic school, but an industrial school 'like Booker T. Washington for the negro'.<sup>98</sup> Buttrick, as with the request of Rabun Gap, explained that it was GEB policy to fund only colleges directly. Berry was able to solicit funding from various other sources for her Boys' Industrial School for the 'moral, mental and physical education for the young'.<sup>99</sup> Despite not being able to provide funding, the school was certainly approved of, and even celebrated, by the GEB. In a 1904 letter Berry listed as references for endorsement Robert Ogden, Albert Shaw and Walter Hines — all board members of the Southern and General Educations Boards.<sup>100</sup> Buttrick himself thought it 'a model of what public secondary schools ought to become'.<sup>101</sup>

Arising out of Berry's Sunday schools, the new boys' school placed a strong emphasis on religion and on following Christian precepts. In addition to an academic education, the school aimed to 'make of the boy a workman as well as a student by giving dignity to manual labour'. As the school charged a very low fee in order to cater to Poor Whites, the children worked in the fields and workshop over weekends to earn their food and board. In addition, their domestic habits were monitored by teachers and by Berry herself. The value of home life in the training of boys could not be overstated, said the school, and it promised to make a 'Christian and refining influence' a prominent feature of home life. They went on:

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<sup>96</sup> Thomas B. Appleget to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. 23 Dec 1926, Folder 244, Box 36, Series G, OMR.

<sup>97</sup> Berry College, 'Our Rich History', accessed 23 September 2015, <http://www.berry.edu/richhistory/>.

<sup>98</sup> Martha Berry to Wallace Buttrick, April 25, 1902, Folder 415, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>99</sup> Folder 415, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>100</sup> Martha Berry to Daniel C. Gilman, March 2, 1904, Folder 415, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>101</sup> Wallace Buttrick to Frederick T. Gates, May 20, 1909, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

‘The teachers occupy the building as well as the students and they endeavour by precept and example to inculcate gentlemanly habits and manners’.<sup>102</sup>

As with Rabun Gap, advertisements and endorsements for a Poor White school relied heavily on racial propaganda. In a magazine article entitled ‘Solving the South’s great problem’, which was reprinted by the school and used as a brochure, the Southern preacher and author Howard Agnew Johnston proclaimed that the Poor Whites of the region ‘have probably the purest American blood, free from the admixture of modern immigration, found on the continent. It was from this people that Abraham Lincoln came, and the stock still contains elements of rugged strength and clean living’.<sup>103</sup> The work that the Education Boards had done on behalf of African-Americans was commendable, he said, ‘but what is to be our attitude toward our white brethren of the South who are handicapped by this burden of poverty? Shall we educate the negroes above them? If we fail to do our duty toward them, through our devotion to the task of uplifting the negro, that is what will happen’. The great tragedy, he said, was that the Poor Whites ‘are driven by force of their circumstances to compete with the negro at ordinary day labor at the level of the negro’s wages and mode of living’. It was ‘self-evident’ that the solution to the ‘problem of the South’ was an institution like the Boys’ Industrial School, ‘which takes these splendid boys and trains them for the highest type of manhood’.<sup>104</sup>

Berry had both a gift for fundraising and a dense web of society connections. The school soon became something of a cause célèbre amongst those who moved in the circles of government and philanthropy. The school received tributes from senators and scientists alike, including Robert Ogden and Wickliffe Rose. Thomas Edison praised it, as well as Adolph Ochs, owner of *The New York Times*. In 1909 a second school, for girls, was added and the land the schools occupied significantly expanded. Berry encouraged her supporters to solicit further philanthropic funding. It received endorsement from no fewer than four U.S. presidents: Woodrow Wilson, Howard Taft and Calvin Coolidge; Theodore Roosevelt called the Berry Schools ‘one of the greatest practical works for American citizenship that has been done within this decade’.<sup>105</sup> Buttrick was even forced into the uncomfortable position of explaining to a sitting president, Wilson, why the GEB would not contribute funds. Andrew Carnegie personally suggested a funding partnership for the Berry Schools with the Rockefellers.<sup>106</sup> John Kellogg, of the breakfast cereal, raised the issue with Rockefeller, Jr. during a visit to Kellogg’s home at Battle Creek, MI. Martha Berry, on a trip to New York, even waited for the elder Rockefeller outside the Sunday service at his local church in Pocantico Hills, and advertised her schools. All the demands led Rockefeller, Jr. to declare in 1918 that he ‘frankly [had] been rather unfriendly in my feelings towards Miss Berry’s School, because she has pulled so many wires to get both the Board and us to

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<sup>102</sup> ‘Boys’ Industrial School’, Folder 415, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>103</sup> ‘Solving the South’s great problem’, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Solving the South’s great problem’, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>105</sup> School pamphlet, Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>106</sup> Andrew Carnegie to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., 9 December 1918, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

help it'. Nonetheless, he told Buttrick that perhaps the time had come to change GEB policy. Whether 'in instances where schools are doing valuable work, which is having a real and beneficial influence on the educational system of the South, they ought not to be considered on their own merits'.<sup>107</sup> Buttrick and the GEB held firm.

Despite the lack of a contribution from the Rockefeller philanthropies, Berry was able to raise significant funds for her schools. In 1926 she added a junior college, and soon after a senior college. By the 1930s the school owned 30,000 acres of land to become the largest college campus in the United States, complete with game rangers. The school was able to weather the Great Depression in part due to the donations of Henry Ford, who became much attached to Berry and her work. He funded the building of, amongst others, a gym, an auditorium and a reservoir. Clara Hall, named after Ford's wife, is a particularly beautiful building and today often used as a backdrop in films.

By the 1930s the school curriculum at the Berry Schools had not changed drastically from the turn of the century. Religion was still a focus and the vocational and agricultural work had been adapted so that the schools offered eight months of work with no vacation, followed by four months of agricultural work where the Poor White boys were given the opportunity to work back their schooling and board. Girls were expected to do domestic work for the school such as sewing, cooking and laundry. The system led one contemporary visitor to proclaim that '[t]here is being worked out on that vast property a social experiment which is bound more and more as the years go by to be a leavening, stabilizing force in this upheaved world'.<sup>108</sup> Neither had the racial emphasis changed. In 1930 a visiting church group proclaimed the result of the schooling a 'priceless gift to America — the reclaiming of this great Anglo-Saxon stock, — "our contemporary ancestors" as one of our Southern educators so aptly calls them'.<sup>109</sup> Or 'reclaiming human waste' as a school brochure proclaimed in riper and more revealing language.<sup>110</sup>

In the period the school also attracted the attention of educators interested in exporting education, and the ideals of vocational education, to underdeveloped parts of the world. Anson Phelps Stokes, philanthropist and head of the Phelps Stokes Fund, which focussed on improving education in Africa and the Americas, called a visit to the Berry Schools 'one of the most interesting educational experiences which I have ever had'. It called to mind 'the first educational pilgrimage I made to the South on one of the late Robert C. Ogden's parties'. In a pamphlet he wrote for the schools, Phelps Stokes praised the vocational education they provided. It was 'one of the most invigorating and inspiring ideals which has been developed in our country in recent times ... Here is a real opportunity for an investment in young Americans of sound stock attached to their ancestral soil'. He was very aware that

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<sup>107</sup> John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Wallace Buttrick, July 29, 1918, Folder 416, Box 46, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>108</sup> Mrs. Alice Morris to Mrs. Walter G. Ladd, May 16, 1933. Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>109</sup> 'The New York Pilgrims' Seventh Annual Trip', Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>110</sup> 'Reclaiming human waste', Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

the students were Poor Whites who were being disciplined for modern and middle-class values. The students were trained in ‘ideals and practices’ that they could apply in their own communities, and not be tempted by the cities. ‘Of course one does not look for many scholarly research workers or highly independent and constructive thinkers in an institution of this type’, he said, ‘but rather for a group of students preparing themselves by mental and moral discipline for rural life and leadership’.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps most interestingly Thomas Jesse Jones, education director of the Phelps Stokes Fund, and who had conducted the Fund’s survey of educational needs in Africa, enthused that ‘[t]here is being worked out here the kind of education which the whole world needs ... the type of education which can be used effectively throughout the world’.<sup>112</sup>

Both the Berry Schools and Rabun Gap illustrate the discourse of the Southern educational awakening as it applied to Poor Whites. These were no mere schools but centres of racial reclamation. After graduation the students were expected to stay in the region and convert their friends and neighbours. The schools were crucial centres of rural regeneration in a region rapidly losing its best to the cities. The type of education the students received — indeed the only education they were capable of receiving — was the same industrial and vocational training that was being worked out for African Americans. American educators interested in international education, such as Jesse Jones, recognised that there was a relation between the training of Poor Whites in rural schools in Georgia and, say, black South Africans in Natal. This emphasises the shifting racial standard that Poor Whites were held to — at the same time both White and Not-White, they were to be treated differently. The usual rules did not quite apply.

What is clear is that the rhetoric of the Southern educational movement, led by Southerners but financed by Northerners, was not limited to an annual conference attended by millionaires. The ideas of the SEB, and enabled by the General Education Board, were digested, refined and implemented. Rabun Gap and the Berry Schools taught the Poor White on the same principles as the African American, but they made sure to discipline and monitor the habits and morals of the students. They took Poor Whites and made them into good whites.

### **The Carnegie Commission and international philanthropic networks**

In no wise was this ambition restricted to the American South, however. The ideas and values of the Southern and General Education Boards formed part of the transnational movement for progressive education that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. The SEB campaigns were the vanguard of an increasing interest in reforming education that encompassed a great many approaches and experiments. It included such diverse elements as Montessori schools in Italy, Rudolf Steiner’s

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<sup>111</sup> ‘My visit to the Berry schools’, Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

<sup>112</sup> School pamphlet, Folder 419, Box 47, Series 1.1, GEB.

Waldorf schools and Baden-Powell's Scout movement. Its advocates could be found in the United States, in Europe, and throughout the British Empire. In the United States the Progressive Education Association and, in Britain, the New Education Fellowship became the standard-bearers for a new type of education. Educators and educational lobbyists travelled between countries, delivering lectures, influencing policy. They drew on ideas of education in France, in Denmark, and in Germany. This was a networked world and a transnational discourse. Its focus was the Western world — the reform of education in Europe, the United States and, to a degree, the British Empire.

There was also an increasing interest in exporting these educational models to the developing world. In the United States the model of 'negro industrial education' was seen as compatible with 'native education' in Africa. Here there was significant philanthropic attention, as typified by the educational survey of Africa undertaken by the New York-based Phelps-Stokes Fund. American and European experts on 'native education' drew on the vocational and industrial education proved for African-Americans in the South as their model. But, as the SEB campaigns show, these forms of schooling and training were just as applicable to the Poor Whites and, in certain respects, developed for the group. The transnational education experts knew this and applied the same techniques when they encountered the Poor Whites of South Africa.

In 1923 the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY) appointed Frederick Paul Keppel as its president. Established in 1911, the corporation was one of the last, and certainly the largest of the philanthropies established by the Scottish-American steel magnate Andrew Carnegie. The organisation was founded 'to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding'.<sup>113</sup> Keppel joined the corporation from Columbia University, where he had been dean of Columbia College. Keppel was a hugely influential figure in the corporation and its international interwar policies were largely shaped by him and the network of advisors he drew upon.

Keppel was unabashed in his admiration for the work of the General Education Board and the health work of the Rockefeller Foundation.<sup>114</sup> He was also keenly interested in spreading Progressive educational ideas, particularly in the British Dominions. These policies and ideas 'internationalised American educational theories and practices throughout the English-speaking world'.<sup>115</sup> In order to accomplish this Keppel cultivated a network of what he called 'key men' — a loyal group of education experts scattered throughout the world. These key men 'were at once products and advocates of modernism, their confidence in the natural and social sciences melded into the grand themes of their times: the British Imperial Mission, American Expansionism, and shared Anglo-Saxon racial

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<sup>113</sup> Carnegie Corporation of New York, 'About' (Carnegie Corporation of New York, January 1, 2015), <https://www.carnegie.org/about/>.

<sup>114</sup> Frederick Paul Keppel, *The Foundation: Its Place in American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1930), 113.

<sup>115</sup> Richard Glotzer, 'A Long Shadow: Frederick P. Keppel, the Carnegie Corporation and the Dominions and Colonies Fund Area Experts 1923—1943', *History of Education* 38, no. 5 (September 2009): 621.

identity'.<sup>116</sup> This was a tacit allegiance to what the feminist scholar Tiffany Willoughby-Herard calls 'global whiteness'.<sup>117</sup> Along with these advisors, Keppel relied on advice from the educators at Columbia's Teachers College (TC), which was closely linked to the corporation. The college had been established to train young women for domestic service, then changed its focus to industrial training, and finally to the training of high-quality teachers.

The first of these key men was James Earl Russell, recently retired dean of Teacher's College, and appointed Keppel's Special Assistant. Like Keppel, Russell believed in the importance of the British colonies, and in the identity their white inhabitants shared. On a trip he took in 1928 to assess educational opportunities in Australia and New Zealand, Russell noted that '[t]hese countries are the experiment stations for all English speaking peoples'.<sup>118</sup> A few week later he wrote that Australia, in the midst of its White Australia policy, was 'a blood brother to us and will always be a "white man's country". It is trying out problems in democracy which ... must inevitably be an example to us ... The time is ripe for closer contacts and the safest way is through educational agencies'.<sup>119</sup>

Other key men followed. From Canada, Australia, New Zealand. Many of them were graduates of Teacher's College recruited by Russell and who held posts as directors and professors of education. They were experts who shared an interest in progressive and vocational education. In South Africa Keppel relied on Charles Loram, a TC graduate and now chief inspector of Native Schools in Natal. Loram was also the South African representative of the Phelps Stokes Fund, and had authored the highly influential *The Education of the South African Native*. Another key man was Ernst Malherbe, a TC graduate and lecturer at the University of Cape Town's Faculty of Education. Malherbe was also deeply interested in native education and had authored a comprehensive history of education in the country. A few years later, when Malherbe was appointed as director of South Africa's National Bureau of Education, he wrote to Keppel that 'you may look upon me as another link in the enterprise of international co-operation on education'.<sup>120</sup>

Keppel was convinced of the importance of the Dominions to the Western world. As English-speaking liberal democracies, they were to be embraced in a world polarised between 'communistic and totalitarian' states:

For those of us who believe in what, for want of a better term, is called the Anglo-Saxon tradition, these far distant lands have a significance beyond anything that can be measured by their present population, wealth or economic importance. This significance lies in an

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<sup>116</sup> Glotzer, 'A Long Shadow', 622. Also Ellen Condliffe Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 30.

<sup>117</sup> Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of A White Skin*.

<sup>118</sup> James Russell to Frederick Keppel, 2 April 1928, Box 316, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>119</sup> James Russell to Frederick Keppel, 25 April 1928, Box 316, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>120</sup> Ernst G. Malherbe to Frederick P. Keppel, 30 March 1929, 'Poor White Study', Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.



essential unity of the spirit, and agreement as to what things are really worthwhile in life, what things are right and what are wrong, which, in spite of superficial differences, already constitutes a bond between them and the other countries I have mentioned. The bond is, of course, closest with the other representatives of the English-speaking world.<sup>121</sup>

In 1926, in order to finance educational philanthropy in the English-speaking world, Keppel repurposed the corporation's Special Fund, thus far used only for small and unrelated causes, into the more focussed Dominions and Colonies Fund. That same year Russell was sent to East and Southern Africa on a fact-finding trip, and in Cape Town he was first introduced to Malherbe. It was also the year that Mabel Carney, a recently-hired lecturer at Teachers College and expert in rural education, took a sabbatical in order to conduct a survey of mission schools in Africa.

Mabel Carney had won renown in education circles for her book *Country Life and the Country School*. Carney, an enthusiastic member of the Country Life Movement, had spent years as a teacher, and then director of rural schools. Her book viewed schools as centres of rural uplift and 'the country school and the country teacher as regenerating forces for the new rural order'.<sup>122</sup> In fact, her book can practically be regarded as a textbook for the rural uplift policies and ideals of the Country Life Movement. It contains chapters on vocational training, domestic training and home improvement, Knapp's farm demonstration movement, school consolidation, rural school supervision, sanitation and on the role of the school in the community. She was particularly concerned with the condition of buildings: inferior farm homes were found 'among the more shiftless class of tenants ... They are to the country what tenements are to the city ... Their presence suggests "the country slum"'. The physical condition of school houses was also discussed, from ventilation to light, and right down to the colour of paint on the walls and the arrangement of trees on the grounds. This 'regeneration' was directed particularly at tenant farmers, which she regarded as part of an evil system. 'No satisfying rural civilization throughout the history of agriculture has ever been constructed upon a system of tenantry and landlordism', she wrote.<sup>123</sup> The solution to rural poverty and decline was the school, which she regarded as the 'best and most available center for upbuilding the rural community, and bears at present the greatest responsibility for socializing country life'.<sup>124</sup>

Midway through Carney's African trip she visited South Africa where she renewed contact with a number of old Teachers College students. In Cape Town a dinner was hosted in her honour by Malherbe, who had been her student in New York and had incorporated some of her ideas in his own book. She called South Africa 'the second best country in the world' but was struck by its rural poverty — both

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<sup>121</sup> Frederick Paul Keppel, *Philanthropy and Learning, with Other Papers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), 150-152.

<sup>122</sup> Mabel Carney, *Country Life and the Country School* (Chicago: Row, Peterson and Company, 1912), 327.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, v.

white and black. For the Poor White rural schools she prescribed a familiar remedy: ‘The country needs nothing so much as a big awakening along rural education lines with more of the extension work, community organisation, specialized teacher training, constructive supervision, and curriculum adaptation which had done so much for our farm life and rural schools at home’.<sup>125</sup> Upon her return to the United States, Carney wrote a glowing report of her time in South Africa and this, together with protracted lobbying by Charles Loram in Natal, helped convince the corporation to send Russell to Africa and finally, in 1927, Keppel himself.<sup>126</sup>

Keppel spent four months touring Africa. He was accompanied by James Bertram, Secretary of the Corporation, a Scot who had spent a number of years as a station master in Natal. Along with Loram and Thomas Jesse-Jones, Bertram was a key advisor to Keppel on African issues. The South African itinerary of the two Carnegie representatives was devised by Loram, who joined them for part of the journey, and arranged meetings with influential figures such as Jan Smuts, elder statesman and ex-Prime Minister. In Cape Town Keppel was finally introduced to Malherbe. During a discussion of possible research projects for the Corporation Malherbe showed the American an article he had written on the so-called ‘Poor White problem’ in South Africa. In the article Malherbe had written:

Today we have over 100,000 so-called ‘Poor Whites’. They are becoming a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of our White people, living as we do in the midst of the native population which outnumber us 5 to 1. We shall never solve the Poor White problem adequately until we get thorough and first-hand knowledge of the causes underlying this malady — the cumulative result of some maladjustment in our society in the past.<sup>127</sup>

Keppel was intrigued and asked Malherbe for a formal proposal. Upon their return to the United States the two Carnegie representatives drew up a report of educational opportunities in Africa. In South Africa they particularly recommended the corporation invest in adult education, library services and teaching material in local languages. However, as Bertram wrote, the educational advancement of the white in Africa was equally crucial: ‘[i]t is as important for a deputation to Africa not to “go native” as for it not to “go white”’, he wrote.<sup>128</sup> Along with vocational education, they recommended a research project to ascertain the extent of the ‘poor white class’ in South Africa, and on what could be done to stop its growth. ‘Estimates as high as 10% of the white population of the union (1,500,000) are given as the number of “poor white”’, wrote Bertram. ‘These people exist on the verges of towns, in slums, in isolation on the veldt, and even intermingled in native “locations”, in a state of physical, mental and moral destitution’. Again the object was racial rehabilitation: ‘[s]cientists state, inasmuch as the original

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<sup>125</sup> Richard Glotzer, ‘The Career of Mabel Carney: The Study of Race and Rural Development in the United States and South Africa’, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29, no. 2 (1996): 309—36.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 325.

<sup>127</sup> Brahm David Fleisch, ‘Social Scientists as Policy Makers: E. G. Malherbe and the National Bureau for Educational and Social Research, 1929—1943’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21, no. 3 (September 1995): 355.

<sup>128</sup> Report of the President and the Secretary as to an Educational program in Africa, 1927, CCNY, 43.



stock was of the best (Nordic, and a selected, courageous and enterprising class of Nordic), that under proper treatment the qualities of the original stock might be brought to the surface in coming generations'.<sup>129</sup> The corporation agreed to fund the project, and research on the Poor White problem in South Africa was begun.

The resulting Carnegie Commission on the Poor White Problem was a multi-year investigation that remains extraordinarily influential to this day. The extent of its significance is still being debated nearly a century later. On the one hand scholars like Ann Laura Stoler argue that the Commission's final report on how to resolve the 'problem' anticipates the creation of a racialised welfare state. 'Prescriptions for family life, child rearing, and education were critical to it. The Poor White Problem was fundamental to the making of Apartheid, and the commission's recommendations laid its concrete foundations'.<sup>130</sup> On the other C.J. Groenewald argues that the investigation was just one of many projects funded in South Africa by the Carnegie Corporation, and for all its racialised language, hardly a supremacist masterplan. According to him the commission was more notable for its innovative interdisciplinary approach, its methodology, and its approach to fieldwork.<sup>131</sup> Whichever approach is correct, what the investigation did have going for it was a sense of timing.

White South Africa had been growing steadily more concerned about Poor Whites since the late nineteenth century when they were a discordant presence in the newly established mining city of Johannesburg. Colonial concern, coupled with pressure from religious groups, especially the Afrikaans Dutch Reformed Church, led to the establishment of various commissions of inquiry into the problem of white poverty, which was conceived as being largely urban in character. A combination of circumstances — drought, disease, inheritance law, the Second Boer War and its devastating policy of scorched earth — led to the traumatic urbanisation of the farming-oriented Afrikaners. By the 1920s the Poor Whites had increasingly become a nationalist cause for Afrikaner politicians, culminating in the 'Poor White' election of 1924 which saw an Afrikaner Nationalist government replace a British colonial one. More drought followed and, by the time of the Great Depression, the Poor White Problem had become something akin to a national mania.<sup>132</sup> The findings of a networked and academically credible commission, funded by a major American philanthropy, were seized upon as concrete data and used to spur interest groups into action. The report, and the activity it spurred, 'became the centre for the war against white poverty'. It was extensively debated at *volkskongresse*, or 'People's congresses', which established committees to implement the recommendations of the report. 'In its wake followed

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<sup>129</sup> Report of the President and the Secretary as to an Educational program in Africa, 1927, CCNY, 45.

<sup>130</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, 'Tense and Tender Ties: The Politics of Comparison in North American History and (Post) Colonial Studies', *The Journal of American History* 88, no. 3 (December 2001): 859.

<sup>131</sup> C. J. Groenewald, 'The Methodology of Poverty Research in South Africa: The Case of the First Carnegie Investigation 1929—1932', *Social Dynamics* 13, no. 2 (1987): 60—74.

<sup>132</sup> This is addressed more fully in Edward-John Bottomley, *Poor White* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012).

the full institutionalisation of sociology and social work as academic disciplines at South African universities' as well as the establishment of a government department of social welfare.<sup>133</sup>

Importantly, and in line with the Carnegie Corporation's interests, its success led to the dramatic expansion of the National Bureau for Educational Research, a government research unit directed by Malherbe. The corporation effectively subsidised Malherbe's salary for the first two years of the Bureau's existence. The Bureau acted as the South African link in the chain of the Corporation's educational programme, and was devoted to implementing education reform along American lines.<sup>134</sup> The policy-orientated research conducted by the Bureau, such as a large-scale intelligence testing, was heavily influenced by Malherbe's training in New York.<sup>135</sup>

The Commission itself was intricately connected to the United States and to theories of rural uplift that had been trialled in the South. It consisted of five sections, each under the purview of a lead investigator: economics, psychology, education, sociology and health. The Commission was led by Raymond Wilcocks, a professor of psychology at the University of Stellenbosch. Wilcocks had already travelled to the United States on a Carnegie Corporation grant to conduct a comparative study on Poor Whites in the U.S. South and South Africa. Loram was initially placed in charge of the education study, but Malherbe later took charge.<sup>136</sup> The sociological section was headed by a representative of the Dutch Reformed Church, Reverend Johannes Albertyn. He was advised by another clergyman, Anton Luckhoff, who had also travelled to the United States on a Carnegie grant and had also done a comparative study on Southern and South African Poor Whites.

The Commission as a whole also benefited from the advice of number of U.S. academics. The investigators, most notably Malherbe, consulted a reading list on rural poverty drawn up by, amongst others, Thomas Jesse Jones of the Phelps-Stokes Fund. Jones also provided methodological advice to the investigators in the initial stages. The reading list was, in many aspects, a mirror of the work the GEB had done twenty years earlier, and reflected the interests of the SEB: it contained articles and books on mountain Poor Whites, rural school administration, Danish folk schools, vocational education, community and church involvement, mental testing as well as pamphlets on farm schools, farm demonstrations and farmers cooperatives.<sup>137</sup>

Jones was initially supposed to travel to South Africa as a 'Poor White sociologist'. The Commission was enthusiastic about having an outside opinion to advise it on whether the 'remedial measures which were being applied in South Africa had been tried and found wanting elsewhere'.<sup>138</sup> As Loram explained

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<sup>133</sup> Groenewald, 'The Methodology of Poverty Research in South Africa', 63.

<sup>134</sup> Zine Magubane, 'The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107, no. 4 (October 1, 2008): 697.

<sup>135</sup> Fleisch, 'Social Scientists as Policy Makers', 353-354.

<sup>136</sup> Charles T. Loram to Frederick P. Keppel, 14 July, 1928, 'Poor White Study', Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>137</sup> Coulter memorandum, 9 April, 1929, 'Poor White Study', Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>138</sup> 'Report on the sociological aspect of the Poor White question', Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

it, South African sociologists had mostly focussed on ‘native’ issues, and lacked academic experience of Poor Whites. Jones, on the other hand, he regarded as ‘the leading authority in the world on the education of backward peoples’.<sup>139</sup> Jones declined to travel, however, and the corporation ended up funding two other U.S. academics to work in South Africa with the commission — Charles Coulter, a sociology professor at Ohio Wesleyan University, and Kenyon Butterfield, of Michigan Agricultural College.<sup>140</sup> Butterfield, whose thinking had deeply influenced the work of Mabel Carney, championed Knapp’s farm demonstration method, and was a renowned sociologist on rural decline. He had also been a member of Roosevelt’s Country Life Commission.

Given the deep influence of U.S. educational thinking on the establishment and makeup of the Carnegie Commission as well as the commissioners themselves, it should come as no surprise that the Commission’s educational findings closely followed the thinking and methods that had been trialled on Southern Poor Whites decades earlier. The primary purpose of the study was racially regenerative: it explicitly stated that it had ‘clearly in mind the ultimate re-integration of this section of our submerged population into the general body of European society in South Africa’.<sup>141</sup> It was also particularly concerned with the perceived growth of class distinction among Afrikaners, which led to increased social intercourse between black and white people:

The *bywoner* [tenant farmer] and farm labourer are in many cases no longer received as social equals by the land-owner and his family. They are very often allowed only in the kitchen of the house ... thus the poor white in time comes to associate with non-Europeans. The result is that the respect of the coloured man for the European fellow-worker disappears and from social intercourse to miscegenation is but a step.<sup>142</sup>

This mirrored similar fears about relations between white and black sharecroppers in the U.S. South.

The commissioners found that South Africa’s education system for whites was inadequate and regarded with suspicion by rural Poor Whites, ‘as a thing that had no bearing on their daily life and needs’. An emphasis on classical subjects, such as algebra and Latin, had meant that ‘poverty and inferiority’ had become associated with industrial and vocational training. These skills had been taught to South African black and coloured pupils, but not to the rural Poor Whites. This had undoubtedly become ‘an obstacle to the practice and the development of skilled trades among the Dutch-speaking population, which had at first practically only a farming tradition and not the industrial tradition of later immigrants’.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Charles T. Loram to E.G. Jansen, December 14 1929, Box 295, Folder 8, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>140</sup> Frederick P. Keppel to Charles T. Loram, January 18, 1929, ‘Poor White Study’, Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>141</sup> Report on the sociological aspect of the Poor White question, ‘Poor White Study’, Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY.

<sup>142</sup> Johannes R. Albertyn and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *The Poor White and Society* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 24.

<sup>143</sup> The Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Joint Findings and Recommendations* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), ix.

The Commission's solution was to update the school curriculum to make it more relevant for rural pupils. This included more interesting reading material. The Commission recommended the government tie vocational and industrial training to schools, as well as to offer adult vocational training — these skills would be needed by a rapidly urbanising population. But, in order to prevent this urban drift and to regenerate the countryside, the Commission recommended teaching improved farming methods. Rural isolation meant that many Poor White farmers were using outdated methods. The recommended solution was the aggressive expansion of the agricultural extension work which had recently been begun by the government, and which had been modelled on the U.S system, itself derived from Seaman Knapp.<sup>144</sup> In fact, said the Commission, the farmer's cooperative system would be most effective if it was taught to farmers from a young age — and implemented in the schools.<sup>145</sup> The Commission also recommended the centralisation of farm schools in order to better serve as social centres, and to have an uplifting effect on the surrounding community. Better quality teachers were also needed.

Finally, the report found it important to train Poor White women and girls for domestic life. The same isolation that had led to the backwardness of farming methods 'contributed to keep the poor white family backward as regards housing and housekeeping'. In fact '[i]n many ways poor housing has a detrimental effect on the orderliness, refinement and morality of family life'.<sup>146</sup> Poor White mothers were to be trained in health, nursing and infant care, as well as the upbringing of children. And both mothers and daughters were to be instructed on nutrition and the proper choice and preparation of foods.

The Carnegie Corporation regarded the Commission as a complete success and distributed its report widely in U.S. academic circles. Writing in 1942, nearly a decade after the publication of the report, Keppel regarded the Poor White study as one of the great successes — one of the 'indisputable 'strikes' in favour of the Colonies and Dominions Fund, along with the establishment of Councils for Educational Research in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>147</sup> It was so successful that the corporation planned a follow-up study of the American Poor White under the leadership of Malherbe, but this was set aside after the discovery of the Dutch academic Den Hollander's similar research.<sup>148</sup>

The Carnegie Commission was a model of interdisciplinary cooperation that led to real policy reform — partly based on the political environment the final report was released in, and partly because the commissioners could draw on established practices that had already proved successful in the United States. The Carnegie commissioners did not view the South African Poor White in isolation, but as a 'backward' people, characteristic of both racial degeneration and racial mixing, and found in various

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<sup>144</sup> Glotzer, 'The Career of Mabel Carney', 322.

<sup>145</sup> The Carnegie Commission, *Joint Findings*, xii.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid*, xviii.

<sup>147</sup> 'Memorandum on the activities of Carnegie Corporation in the British Colonies and Southern Dominions', Box 4, Series I.D, CCNY.

<sup>148</sup> Reminiscences of E.G. Malherbe, 17, Oral History Project, CCNY.

parts of the world. It was so intent on this conception that it ignored the glaring contradiction in its methods: the Poor Whites in South Africa had long been regarded as primarily an urban problem — for nearly forty years various commissions had attempted to understand the appearance of Poor White slums in Johannesburg and Cape Town. In drawing on American methods of educational reform, the Poor Whites were recast as primarily a rural phenomenon. Unlike the corrupt urban poor, the poor of the countryside could still be regenerated, and depopulated rural regions uplifted. They could still be made as white as the Americans had made them.

## **Conclusion**

Soon after the publication of the Carnegie Commission's report, Malherbe penned an article arguing for the introduction of a more relevant, vocational-based curriculum in schools. The outdated teaching of Latin and algebra to the children of farmers meant that schools were 'actually breeding poor whites'.<sup>149</sup> This was a central tenant of the movement for educational reform. It is striking how similar the core beliefs of the Carnegie Poor White Commission are to the Country Life Commission — constituted twenty years earlier on another continent. The reason, of course, is that both commissions internalised the assumptions of Progressive-era educational reform: educational uplift and racial uplift went hand in hand. The Poor Whites could be educated white. These assumptions crossed oceans as networks with a concern for Anglo-Saxon racial solidarity called on experts to diagnose and reform similar problems in very different parts of the world. The same solution was recommended and the same methods applied.

The farm demonstration technique of Seaman Knapp, later taken up by the governments of South Africa and the United States as the agricultural extension service, was believed to be a key method of uplifting impoverished regions by increasing their income. But the farm demonstrations were also a key source of training in the values of the white middle class. Farmers were not only taught how to cover winter crops, but to keep their yards and bodies clean; their sons were taught values of thrift and competition and their daughters and wives were taught the techniques of modern civilised home-making.

It is no accident that the extension service was often attached to the rural school. Here Poor White children could be trained from a young age in how to act white and how to think white. But before these schools could function properly, they had to be improved — the buildings had to be rebuilt, the country schools centralised — so that they could radiate a civilising influence across the rural communities they existed in. The SEB and GEB campaigns to improve rural education were part of an avowed effort to

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<sup>149</sup> 'Character building and hypocrisy in our national life', Box 209, Series III.A Grants, CCNY, 33.

uplift Poor Whites. This was not glossed over, but proudly declared in halls packed by reform-minded educators and philanthropists.

As the Rabun-Gap and Berry schools show these were not mere ideals, but methods that were put into practice across the South. The industrial and vocational training that had so far been prescribed for African-Americans could be repurposed to uplift another backward people. And it did not stop there. Education reform formed part of a number of movements, such as the Country Life Movement and Progressive Education. As such they plugged into transnational networks where like-minded experts were deployed to diagnose troubled regions as they had once diagnosed the South. The Carnegie Commission replicated the same ideas and the same methods that its American-trained experts had been taught and had themselves disseminated. It was another part of the international movement for education reform which had as its inspiration the uplift of the Poor White. In this way the Poor White that was found in the poor country schools of Tennessee and Alabama was the same Poor White found in the poor country schools of the Karoo and the veldt.

# Curing the Poor White

## *Environment, disease and racial degeneration*

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For the reformers and experts concerned with the Poor Whites, it was as important to discipline the body as it was to discipline the mind. The previous chapter examined the governance of Poor Whites through the influential and explicitly transnational discourse of training. This chapter continues the focus on transnational governmental programmes by examining the parallel discourse of health and sanitation. Philanthropies regarded their attempts to improve the health of the Poor White population as opportunities to reform Poor Whites' habits, including cleanliness and sanitation. Experts tied the perceived degeneration of the group to their ill health. Improving their health was akin to rehabilitating their racial status. Curing the Poor Whites meant uplifting the Poor Whites to the healthy middle class. The chapter demonstrates this by looking at how the group was intimately connected to a variety of medical and pseudo-scientific discourses, as well as how a transnational network of philanthropies and experts employed these discourses to govern. It shows how the trope of degeneration was particularly employed in eugenics to prove that Poor Whites held a danger to the white race as a whole. It then examines how the diseased identity of Poor Whites was taken even further via the search for a cure for 'Poor Whiteism' which was regarded in the U.S. South as hookworm disease, in South Africa as malaria, and in the British settler societies as tropical degeneration. In each case finding a cure for 'Poor Whiteism' served as the impetus for a broader transnational medical governance, aptly demonstrated by U.S. philanthropic imperialism. The chapter thus demonstrates that the discourse of health and sanitation was another form of transnational governmentality, but also deepens its concern with biopolitics, biopower and the body.

### **The discovery of 'Poor Whiteism'**

In 1912 Walter Hines Page, an influential New York publisher, made a startling announcement in his magazine *World's Work*. The secret cause behind the downfall of advanced civilizations had been discovered: a disease, hitherto unknown. Its effects were insidious, devastating and widespread. It had led to the ruin of the Romans, the Ancient Greeks and the pharaohs. 'This debilitating disease has played an incalculable part in the history of all warm countries', he wrote. 'The present condition of China, of India, and of Central America, and of parts of South America, and of the West Indies is in great measure accounted for by its ravages, in some of these countries for many centuries'.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Hines Page, 'The Hookworm in Civilization', *World's Work*, September 1912, 504.



It was now revealed that in these countries a parasitical worm — invisible to the naked eye — attached itself to the digestive organs of its human hosts and hid there, sucking nutrients, causing exhaustion and sapping the will to work. Yet this ‘hookworm disease’ was not some far-off malady of the tropics. It was already present in the United States, and had been there for centuries. ‘The southern people are of almost pure English stock. It has been hard to explain their backwardness, for they are descended from capable ancestors and inhabit a rich land’, wrote Page. ‘Now, for the first time, the main cause of their long backwardness is explained and it is a removable cause. The hookworm has probably played a larger part in our southern history than slavery or wars or any political dogma or economic creed’.<sup>2</sup>

There was hope for the sufferers of the disease, however. Page announced that he was part of a new Rockefeller-funded initiative set up to combat the malady. Once detected it was easily and inexpensively cured. Removal brought new vitality and initiative. Poor farmers who had been unable to plough their lands suddenly found the energy not only to complete their work, but to paint and repair their house. The cause of ‘Poor Whiteism’ had been discovered and its cure held great promise for the development of afflicted regions. ‘Every man who knows the people of the southern states sees in the results of this work [a] new epoch in their history and, because of its sanitary suggestiveness, a new epoch in our national history’, declared Page.<sup>3</sup>

The search for a cure for Poor Whiteism illustrates a central tension of societies dependent on racial control such as colonial Britain or the U.S. South of the Jim Crow-era. The era of white racial triumphalism coincides with the greatest concern over the fragility of the white race. At stake was not only survival, but the standards of civilization. The slightest slip and the white race would regress to the level of the natives it ostensibly ruled. Newly discovered diseases turned strong settlers into useless Poor Whites. Colonialism resulted in the sustained attempt to settle environments very different from temperate Europe. In the heat of the tropics men and women wilted like flowers. The very environment seemed hostile to white settlement. And even if they succeeded, the wrong type of settler would pass his or her bad blood on to their children who would inherit weak or immoral traits. The result: a withered and corrupt race in strange climes, far removed from their healthy and virtuous ancestors.

These concerns did not escape the philanthropies of the period, and this chapter examines their attempts to cure and strengthen impoverished whites in a physical and moral sense. By eradicating Poor Whiteism, the philanthropies were helping to alleviate racial concerns over their moral, physical and hygienic standards which were falling dangerously close to that of the native. In their efforts to cure Poor Whiteism the philanthropies were helping to ‘whiten’ the Poor Whites and the sick regions they inhabited.

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<sup>2</sup> Page, ‘The Hookworm in Civilization’, 504

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Eugenics and the science of race

In 1883, Francis Galton, cousin to Charles Darwin and evangelist for evolutionary theory, developed a theory of biological inheritance that would go on to ignite interest across the world. His work on eugenics held that moral traits, such as piety, temperance and a good work ethic, could be inherited, and that this inheritance was possible on a larger scale than ever thought possible. The genetic stock of an entire race — in the era's sense of 'Irish' and 'Anglo-Saxon' races — could be improved through better breeding. Conversely, a race could degenerate through an influx of bad blood, either from unwanted traits, such as criminality, or through mixing with other, lesser races. Eugenics was taken up by Social Darwinists who held to a strict Victorian hierarchy of races throughout the world. At the top were the white races now known as Caucasian, and at the bottom were the black races of Africa. The Poor Whites, too white to be disinherited and too corrupt to be embraced, became natural targets of eugenic interest. Moreover, they were doubly dangerous because of their frequent contact with other races on the farms and in the factories and slums.

Popular ways of illustrating eugenic inheritance were family studies, the most well-known of which were of the Juke and Kallikak families. These pseudoscientific studies purported to show that the perceived degeneracy, illiteracy, poverty and criminality of Poor White families could be traced through generations. Henry Goddard's study of the Kallikaks (from the Greek *kallos* for beauty and *kakos* for bad) traced the descendants of the American Revolutionary War soldier Martin Kallikak who, before repenting and marrying a Quaker woman, lived a sinful life with a 'feeble-minded tavern girl'. Goddard was conveniently able to show that, after two generations, the first relationship resulted in 'hundreds of the highest type of human beings'. The other relationship bore a son known as 'Old Horror' and from him 'hundreds of the lowest type of human beings'.<sup>4</sup> The Kallikak study was the 'primal myth of the eugenics movement'<sup>5</sup>, in the words of Stephen Jay Gould. 'Eugenic family studies such as these influenced the public's understanding of what constituted "degeneracy" for nearly half a century'.<sup>6</sup>

'It is hard to overestimate the influence of Darwinian and eugenic ideas in the Progressive Era', wrote the economist Thomas Leonard. 'One cannot fully understand the economic ideas that underwrote labor and immigration reform without also understanding the biological thought that crucially informed them'.<sup>7</sup> Although now mostly dismissed as a pseudoscience, eugenics was taken very seriously in the first half of the twentieth century. It was a broad and hugely popular scientific field that contained within

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Garrett, *General Psychology* (New York: American Book Co., 1955), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, Revised and expanded. (New York, NY: Econo-Clad Books, 1999), 198.

<sup>6</sup> J. David Smith and Michael Wehmeyer, 'Who Was Deborah Kallikak?', *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities* 50, no. 2 (April 2012): 169—78.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas C. Leonard, 'Mistaking Eugenics for Social Darwinism: Why Eugenics Is Missing from the History of American Economics', *History of Political Economy* 37 (2005): 202.

it differing schools and theoretical positions. It was introduced to university curriculums and its adherents included Nobel prize-winning scholars, writers, artists, journalists, cranks, kooks, radicals and presidents.<sup>8</sup> Theodore Roosevelt was keenly interested, writing in 1913 to Charles Davenport, the leading eugenicist in the United States, that ‘society has no business to permit degenerates to reproduce their kind ... It is really extraordinary that our people refuse to apply to human beings such elementary knowledge as every successful farmer is obliged to apply to his own stock breeding’.<sup>9</sup> Just a few years later, eugenic views were endorsed by the U.S. government’s health department. ‘The U.S. Public Health Service Surgeon General supervised eugenic examinations and issued eugenic marriage certificates. Dr. W.C. Rucker, the assistant surgeon general, said “Eugenics is a science. It is a fact, not a fad.”’<sup>10</sup>

Long before the contemporary era of globalization and the internationalization of science, eugenics was known (if not always actively supported) virtually throughout the world. The *Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* has chapters on Britain, South Asia, Australia, New Zealand, China, Hong Kong, South Africa, Kenya, Southeast Asia, Germany, France and its colonies, Netherlands and the Dutch East Indies, the Scandinavian states, Southern Europe, Eastern Europe, Russia and the Soviet Union, Japan, Iran, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Brazil, the United States and Canada.<sup>11</sup>

Broadly, eugenics divided into two areas of interest — positive eugenics and negative eugenics. The former emphasised strengthening the race — producing ‘better babies’ and ‘fitter families’ through selective breeding. The latter was of a more catastrophic bent, focussing on ‘race suicide’ and degeneration. Negative eugenics focussed on the elimination of the ‘unfit’ from the breeding pool in order to strengthen the whole. This included those with physical handicaps and the ‘feeble-minded’, a somewhat vague term which encompassed learning disabilities but could also be linked to vice. Although euthanasia was sometimes recommended as a solution, sterilisation was more accepted. In the United States, 31 states instituted compulsory sterilisation — usually of ‘imbeciles’ in asylums. In this period Harry Laughlin, superintendent of the Eugenic Records Office (ERO), the leading eugenic research centre in the United States, published his ‘Model Eugenic Sterilization Law’ which proposed the sterilisation of the ‘socially inadequate’. This included the ‘feeble-minded, insane, criminalistic,

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<sup>8</sup> Paul A. Lombardo, ‘Taking Eugenics Seriously: Three Generations of ??? Are Enough?’, *Florida State University Law Review* 30, no. 191 (2003): 191—218.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Image ID#1328’, by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, *Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement*, accessed 3 August 2015, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Lombardo, ‘Taking Eugenics Seriously’, 210.

<sup>11</sup> Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics* (United States: Oxford University Press, 2012). This is also a helpful guide to the literature on eugenics, which is huge and growing. Recent works are Desmond King and Randall Hansen, *Sterilized by the State: Eugenics, Race, and the Population Scare in Twentieth-Century North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Stefan Kühl, *For the Betterment of the Race: The Rise and Fall of the International Movement for Eugenics and Racial Hygiene* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

epileptic, inebriate, disease, blind, deaf; deformed; and dependent' — including 'orphans, ne'er-dowells, tramps, the homeless and paupers'.<sup>12</sup>

In the U.S. these theories were first tested on Poor White bodies. The first person to be sterilized was Carrie Buck from Charlottesville, Virginia, a seventeen-year-old girl with a young son. She was sterilized for supposed hereditary traits of feeble-mindedness and sexual promiscuity. Buck's mother was already in an asylum. After a legal challenge was mounted, Buck was put on trial. Colony Superintendent Dr. Albert Priddy's testimony as to her character was that Buck had 'a record of immorality, prostitution, untruthfulness and syphilis'. The Buck family 'belong[ed] to the shiftless, ignorant, and worthless class of anti-social whites of the South'. In 1927, on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, Justice Oliver Wendall Holmes, Jr.'s formal opinion decreed that '[i]t is better for all the world, if instead of waiting to execute degenerate offspring for crime or to let them starve for their imbecility, society can prevent those who are manifestly unfit from continuing their kind ... Three generations of imbeciles are enough'. In total, more than 60,000 Americans were subject to forced sterilisation.<sup>13</sup>

The U.S. was not alone in this practice. In Sweden, between 1935 and 1975, a total of 62 888 sterilisations were performed for reasons of eugenic engineering.<sup>14</sup> In the UK, the Mental Deficiency Act of 1913 had a provision for the segregation and registration of, among others, the 'feeble-minded' and 'moral imbeciles'. The latter were deemed to have a proclivity for crime and drink. Josiah Wedgwood, one of only two MPs who voted against the bill, tried to counter arguments of hereditary mental deficiency by arguing that feeble-mindedness was a product of poor living conditions; that it was environmental. 'Surely we must recognise that at the bottom of all these problems of the feeble-minded is the problem of poverty and overcrowding', he said. 'People are crammed together in such a way that they cannot possibly grow up to be normal people'. The Bill, said Wedgwood, was 'a spirit of the horrible Eugenic Society which is setting out to breed up the working class as though they were cattle. The one object in life of the society seems to be to make mankind as perfect as poultry'.<sup>15</sup>

In contrast to the, as it were, 'idealistic' narrative of positive eugenics, the gloomy predictions of negative eugenics warned of 'race suicide'. Eugenicists held, paradoxically, that the stronger, fitter Anglo-Saxon race was in danger of being overwhelmed by the weaker races. The reasons varied widely: some held that Anglo-Saxons were more suited to traditional, rural life and could not adapt to increasing urbanisation. In the British colonies, such as South Africa, the colonised were thought to already be practicing a 'primitive' form of eugenics by not allowing mentally or physically handicapped children

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<sup>12</sup> Paul A. Lombardo, 'Eugenic Sterilization Laws', by Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, *Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement*, accessed 3 August 2015, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Alberto Spektorowski and Elisabet Mizrahi, 'Eugenics and the Welfare State in Sweden: The Politics of Social Margins and the Idea of a Productive Society', *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 3 (2004): 333—52.

<sup>15</sup> Jayne Woodhouse, 'Eugenics and the Feeble-minded: The Parliamentary Debates of 1912-14', *History of Education* 11, no. 2 (1982): 33.

to live, and keeping their stock strong as a result.<sup>16</sup> The race could also degenerate by interbreeding with those of a lower order. Thus eugenicists were firmly, and unsurprisingly, against miscegenation. As the Poor Whites were most likely to come into contact with other races and were already viewed as morally corrupt, the group became the most likely to compromise the entire race as a result.

In his influential 1916 book *The Passing of the Great Race* Madison Grant, chairman of the New York Zoological Society and a leading eugenicist, argued that '[w]hen it becomes thoroughly understood that the children of mixed marriages between contrasted races belong to the lower type, the importance of transmitting in unimpaired purity the blood inheritance of ages will be appreciated at its full value'.<sup>17</sup>

Eugenic fears of race mixing in the U.S. interacted with federal and state policy on a host of levels. Their arguments, and the perceived expertise of scientific racism, contributed to bans on mixed marriages. By 1915, 28 states had declared mixed marriages invalid. Eugenicists were similarly involved in calls for immigration restriction in the period. The ERO's Harry Laughlin testified before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Immigration and Naturalization that the American (Anglo-Saxon) gene pool was being diluted by morally and intellectually inferior immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe. He was appointed 'eugenics expert' for the committee and eventually testified before Congress as an expert in favour of a Bill that became the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924.

As a developing and immensely exciting scientific discipline which promised to alleviate human suffering, it should not be surprising that philanthropic funding and eugenics came into contact. For the Rockefeller organisations, the association began on a very small scale when, in 1911, general counsel Starr J. Murphy wrote to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to suggest funding fieldworkers to conduct eugenic surveys on behalf of Eugenic Records Office, which had recently been founded by Charles Davenport. Murphy wrote that he was 'strongly impressed with the importance and practical value of the work of [Davenport's] Committee on Eugenics'. Eugenics, he explained, would result in a population 'such as will not require such enormous expenditures as we are now compelled to make in caring for those who by reason of inherited qualities are defective, criminal, or susceptible to disease'. At present, '[t]he perpetuation of this [feeble-minded] stock is outrageous from every point of view, and it imposes an enormous burden upon society'. The ERO would rouse the spirit of the public and, when this was accomplished, 'it must be crystallized into appropriate legislation. Since the weak and the criminal will not be guided in their matings by patriotism or family pride, more powerful influences must be exerted as the case requires; and as for the idiots, low imbeciles, incurable and dangerous criminals, they may under appropriate restrictions be prevented from procreation either by segregation during the

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<sup>16</sup> Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Paul A. Lombardo, 'Eugenic Laws against Race Mixing', by Archive of the Eugenics Record Office, *Image Archive on the American Eugenics Movement*, accessed 4 August 2015, <http://www.eugenicsarchive.org/eugenics/list3.pl>.

reproductive period, or even by sterilization'.<sup>18</sup> Despite this personal and impassioned plea, he remained cautious on behalf of the organisation and suggested proceeding carefully.

Murphy's restraint did not last, however, and the following month he wrote to Rockefeller Jr. that 'I have become greatly interested in this subject of Eugenics, and believe it to be one of those fundamental things which underlie all our problems of education, of crime, and of charity'.<sup>19</sup> Seven months later the Rockefeller organisation began paying the salaries of six full-time fieldworkers and provided grants for the publication of Davenport's research. Persistent questions arose over Davenport's scientific expertise, however. In June 1912 Frederick Gates expressed as much in a letter to Rockefeller Jr. but noted that '[t]his work of eugenics is undoubtedly of great importance. It has in it much promise'<sup>20</sup>. These misgivings never quite went away and Murphy's excitement soon began to wane. The organisation ceased funding ERO fieldworkers in 1915.

Although eugenics continued to increase in popularity, the next significant involvement of Rockefeller philanthropy was not until a decade later. In 1925 Leon F. Whitney, Field Secretary of the American Eugenics Society, wrote to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to inform him that that he had been appointed as a member of their finance committee. 'You are needed in this work', he wrote. 'Recent investigations have shown that we had had the "cart before the horse" in our thinking that we could clean up the slums thereby clean the people, that we could better environmental conditions and thereby cut down criminality, that we could build churches and make people good, that we could build great institutions of learning and thereby raise the mental level of our people ... the people make the slums; moral people are born, not made'.<sup>21</sup>

Two days later John D. Rockefeller, Jr. wrote to Arthur Woods, a prominent police reformer, expert on unemployment, and president of the Rockefeller Center, asking for his advice. It was out of the question that he accept a position on the Eugenics Society yet 'the matter of which the letter speaks is, I believe, a profoundly important one to the future of this country ... I should like to be helpful in the field, but could not take any personal part'.<sup>22</sup> The Rockefeller organisation did, however, agree to an annual gift of \$5 000 to the Society, which continued until 1929, when contributions were scaled down and eventually came to a stop in 1930.

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<sup>18</sup> Starr J. Murphy to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., February 9, 1911, American Breeder's Association, Folder 2, Box 1, Series F, OMR.

<sup>19</sup> Starr J. Murphy to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., March 17, 1911, American Breeder's Association, Folder 2, Box 1, Series F, OMR.

<sup>20</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., June 14, 1912, American Breeder's Association, Folder 2, Box 1, Series F, OMR.

<sup>21</sup> Leon F. Whitney to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., January 28, 1925, American Eugenics Society, Folder 599, Box 60, OMR.

<sup>22</sup> John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to Arthur Woods, January 30, 1925, Folder 599, Box 60, OMR.



For Rockefeller Jr. issues of eugenics, population control and family planning seem to have been part of the same concern and a personal interest. His son, John D. Rockefeller III, shared his passion.<sup>23</sup> A few years earlier Frederick Osborn, a prominent eugenicist who would eventually reform the field after the atrocities of Nazi race science, or *Rassenhygiene*, had written to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. asking for funding for a study by the American Eugenics Society, of which he was a founding member. Although nothing seemed to come of this, Osborn entered the picture again in 1936 when John D. Rockefeller III wrote to him to personally contribute \$500 ‘in view of my very real interest in the field within which the [American Eugenics] society operates’.<sup>24</sup> Rockefeller III continued to gift comparatively small amounts of money to the society until 1941. Osborn, who was well-known as a population researcher, evidently impressed the Rockefellers. He served on the Board of Trustees of the Rockefeller Institute from 1938 till 1946. In November 1952 John D. Rockefeller III established his Population Council to research, at least initially, birth control and family planning. He served as president of the Council and appointed Osborn as his second-in-command. In 1953 the Rockefeller Foundation became involved through the funding of research into population problems in India. From there the Council expanded research into other Asian countries and, in 1957, Osborn was appointed president until 1959, when he stepped down.

What is important to note here is the flow of philanthropic focus from Poor White bodies to more global concerns. In the United States eugenics moved from the sterilisation of Carrie Buck, one of the ‘shiftless’ and ‘worthless’ whites of the South, to studying overpopulation in India and improving access to family planning information in Taiwan. At the very heart of U.S. philanthropic imperialism was a concern for the Poor Whites.

In South Africa, for instance, the ‘vocabulary of Social Darwinism’ has been traced to the 1870s. The ideas were spread by networks of amateur scientific organisations seeking to provide justification for formal racial segregation.<sup>25</sup> This rise is reflected in the various government investigations into white poverty. The earliest reports, such as the Transvaal Indigency Commission of 1906-1908 did not reflect much eugenic thought. Yet by 1922, the report of the Unemployment Commission was filled with eugenic language. It was especially concerned with ‘feeble-mindedness’. The report put it starkly: ‘[w]hile poverty and unemployment may be down to various causes which are not fundamental, the primary cause is the inherent incapacity, as the result of feeble-mindedness, to compete on equal terms with normal individuals’.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center. ‘Family Planning · Health’. *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*. Accessed 4 August 2015. [http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/health/family-planning#\\_ftn1](http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/health/family-planning#_ftn1).

<sup>24</sup> John D. Rockefeller 3rd to Frederick Osborn, June 30, 1936, American Eugenics Society JDR 3rd correspondence, Folder 600, Box 60, OMR.

<sup>25</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*.

<sup>26</sup> U.G. 16 (1921), 15.



One of the experts testifying before the commission was Dr. J.T. Dunston, then Commissioner in the Union for Mental Disorders. According to him the Poor Whites lacked ‘foresight or reasoning power, and unless they are supervised they gradually degenerate’. Eventually they would become criminals, whether they wanted to or not: ‘It is an extraordinarily interesting thing that we expect to find these people, owing to their incapacity to compete, among the prostitutes and criminals and unemployed, and unemployables and weaklings. We expect to find them all there’. Although not advocating forced sterilisation (as he would in later years) Dunston argued that, in order to protect the race from degeneration, marriage should be restricted to ‘those who are normal and can reproduce normal people’.<sup>27</sup>

The Carnegie Commission was, in its turn, similarly saturated with eugenic thought. This is clear from the outset, when Dunston was asked to be the expert for the psychology volume. Early meetings of the Commission show he was to write a section on the geographical distribution of intelligence, and another on the intelligence of the Poor Whites in labour colonies.<sup>28</sup> Malherbe, too, was enthusiastic about the possibilities of eugenics. Shortly after the Carnegie report was published, a Johannesburg newspaper published a speech by Malherbe in which he warned of the danger that the Poor Whites held for the quality of the white race. The headline read: ‘Future of the White Race in Question’.<sup>29</sup> He was not the only one in the commission who held such views. In his volume Grosskopf put his eugenic views bluntly: ‘One often hears it stated on public platforms ... that the poor are just as good as their more favourable placed fellow-citizens, and that the blood that runs in their veins is the same as that of the best families. The former of these statements, as an expression of democratic sentiment, we may allow to pass. But if the implication is, that the “poor white” portion of the population, taken all round, possesses the same personal and hereditary qualities as those who occupy a higher place in society then, to say the least, it is a bold generalisation’.<sup>30</sup>

Malherbe’s volume on Poor Whites and education is largely concerned with the large-scale eugenic intelligence testing of Poor White schoolchildren in order to prove that poor whites were genetically intellectually inferior. His IQ tests found that the ‘[p]oor white’s intelligence is lower *on the average* than that of the European population as a whole, and the percentage of them classed as subnormal is approximately twice as large as that of the European population as a whole’.<sup>31</sup> Malherbe also found that the children of larger families tended to be less intelligent than smaller families and, as Poor Whites were more likely to have large families, he advocated ‘the restriction of the size of families amongst

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<sup>27</sup> U.G. 16 (1921), 15.

<sup>28</sup> Meeting of the Joint Board, 14 April 1928 ‘Poor White Study’, Box 295, Series III.A Grants, CCNY

<sup>29</sup> Susanne M Klausen, *Race, Maternity and the Politics of Birth Control in South Africa, 1910-1939* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 42.

<sup>30</sup> Johannes F.W. Grosskopf and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 105.

<sup>31</sup> Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Joint Findings and Recommendations* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), xxiv. Emphasis in the original.

the poorer and weaker classes, both by education and the raising of the standard of living and by the dissemination of knowledge concerning hygienic methods of birth control amongst the poorer and weaker classes so as to restore the balance which nature and progress demand'. In the end, Malherbe was propagating the old eugenic fear that, as the middle-class had smaller families, the 'upper strata' was in danger of being swamped by poor whites. 'It is no use to try and console ourselves with the idea that a similar differential fertility exists in Europe. The fact remains that South Africa's white population is in a unique position, viz., that of educative leadership. We, above all, in Africa cannot afford a decline in the average level of intelligence of the white people'.<sup>32</sup>

Taking the above into account, it is interesting that eugenic vocabulary is virtually absent from the Carnegie Commission's findings and recommendations. Instead of inherent incapacity, the commissioners advocated economic causes as the main cause of white poverty. Instead of birth control, they recommended expanding education and building schools in rural areas. The final report stated that, although the average Poor White intelligence was found to be lower than that of other whites, many Poor Whites were of above average or even gifted intelligence. Thus 'their *potential* intelligence is higher than would appear at first sight'.<sup>33</sup>

Ultimately, this contradiction was political. The historian Saul Dubow argues that eugenics was difficult to reconcile with increasing Afrikaner nationalism — especially as the majority of poor whites were Afrikaners. Thus the Carnegie report had a nationalistic interest in redeeming the Poor Whites and promoting the unity of the Afrikaner *volk*. Notions of inherent incapacity would also make relations with British whites problematic. The racial unity demanded by white prestige proved more important.<sup>34</sup> Eugenic thought did not altogether vanish from South Africa. Indeed, after the publication of the Carnegie report it was taken up by nationalist eugenicists such as the sociologist Geoffrey Cronjé, who published articles on *rasverbetering* or racial improvement. But eugenics, never enthusiastically embraced in South Africa, became increasingly unfashionable after the Second World War.

In South Africa, the United States and around the Western world eugenics held a seductive appeal. Together with Social Darwinism it structured the world into easily understood categories of higher and lesser races. It promised a simple solution to the myriad problems of the period. Simple better breeding could alleviate poverty, crime, conflict and defect. Through its focus on white moral degeneracy, it facilitated a transnational understanding of the Poor White. Poor Whites differed from other whites on a cellular level. Poverty, morality and intelligence became genetic markers that the better classes could breed for, and which set the Poor Whites apart on a racial level. Rather than being limited to the U.S.

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<sup>32</sup> Ernst G. Malherbe and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Education and the Poor White* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 236 — 237.

<sup>33</sup> Carnegie Commission, *Joint Findings*, xxiv. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>34</sup> Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, 284.

South or South Africa, the Poor White became a defined figure of fear and loathing wherever ‘white civilisation’ was under threat.

### **Hookworm and the South**

In the same period that eugenic theory became a fashionable topic in salons, officials in Lee County, Mississippi were advancing another theory for the backwardness of Poor Whites. The roads in the rural county were peppered with signs drawing on more than two hundred different slogans. At every dangerous curve and mile marker one could read such advice as ‘You Are Not Germ Proof, Wake Up’, ‘Get the Habit of Clean Living’, ‘Shun the Perils of Uncleanliness’, ‘Pollute Not the Soil’, ‘Keep the Backyard Clean’, and ‘Good Roads, Good Health, Good Citizenship’.<sup>35</sup> Disease, particularly hookworm disease, was considered a significant cause of white poverty. Health experts also drew on readily available eugenic theory to argue that, over generations, the presence of disease could degenerate the inhabitants of an area. In only a few decades public health knowledge had abandoned miasma theory, which held that ‘bad air’ could produce disease, and discovered germ theory. The public was slowly discovering the importance of cleanliness and sanitation in preventing the transmission of disease.

Proponents of disease as the cause of white poverty also had an advantage: in contrast to the gloomy and catastrophic theories of eugenics, disease could be cured. Through medicine and sanitation the Poor Whites could be cured — physically and morally — and become industrious and upright members of society. By improving the health of the Poor Whites, reformers and philanthropists were uplifting them in the ranks of civilisation and, in effect, making them more white.

Hookworm disease was intimately tied to issues of sanitation. The dramatic improvement that resulted after a cure meant that the disease became closely associated with Poor Whites, particularly in the rural U.S. South, where a lack of basic sanitation enabled the worm to thrive. The worm had first been discovered amongst Italian miners in 1834 and its lifecycle only described in 1896. Hookworm larvae typically enter the skin by burrowing through the feet. Inside the body it lays eggs in the small intestine before being expelled in stool where, in areas with poor sanitation, it can reinfect the host. As the rural poor were the most likely to go without shoes, the disease was mostly, though by no means only, found with them.

The symptoms of hookworm disease include severe anaemia and stunted growth, leading to its name as the ‘germ of laziness’.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, as the worm deprives the body of essential minerals it can result in

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<sup>35</sup> Ring, *The Problem South*, 65.

<sup>36</sup> John Farley, *To Cast out Disease: A History of the International Health Division of the Rockefeller Foundation (1913-1951)* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, USA, 2003).

an intense desire to eat dirt, known as pica. This further associated the Poor Whites with degeneracy as their proclivity to eat dirt was held up as an example of their fall from civilization. Luckily treating hookworm was relatively simple and inexpensive, if unpleasant. It involved a treatment of thymol (an extract of thyme) followed by a dose of Epsom salts or castor oil. As the anaemia was relieved, the patient became considerably more energetic, leading authorities of the time to conclude that, by treating hookworm, they were curing 'Poor Whiteism'.<sup>37</sup>

Hookworm disease, and the curing of Poor Whiteism, was to prove the basis for the international disease prevention work of the Rockefeller organisations and the Rockefeller Foundation specifically. The disease was first brought to the attention of the organisation in 1909 by Charles W. Stiles, a zoologist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and who also first discovered the disease in the U.S. The scale of infection was vast. In his first meeting with Gates, Stiles estimated that 'one-third of all the rural residents of the Atlantic and Gulf States living on sandy, or rather not living on clay soil, are more or less infected'.<sup>38</sup> Within six months of the meeting John D. Rockefeller, Sr. gifted a million dollars for the establishment of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (RSC). In the five years of its existence the Commission examined more than one million people for the disease and treated nearly 500,000.<sup>39</sup>



Fig. 5. The Bryant family of Kentucky. RSC agents suggested hookworm disease resulted in 'fish eye stare'.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 113.

<sup>38</sup> Frederick T. Gates to Charles W. Stiles, July 23, 1909, Folder 544, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

<sup>39</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, '100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation | Eradicating Hookworm · Health', by Rockefeller Archive Center, accessed 10 August 2015, <http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/health/eradicating-hookworm>.

<sup>40</sup> Author unknown, 'Bryant family, Kentucky', in *Second Annual Report*, Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

The RSC initially met with resistance from both public and medical opinion in the South. The Rockefeller Commission was regarded as a Northern imposition and the cries of Southern infection, disease and filth offended many.<sup>41</sup> Newspapers initially delighted in denouncing ‘the hookworm myth’ which was conceived by ‘ingenious minds for the injury of the South’.<sup>42</sup> Some medical professionals claimed the disease simply did not exist. The Commission was careful to win Southern support through its educational campaigns and by appointing a number of Southerners to its board. Stiles was appointed co-secretary of the RSC along with Wickliffe Rose, who had also been involved with the Southern Education Board.

The RSC mixed eugenic language with its concern for curing disease. Soon after the Commission was established, the secretaries warned that ‘... it can easily be shown that the hookworm affects not only the health of the Nation, but its prosperity, and finally that it tends towards the degeneration of the race ...’<sup>43</sup> Hookworm was no ordinary disease. An ‘[a]cute disease may strengthen a race by killing off the weak; but hookworm disease is chronic. It works subtly through long periods of time, and its cumulative results — physical, intellectual, economic, and moral — are handed down as an increasing handicap from generation to generation’.<sup>44</sup>

The combination of eugenic degradation and hookworm disease made sense to the commissioners. Moral and physical degeneration were ultimately indistinguishable. During a visit to Virginia, Rose described an isolated region ‘which for generations has been inhabited by a people set apart by marked peculiarities from the people surrounding them on every side’. The ‘Forkemites’ that lived there ‘look like a distinct race; they are known for their extreme poverty, their lack of energy and thrift; for the low order of their mentality and the dense illiteracy springing from it; for the lack of moral perception and the low moral tone which characterizes the community as a whole’.<sup>45</sup> According to Rose:

The fact is we have here a large community in which practically the whole population has for generations borne the burden of a heavy infection; the community has been islanded and this isolation has been both the cause and effect in accentuating the cumulative results — physical, intellectual, economic, and moral, — which have been handed down from one generation to the next; from generation to generation there has been a lowering of physical vitality, this in turn has brought a lowering of mental vitality; the struggle for existence has

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<sup>41</sup> John Ettlign, *The Germ of Laziness: Rockefeller Philanthropy and Public Health in the New South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1981), 130.

<sup>42</sup> Work of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission’, Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR, 7.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Report of Assistant Secretaries for Eradication of Hookworm Disease. Quarter ending June 30, 1910’. Reel 11, Folder 204, Series 3, RSC.

<sup>44</sup> Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease, *Second Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

<sup>45</sup> Wickliffe Rose to Frederick T. Gates, June 28, 1911. ‘General. 1911-1916’ Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR.



grown more hard and hopeless; one result has been a deadening of the moral sense and a loss of self-respect which shows itself in the low moral tone of the community. The result in some extreme cases has been an almost complete abandonment of the ordinary decencies of life.<sup>46</sup>

When the communities were treated for hookworm and made healthy, moreover, their morals were treated too:

Dr. Fisher pointed out to me one home of this extreme type; a family of eight; all were found heavily infected; all have been treated; and he assures me that a clearing of the moral atmosphere has already set in. Dr. Fisher is firmly convinced that the effect in reforming the moral life of the individual and elevating the moral tone of the community in extreme cases like this is going to be as marked as the economic results.<sup>47</sup>

The organisation did not consider the community atypical of the South. Gates relayed Rose's report directly to John D. Rockefeller, Jr: 'The community here described, while perhaps not in all respects representative of the whole south, is truly representative of many parts of the South, and, with modifications as to greater or less severity of infection, universally so. The main facts shown, as to causes, conditions, cures and promise, are universal'. The message was clear — the organisation would cure the Poor Whites of hookworm disease, but, in the process, they would morally reform them.<sup>48</sup>

As they investigated the scope of the disease in the South, the members of the Sanitary Commission were struck by the contrast between diseased and healthy regions. 'The schools, towns, crops and all other elements of life are markedly inferior and more backward in the more heavily infected counties than in the counties not so heavily infected', wrote Gates. '[T]his disease has penetrated into the most fundamental elements of life, industry, mental progress, moral condition and every other element which enters into human progress, as a serious deterrent'.<sup>49</sup>

As better sanitation, cleaner homes and yards, as well as sanitary fly-free privies significantly reduced the threat of re-infection, the RSC campaigns were as much about health and moral education as they were about curing disease. Rural sanitation was still very primitive in the period. 'A doctor in the U.S. Public Health Service noted that since "we house-break our pet cats and dogs", it did not "seem too much to expect of human intelligence" that people could be trained to become "yard-broke" and give up their practice of defecating on the ground in such a "dangerous and disgusting manner" so close to

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<sup>46</sup> Wickliffe Rose to Frederick T. Gates, June 28, 1911. 'General. 1911-1916' Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., June 30, 1911. 'General. 1911-1916' Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller Jr, December 13, 1910. 'General. 1909-1910' Folder 544, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

their water supplies and kitchens'.<sup>50</sup> The RSC also deployed other Rockefeller resources: Knapp's farm demonstrators and the county school agents were asked to advise farmers and schools on hygiene and the building of sanitary privies.<sup>51</sup>

The RSC had a three-pronged strategy: education, dispensaries and model communities. The effect of each was calculated to ripple outward into the broader community as more and more people were easily cured of their infections and encouraged their neighbours to do the same. An unmistakable evangelical air ran through these proceedings as the sick were suddenly healed. 'Nothing since the days of Christ in Galilee is comparable to it', wrote Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr.<sup>52</sup> Mobile dispensaries would visit communities for one day each week where the rural poor could hear lectures and see demonstrations of the hookworm menace. They were encouraged to bring in stool samples for the analysis of hookworm infection in state and private laboratories and to take home educational literature and pamphlets for further distribution. The treatment was not limited by race and the campaigns were also extended to African-Americans. It is clear from, amongst others, the extensive photographic record of the RSC that the focus was firmly on Poor Whites. Only in the last year of its operation did the RSC distinguish between race in its dispensary work, and that was to note that '[o]f the total of 14 921 persons examined, 16,8% were found to be infected. The percentage of infection was found to be 19,2% for the white race and 8,7% for the black race'.<sup>53</sup> Where African-Americans were discussed, and a justification for helping them needed, it was often in the same language of colonial health officers: African-Americans and their homes were 'reservoirs' of disease that threatened the health of whites. '[T]he white man owes it to his own race that he lend a helping hand to improve the sanitary surroundings of the negro', wrote Stiles.<sup>54</sup>

To accompany the dispensaries, the RSC funded a sanitary survey of a least one hundred homes in each county. Sanitary inspectors visited rural homes to survey conditions of the yard and the privy, and thereby monitor and discipline Poor Whites who put the race to shame. This was not a small undertaking. By 1914 over 200,000 rural homes had been inspected in 564 counties across the South.<sup>55</sup> Accompanying the sanitary inspection was an infection survey of two hundred children of school age in the county as well as inspection of the condition of school privies. The RSC, and Rockefeller philanthropies as a whole, put a great emphasis on the importance of education in uplifting the surrounding area. 'The school should cease to serve as the center for the spread of infection. Instead of spreading infection it should become a model in preventing soil pollution', wrote Rose. The

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Ring, *The Problem South*, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Charles W. Stiles to Wickliffe Rose, November 7, 1910. Frame 23, Reel M02, Series 1, RSC.

<sup>52</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., April 15, 1912. 'General. 1911-1916' Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

<sup>53</sup> 'Hookworm disease - Southern States Report 1916', Folder 44, Box 5, Series 3, RG 5, RF

<sup>54</sup> Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease. *First Annual Report of the Scientific Secretary for the Year Ending January 25, 1911* (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911), 19.

<sup>55</sup> 'Work of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission', Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR, 2.



organisation, together with state health departments, printed and distributed a great variety of material to instruct schoolchildren on the dangers of hookworm disease and poor hygiene. These pamphlets also instructed the children on the proper morals and conduct of whites.

An example of the hookworm literature distributed to schoolchildren was ‘The Story of a Boy (who did not grow up to be a tall strong man)’. The pamphlet, and accompanying illustrations, told the story of Tom Hardy, a Poor White who was infected with hookworm due to using a poor privy or bushes. ‘Tom was pale, thin and small. He was dull and seldom felt well enough to go to school’. His whole family was too sick to work, and their home dirty. In contrast, Tom’s uninfected playmate was ‘rosy, strong and tall’ and his family ‘worked and saved money ... Their home was clean and well-kept’. After Tom and his family were treated for hookworm disease, his father built a sanitary privy, ‘then he fixed up their home. After that Tom’s father worked hard and saved money’.<sup>56</sup>

As a sequel to the dispensary work the RSC began a campaign to create model demonstration communities. Sanitary health inspectors, together with assistants, spent an average of 90 days supervising sanitary facilities and sanitary behaviour in small rural towns, and later groups of small towns. The intent was for the influence of the work to ‘radiate into the surrounding territory’.<sup>57</sup> Although some of these communities were African-American, the focus was on whites and Poor Whites. One report noted that ‘in the average population of each community the white race exceeded the black by 50 per cent’.<sup>58</sup> The conditions were sometimes shocking. In the fast-growing industrial community of Kingsport, Tennessee, poor sanitation, a lack of facilities and intense overcrowding made the town a dangerous disease risk. ‘[F]lies were buzzing by the millions; the whole territory around the place was covered with a rank growth of weeds, grass and bushes; garbage and refuse material were piled about and thrown in amazing profusion; restaurants and eating booths were serving food which swarmed with flies, being exposed on counters and tables which, many times, were less than twenty feet from an open privy from which the contents flowed like volcanic lava’.<sup>59</sup>

Despite these challenges, the RSC was extraordinarily successful in its goals. It reduced hookworm disease to ‘one of the minor infections of the south’<sup>60</sup> and, by working with state health departments, had gone some way to setting up a public health network. At the end of the RSC’s five-year tenure its board voted to discontinue operations in favour of the state governments taking over the duties of inspection and testing.

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<sup>56</sup> ‘The Story of a Boy’, Folder 223, Box 21, Series A, OMR.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Report on Work for the Relief and Control of Uncinariasis in Southern United States from Jan 1 1910, to June 30, 1915’. Folder 2A, Box 1, Series 2, RG 5, RF, 5.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 7

<sup>59</sup> ‘Hookworm disease - Southern States Report 1916’, Folder 44, Box 5, Series 3, RG 5, RF.

<sup>60</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, Jr., August 10, 1914. Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR.



Tom's parents and his sister and brothers were sick. His father could not work.



His playmate's family were well. The parents and big children worked and saved money.

Fig 6. Extract from *Story of a Boy*.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>61</sup> 'The Story of a Boy', Folder 223, Box 21, Series A, OMR.

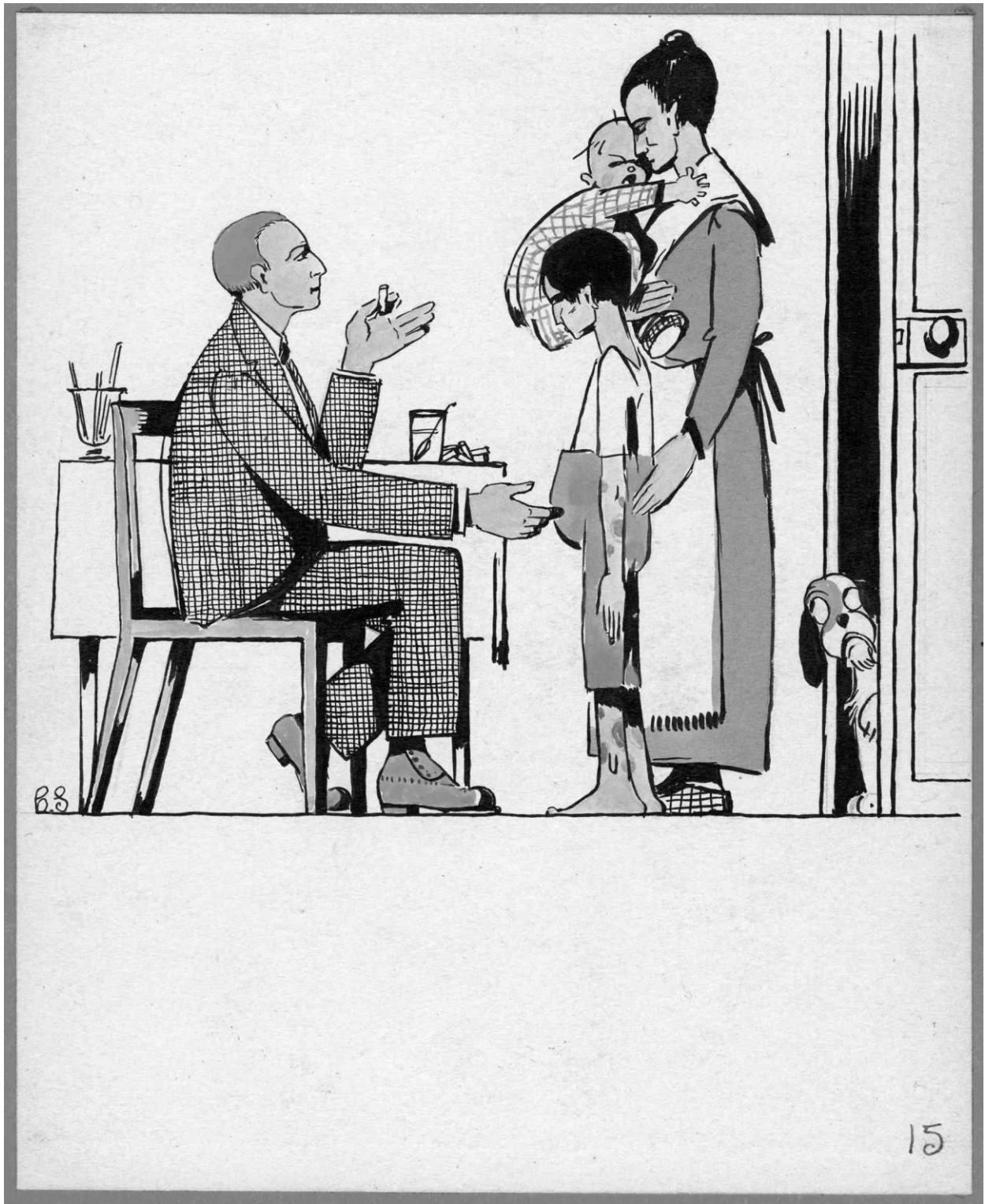


Fig 7. Cartoons from *Story of a Boy*.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> "Cartoons from 'The Story of a Boy'," *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed September 19, 2016, <http://rockefeller100.org/items/show/1749>.



Despite the RSC's closure, the Rockefeller philanthropies were not done with hookworm. As part of their research into the spread and severity of hookworm disease, the RSC had sent out surveys to Western doctors and colonial health professionals throughout the world. The replies were not encouraging. China was infected. So too British Guiana, Puerto Rico, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Egypt, Sri Lanka, Tunisia. 'Hookworm disease is found in practically all countries which lie in the tropical and sub-tropical zones', the organisation warned. 'More than half the population of the globe live in this area'.<sup>63</sup> In South Africa medical officers reported that immigrant Indian labourers in Natal were spreading the infection to blacks, and that Indian household servants were infecting the Europeans.<sup>64</sup> Closer to home, immigration services in San Francisco reported an infection rate of 66% among Indian labourers and, to a lesser extent, the Chinese.<sup>65</sup> *The New York Times* reported that 85% of American Samoa was sick with the disease.<sup>66</sup> A doctor who had visited Venezuela wrote to Rose that the country was severely infected with what was mistakenly called 'tropical anemia'. Proper sanitation and treatment of hookworm, he wrote, would not only permit the 'successful and permanent occupation of the tropics by the Anglo-Saxon race' but would help 'banish the chronic state of revolution from the countries of Latin America'.<sup>67</sup>

In Australia, where the indigenous inhabitants were also viewed as a 'reservoir' of disease, the RSC reported the work of T.F. Macdonald, a doctor who had done research on hookworm infection in communities near Townsville in the 'tropical' northern half of the country. Hookworm was 'sucking the heart's blood of the whole community', he wrote in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene*. In one of the schools he had inspected more than 90% of children were found to be infected — 'and these were white children'. The disease resulted in severe pica among the members of the community. 'Babies would pick dirt from the seams on the floor or from boots carelessly left uncleaned; older children frequently expressed a desire to suck stones, preferring such luxuries to sweets. Adults did not eat earth but developed abnormal delights in pickles, curries and alcohol'. Macdonald was also convinced that moral qualities worsened as the disease grew and strengthened, leading him to theorise that the immorality of the Poor Whites was actually a symptom of 'nerve poisoning'. The only hope, apart from hookworm treatment, was a moral environment as 'moral surroundings [would] counteract degenerate habits'.<sup>68</sup>

In *Smith's Weekly*, H.C. McKay warned his readers of the 'earth-eaters of Queensland' who had sunk 'nearly to the level of the animals'. Infected children were 'shorter, lighter and weaker than the normal

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<sup>63</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, *International Health Board* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1916) 2.

<sup>64</sup> Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease, *Hookworm Infection in Foreign Countries* (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911), 15.

<sup>65</sup> N.W. Glover to Wickliffe Rose, October 19, 1910. Folder 544, Box 53, Series O, OMR.

<sup>66</sup> 'Hookworm Ravages Samoa', *The New York Times*, October 24, 1910.

<sup>67</sup> S. A. Thompson to Wickliffe Rose, June 4, 1912. Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR

<sup>68</sup> T.F. Macdonald, 'Experiences of Ankylostomiasis in Australia', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 1, no. 1907—8: 71.

and were always mentally deficient'. An 'island of white' mentality was on display when he declared that 'if we wish to remain a virile, healthy, alert-minded nation and not a collection of "poor whites", it is our duty to take our tropical plagues seriously ... Otherwise a leering Asia may one day not far distant point the finger of scorn at our native-born — the "white trash" of Asia'.<sup>69</sup>

The organisation was taken aback by the sheer scale of the problem. 'It looks as though we had hit on one of the great world miseries and that this movement is destined to be world wide before we get through with it', wrote Gates to John D. Rockefeller.<sup>70</sup> The following year he wrote: '[t]his disease has penetrated very deeply into the human race. It probably accounts, in a very large degree, for the character of tropical peoples, and perhaps no other single factor has entered more deeply as a retarding force into the development of the human race and the progress of civilization'.<sup>71</sup>

In 1913, partly as a result of the success of the RSC, John D. Rockefeller gifted an unprecedented \$100 million to create the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) 'to promote the well-being of mankind throughout the world'.<sup>72</sup> In 1919 he gifted another \$82.8 million, which made the Rockefeller Foundation the largest philanthropic enterprise in the world. It established, or helped establish, leading centres for the research of public health and tropical diseases, including the London School of Tropical Hygiene and Medicine, the Johns Hopkins School of Public Health as well as the Harvard School of Public Health. The first act of the RF, however, was to create the International Health Commission (later the International Health Division) as a direct successor to the RSC. Under its first director, Wickliffe Rose, the IHD's mission was the '...promotion of public sanitation and the spread of knowledge of scientific medicine'. The IHD immediately began with hookworm campaigns in British Guiana. Partly due to the ease of explaining and curing hookworm disease, the Rockefeller Foundation viewed further campaigns as an ideal wedge to promote public health in other countries.<sup>73</sup> In 1915, Rose expanded the scope of the IHD to include tuberculosis, malaria and yellow fever. Together with hookworm, the IHD allocated 90% of its budget to the research and control of these diseases.<sup>74</sup> By 1924, hookworm campaigns had been adopted in 52 countries across six continents.

These campaigns did not always progress smoothly, especially where the RF could not elicit much government support. India in particular proved problematic and disheartening.<sup>75</sup> In 1922 the RF began intensive hookworm campaigns in Madras province, but struggled with local cultural and caste issues,

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<sup>69</sup> Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Durham: Duke university press, 2006), 144-145.

<sup>70</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, November 2, 1910. Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR

<sup>71</sup> Frederick T. Gates to John D. Rockefeller, June 30, 1911. Folder 545, Box 53, Series O, OMR

<sup>72</sup> 'An Act to Incorporate the Rockefeller Foundation', January 23, 1917. Folder 249, Box 24, Series O, OMR.

<sup>73</sup> Rockefeller Archive Center, '100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation | Hookworm: Exporting a Campaign · Health', accessed 12 August 2015, [http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/health/eradicating-hookworm/hookworm-exporting-a-campaign#\\_ftn1](http://rockefeller100.org/exhibits/show/health/eradicating-hookworm/hookworm-exporting-a-campaign#_ftn1).

<sup>74</sup> Farley, *To Cast out Disease*, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Farley, *To Cast out Disease*.

a near complete lack of privies, as well as a transient worker population.<sup>76</sup> By the time the RF abandoned its work in India in 1928 the Foundation had wound down nearly all of its other hookworm campaigns in order to focus particularly on the research and control of malaria and yellow fever. This marked a dramatic shift away from sanitation and public health to medical research and control.

The story of hookworm control in the South is the story of sanitation. In curing the South of hookworm disease, an alliance between government and philanthropy had cured the Poor White of her lassitude — her ‘Poor Whiteism’. Hundreds of thousands across the South now preached the gospel of clean living. In teaching the Poor White to live clean and act clean, these organisations were racially reinscribing the Poor White, ‘whitening’ his manners and habits. A moral uplift of the atmosphere of the diseased South had set in, as Rose described. By curing the people, they were curing the space. The trajectory of hookworm disease in American philanthropy closely matches that of eugenics. It had begun with the monitoring and disciplining of Poor White bodies, and expanded outward — a quasi-imperial expansion that stretched, almost literally, across the globe. Hookworm was the ‘wedge’, the vanguard, for the entry of American moral empires into foreign territory. And wherever these sanitary empires entered, they took the idea of the Poor White with them. At the construction of sanitary privies in India, at the dispensing of thymol by dispensaries in Australia, at the handing out of educational pamphlets in Venezuela, was the Poor White.

### **Malaria and the Bushveld**

The Rockefeller Foundation’s interest in malaria was not new, however. Much like hookworm, transnational experts associated malaria with poverty and the tropics. The anaemia and lassitude brought on by malaria were seen as similar, if not identical, to the Poor Whiteism produced by hookworm disease and the two were often confused in diagnosis. Indeed, soon after hookworm was brought to attention of the Rockefeller philanthropies, the board of the RSC noted that ‘[i]t has been shown that the lowered vitality of multitudes long attributed to malaria and climate and seriously effecting economic development, is, in fact, largely due in some districts to this parasite’.<sup>77</sup> In the United States malaria remained endemic in the South until the first decades of the twentieth century. As the poor were mostly likely to live in poorly drained areas where the mosquitos bred, the disease became associated with, and blamed for, the poverty of the region.

Much like hookworm malaria was not just associated with poverty, it could ‘cause’ Poor Whiteism. It was as much a moral disease as it was a physical one. This was an important distinction: a disease may have been dangerous to white settlers in the tropics (such as typhoid) or even associated with poverty

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<sup>76</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report 1924* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1924).

<sup>77</sup> RSC Board to John D. Rockefeller, October 26, 1909. Folder 544, Box 53, Series O, OMR

and slums (such as cholera) but that did not mean that it was regarded as a cause for 'Poor Whiteism'. Cholera could make you sick, could kill you, but malaria and hookworm turned you into a Poor White, with devastating implications for the fate of entire communities, peoples, and for the 'race' as a whole.

Long associated with miasma (literally from the medieval Italian *mal'aria* or 'bad air'), the first scientific use of the word malaria in English was in 1827 by the British geologist John Macculloch. Describing marshy regions in France and Italy, he noted that the habitation of successive generations in malarial areas 'produce[ed] a degeneracy of the races' and that 'universal degeneracy of mind and body appear to be the certain lot of those races which a combination of unfortunate circumstances have placed in countries that seem to have been intended rather for the habitation of reptiles and insects than for those of man'. As well as being smaller and physically deformed the inhabitants of these regions were, amongst others, slow, apathetic, melancholy and looked old before their time. As to their moral condition, wrote Macculloch, 'I might content myself with naming abortion, infanticide, universal libertinism, drunkenness, want of religion, gross superstitions' and a cowardly predilection for poisoning.<sup>78</sup>

Writing a century after Macculloch, the Glaswegian physician William Anderson wrote that malaria is 'a powerful factor in the depreciation of race efficiency. History is studded with instances of colonies wiped out, cities abandoned, armies defeated, by this insidious and widespread disease. There is much to suggest that those who have survived in the worst areas have paid for their survival in terms of inefficiency, physical and mental'. The downfall of the ancient Greeks and the Romans was, he wrote, if not caused by malaria, then greatly facilitated by its presence.<sup>79</sup> Anderson was particularly interested in the legal aspects of malaria. He feared that the malaria-infected soldiers returning from WWI would soon show signs of anti-social behaviour and then turn to criminal activity. Anderson argued that moral degradation arising from malaria, and attributed to nerve damage, be used as a sort of 'insanity defence' in the resulting court cases.<sup>80</sup> War trauma, he argued, was often mistaken for malarial psychosis which could result in violent, even criminal, behaviour, and suicide. The depression resulting from chronic malaria often resulted in, or exacerbated, alcoholism and there was some evidence that the malaria-carrying *anopheles* mosquito was attracted to alcohol.<sup>81</sup> Chronic malaria over generations would imprint these characteristics on the race.

It was in this climate that the Rockefeller philanthropies disbanded the RSC and established the International Health Division to research and control tropical diseases. It was only a little over a decade before the formation of the RSC that it was proved that mosquitos were responsible for transmitting

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in William K. Anderson, *Malarial Psychoses and Neuroses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 16.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson, *Malarial Psychoses and Neuroses*, 184.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.



malaria. Armed with this information the newly-established IHD could seriously consider the possibility of eradicating, or at least controlling, a disease which had plagued humans for centuries. In the period, human mobility and development had contributed to malaria having its greatest historic reach, stretching all the way to the Arctic Circle in Russia.<sup>82</sup> In a promotional booklet, the IHD explained that '[b]ecause of its wide geographic distribution, its extreme prevalence over vast tropical and sub-tropical regions, where in places it is responsible for more sickness and death than all other diseases combined, and because of its obvious effects in the form of direct financial loss, impaired economic efficiency, and retarded physical and mental development, malaria presents the most serious medical and sanitary problem with which we have to contend'.<sup>83</sup>

In 1917 the IHD and, at times, the U.S. Public Health Service, began malaria experiments in the South, in rural Mississippi and Arkansas. In a number of test communities scientists attempted to find out whether quinine could sterilize the blood of people already infected with malaria, and whether a dose of quinine would prevent the uninfected from contracting malaria. In others, IHD researchers attempted to reduce infection by installing screens and by using drainage techniques to eliminate standing water where mosquitos could breed.<sup>84</sup> They also used the RSC techniques of public demonstrations and educational literature. The IHD expanded its efforts to ten U.S. States and, by 1928, the RF was involved in malaria projects in twenty different countries. In 1924 the IHD began an intensive series of malaria campaigns in the Pontine marshes near Rome. These campaigns were actively encouraged by Mussolini's government which 'claimed that malaria was to blame for the Italian South's underpopulation, poverty, and lack of economic progress'.<sup>85</sup> The Italian campaigns also became an ideological problem for the IHD. As the hookworm campaigns had shown, the Rockefeller Foundation believed that much of the poverty and privation in the world was caused by disease. This is in contrast to the educational work of the GEB and the farm demonstrations of Knapp. The IHD's struggles in Italy were roundly criticised by other health experts, such as the Malaria Commission of the League of Nations, who argued that malaria was a problem of poverty, and that a higher standard of living should precede campaigns to control mosquito disease vectors. The solution, the RF was told, was to 'treat the malaria of Italy with roast beef'.<sup>86</sup> The members of the Health Board simply did not agree. In 1937, Lewis Hackett, who led the malaria campaigns in Italy, wrote that '[i]t is easier to believe that release from the burden of malaria will help to bring prosperity and knowledge than that a higher standard of living and education must precede the eradication of malaria'.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Randall M Packard, *The Making of a Tropical Disease: A Short History of Malaria (Johns Hopkins Biographies of Disease)* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, *International Health Board* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1916) 5.

<sup>84</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation, *Annual Report 1917* (New York: The Rockefeller Foundation, 1917) 184-192.

<sup>85</sup> Farley, *To Cast out Disease*, 114.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*

In the same period as the IHD's Italian campaigns, experts in South Africa were also pondering the relationship between poverty and malaria, and particularly whether it was a cause of Poor Whiteism. In 1928, when the Poor White Commission was still in its infancy, a special committee was established and tasked with finding out whether the 'Poor White Question' had a health and medical aspect. A circular letter was sent to many of the leading medical experts in the country asking whether the appearance of Poor Whites could have a medical basis. The replies were varied: 'Poor Whiteism' could be put down to malnutrition, a monotonous diet, dental disease and drought. Certain diseases such as bilharzia and syphilis were mentioned, although hookworm was mostly discounted as it was mostly found amongst blacks in the sub-tropical Natal Province, where Poor Whites were few. Dr C. Louis Leipoldt, a well-known doctor and author, believed that it was a combination of 'pre-natal and genetic causes due to economic plus health factors' — thus eugenics and disease.<sup>88</sup> This was echoed by dr. W.A. Murray of the Union Health Department who believed that, although the causes for Poor Whiteism were non-medical, ill-health was a contributory factor, particularly malaria. According to Murray the '[e]vil effects in first generation result in one-third deterioration from normal, physically and mentally, with weakness, apathy, inability to concentrate, depression and moral instability. In malarial areas in [the] Transvaal probably one-half [of the] total rural white population are too poor to buy quinine or pay for medical relief and live on border line of indigency. Results of chronic malaria on second generation are more permanent and severe, and mental degeneracy may result'.<sup>89</sup> Murray suggested a malarial survey of the Northern and Eastern Transvaal, areas commonly known as the Bushveld and Lowveld. In his report to the Carnegie Commission, J. Alexander Mitchell, the leader of the subcommittee, wrote that malaria was 'undoubtedly an aggravating factor' and that the disease, along with certain of the other causes such as malnutrition, bilharzia, hookworm and other parasitic infections should be thoroughly investigated by the Carnegie Commission.<sup>90</sup> The commissioners agreed and Murray was given the task of writing the Commission's health report.

Murray's conviction regarding the degenerative effects of malaria was heavily influenced by Leipoldt, who had been chief medical inspector for schools between 1914 and 1922. During this period Leipoldt had travelled to the Bushveld, at the time still sparsely settled and only partially explored by Europeans. Here he was struck by the incidence of the disease in the white population, which still held to the theory that malaria was caused by miasma. In 1915, the acting District Surgeon wrote of the Zoutpansberg district:

I am sorry to say that although the higher officials of the District, especially the R.M. [Resident Magistrate] of Louis Trichardt, are endeavouring to do their best to spread among the population the modern ideas about prophylaxis of malaria; they meet with indifference

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<sup>88</sup> J.A. Mitchell, Poor white problem: proposed investigation, 3 May 1928, Box 295, Folder 4, CCNY, 1—4.

<sup>89</sup> J.A. Mitchell, Poor white problem: proposed investigation, 3 May 1928, Box 295, Folder 4, CCNY, 3.

<sup>90</sup> J.A. Mitchell, Poor white problem: proposed investigation, 3 May 1928, Box 295, Folder 4, CCNY, 3.

and often derision. The doctor himself who looks upon the mosquito as ‘The Enemy’ is considered a madman, who does not happen to know that malaria is due to miasma proceeding from swamps. If you tell people that they ought to protect themselves from mosquitoes with wire gauze or nets they want the Government to put up screened doors and windows for them. They do not care about keeping the vicinity of their dwellings clean and seem to enjoy the sight of pools swarming with mosquito-larvae. Others despise the quinine tablets which are freely dispensed by the Government to any pauper of the district asking for them.<sup>91</sup>

The extreme poverty as well as the ignorance of malaria persisted for decades, and was still present in the Depression-era when M.C. Willemse, a health inspector, visited the farms of Poor White settlers in the Letaba district. Willemse noted that the settlers lived in huts which were made of grass and ‘in a worse state than some of the native huts. They build in amongst these huts’. They had settled alongside a running brook that was the breeding ground of malaria-carrying mosquitoes. ‘Hundreds of native huts are situated within 200 yards’, said Willemse and it could be presumed that the majority of children there were malaria carriers.<sup>92</sup> In contrast to the Poor Whites of the Bushveld, the richer white farmers were aware of the disease, and could afford screens and quinine, leading E.N. Thornton, Secretary for Public Health, to write in 1933 that, to be successful in the Lowveld, white farmers ‘had to be educated men with capital’. ‘Any others’, he added, ‘are bound to become infected — and to die off or degenerate’.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, extensive anti-malaria campaigns in the Bushveld were only launched after the Second World War.

Malaria was the ‘curse of the Bushveld’, wrote Leipoldt. ‘It weakens, it saps the energy and spirit of its victims, it stunts their growth, it changes their outlook on life itself, it causes widespread physical and mental deterioration’.<sup>94</sup> In the Annual Report for the School Medical Department in 1915, Leipoldt warned that malaria held ‘[g]rave national significance in the country’ and that the ‘incidence of malaria amongst school children exceeds the percentage of certain of the schools in the Punjab’. Leipoldt soon made a connection between malaria and Poor Whiteism:

Visits to schools in malaria-infested districts make two points very clear. One is the intense fatigue, or rather the tendency to be fatigued by comparatively slight mental exertion, exhibited by all the children; the other is the relatively low mental standard of children who have had repeated attacks of the disease. A class of such children is, so far as steady

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in Randall Packard, ‘‘Malaria Blocks Development’ Revisited: The Role of Disease in the History of Agricultural Development in the Eastern and Northern Transvaal Lowveld, 1890—1960’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27, no. 3 (September 2001): 601.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 600.

<sup>93</sup> Packard, ‘‘Malaria Blocks Development’’, 604.

<sup>94</sup> Christiaan Louis Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1937), 88-91.

application, concentration of attention, and capability of retention are concerned, immeasurably behind a class of children of similar age or proficiency who have no had malaria.<sup>95</sup>

Leipoldt aired his concerns again in 1918 and 1920, arguing that ‘the main characteristics of the chronic malaria child from a health point of view, are his fatigue, his malnutrition, and his anaemia’ and that ‘[w]e are breeding in malarial districts a generation of at least physical degenerates, burdened by the weight of prenatal malnutrition, and there is no evidence to show that we are getting a vestige of racial immunity from it’.<sup>96</sup> From 1918, the School Medical Report began publishing rates of spleen size in schools, an enlarged spleen being a strong indicator of malaria.

Leipoldt was strongly influenced by Anderson’s theory of malarial psychosis (a real but rare side effect of cerebral malaria) leading to moral degeneration — the ‘subtle, deteriorating influence of chronic malaria upon the character and mentality of the victim’.<sup>97</sup> Malaria, after all, had significantly contributed to the downfall of the Ancient Greeks, and then the Romans, Leipoldt said. ‘[I]ts history can be traced, not, it is true, in devastating epidemics, but in the steady, persistent degeneration that it caused...’<sup>98</sup> He gave the example of a boy ‘from a good family’ who had stolen liquor and sold it to blacks in exchange for marijuana, which he then buried. Leipoldt’s examination showed that he was malnourished and suffering from malaria. ‘His thefts were periodical, and apparently cyclical, corresponding in time to the malarial cycle’. The boy was cured with quinine and iron supplements. Thanks to this and similar cases, Leipoldt ‘always bore malaria in mind’ when magistrates asked for his opinion on juvenile delinquents. ‘[A]nd in a fair percentage of cases malaria ... was primarily responsible for the delinquency’.<sup>99</sup>

Thankfully, for the philanthropists and sanitarians, a condition of chronic malaria and moral degeneracy was not permanent. In one school, Leipoldt examined sixteen children who were ‘potentially on the borderland between subnormals and defectives’. Children who were ‘certifiable as mentally defective’. But they were also ‘physically wholly abnormal’ which led Leipoldt to believe chronic malaria was at fault. Treatment with food, quinine, rest and iron supplements followed and, when he visited four months later, there was a marked improvement. ‘The result encouraged one to maintain the hope that the degeneration produced by malaria is not a permanent deterioration. But it is a factor to be taken into consideration when one speculated on the future of the white race in the Bushveld’, wrote Leipoldt.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> W.A. Murray and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932), 91.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 61.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

For his report on the health aspects of the 'Poor White Question' Murray began by noting that it was 'generally accepted' that malaria contributed to Poor Whiteism in the Transvaal.<sup>101</sup> He then set out to test his and Leipoldt's theories of malarial race degeneration. Accompanied by Malherbe and Wilcocks, he spent a month in the winter of 1929, when the malaria threat was lowest, visiting poor rural schools in the Bushveld — often, and by design, in the very same regions that Leipoldt wrote about.<sup>102</sup> Over the month Murray examined and compared more than 800 Poor White children for the symptoms of chronic malaria. When the group visited a school, the children were measured for weight, height and chest size in order to determine levels of nutrition and underfeeding. In their work both Leipoldt and Murray emphasized malnourishment and poor diet as leading to reduced levels of concentration and contributing to Poor Whiteism. Next, the children were examined for the malarial indicators such as spleen size. Based on this the children were divided into 'malarial' and 'non-malarial' groups of Poor Whites and asked to complete intelligence tests for Malherbe so that the results could be compared against each other as well as those of the 'normal' white schoolchildren that Malherbe had already conducted.

To accompany the quantitative data, the Commission's health investigators also interviewed the inhabitants of towns in malarial districts, teachers, headmasters and the children themselves. In their final report they were especially impressed with a school principal in Duivelskloof (now known as Duiwelskloof or Modjadjiskloof) who argued that the poor parents of his pupils 'cannot be regarded as "poor whites" as they still work and struggle along on their own farms, and are anxious to give their children the best education and chances possible'. In fact, 'the principal was convinced that malaria alone will not turn a progressive farmer into a "poor white", not even if he was poor to start with ... Malaria will not knock the energy and ambition out of a progressive man, but will drive a naturally lazy and unprogressive person a step or two lower'.<sup>103</sup>

The results of the investigators' tests were promising for the continued white survival in the tropics. Murray completely disregarded the assumptions he had given when the Commission was still being planned and now concluded that Poor White schoolchildren in malaria districts were physically smaller and weaker than children in healthy districts, not because they had degenerated, but because they were malnourished. Hunger had beaten disease — the opposite of the Rockefeller Foundation's position. Malaria, he found, 'does not on average cause severe deterioration of physique or nutrition, but ... poverty, with consequent underfeeding does so'. His conclusion was bolstered by the results of Malherbe's intelligence testing which found that Poor White children with malaria did not fare significantly worse than other children — compared to both healthy Poor Whites and healthy middle-class children. Malaria, although debilitating and sometimes deadly, did not have a permanent effect on

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<sup>101</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 116

<sup>102</sup> Such as Ohrigstad and Lydenburg

<sup>103</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 109.

whites. In his dismissal of physical causes for Poor Whiteism, Murray concluded that ‘[t]he primary causes which have resulted in the Poor White Problem have not been physical ... But poverty and ignorance leads to malnutrition and so weaken the poor white’s resistance to disease, lessen his physical efficiency and thus accentuate the problem’.<sup>104</sup>

Murray’s conclusion presents a contradiction, not least with his own position prior to the Commission. Although malnutrition had long been given as a contributing factor to Poor Whiteism, the Commission’s complete rejection of a medical or environmental cause in its final report was puzzling considering its reliance on eugenic theory. Although disease could be cured, chronic disease still marked the Poor Whites as physically different from the rest of the race. An economic explanation undid this. The reasons are the same as for the Commission’s rejection of eugenic theory: the racial unity demanded by white prestige was more important. As with eugenics, disease marked difference — and this was not a conclusion that would be acceptable in an atmosphere of increasing Afrikaner nationalism. Poor Whites had to be redeemable for the *volk* to be strong. Leipoldt suspected as much. Writing a few years after the final report, he called the Commission’s conclusion ‘glib’, however ‘comforting’. Thus ‘[i]t is a conclusion we would all like to endorse. Our national pride makes us all too ready to endorse it without considering the difficulties that present themselves to an impartial observer’.<sup>105</sup> He called for systemic reform of provincial administration and the ‘old-fashioned’ educational system, as well as for better medical services for whites and blacks. ‘The white community will have to learn that health is the first consideration of any community, and that education is of secondary importance’.<sup>106</sup>

In contrast to hookworm, malaria did not present any easy solutions. Long believed to be a cause of both physical and moral degeneracy, campaigns against malaria were costly and protracted. Indeed they are still ongoing today. For the Rockefeller Foundation, fresh off the success of its hookworm work, malaria campaigns presented an ideal staging ground for an almost worldwide campaign. ‘Diseased’ spaces such as the American South and the Italian South could be cured of malaria and could be rid of mosquitoes. In rehabilitating the space, they were facilitating the march of productivity, of hygiene, and of civilisation. Curing malaria, like curing hookworm, ‘whitened’ both people and space. For the Carnegie Commission on Poor Whites, malaria was a significant threat to white settlement in the tropics as well as to white prestige. Disavowing the moral and degenerative effects of the disease endorsed further settler expansion while redeeming the Poor Whites and ensuring white racial unity. The health of Poor White bodies and Poor White regions lay at the centre of these early philanthropic campaigns.

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<sup>104</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 127.

<sup>105</sup> Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 346.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

## The danger of the tropics

In 1928, the year the Carnegie Commission began its investigation, the American demographer A.B. Wolfe wrote that '[a] decade ago it was almost universally believed that only under very exceptional circumstances could temperate zone people, especially the white race, live and successfully rear their children in the tropics. Now, however, there is much difference of opinion among those who have a right to opinion ... There is also evidence of more scientific caution in conclusions'. This change was due to the 'remarkable advances in tropical medicine and sanitation, as well as better knowledge of the geography and climatology of tropic lands'.<sup>107</sup> Wolfe was expressing the significant change in thinking about race, place and disease that occurred in the period of the Poor White Problem.

For hundreds of years it had been believed that the physical environment had a significant effect on human bodies, to the degree that certain races were adapted to live in certain climates.<sup>108</sup> The white Anglo-Saxons were adapted to temperate climates; the black and brown races to the tropics and other 'torrid' regions, which had high temperatures and humidity. If members of these races moved from their natural regions they would quickly degenerate and die, like a plant transplanted in unsuitable soil.<sup>109</sup> Environmental theories clashed in interesting ways with the recently discovered germ theory and the abandonment of the concept of miasma. This contributed to the establishment of colonial medical science, which investigated ways of ensuring European protection from a hostile environment in the colonies. One such theory was that a specific type of solar radiation — 'actinic' or 'chemical' rays — harmed white bodies. As historian Dane Kennedy charts, theories of the harmful effects of solar radiation first appeared among the British in India in the early part of the nineteenth century. By the end of the century, it was believed that solar rays could affect the European nervous system. Actinic rays were believed to be responsible. These solar rays, which we would now understand as ultraviolet radiation, damaged nerve cells and, thus, the brain itself. The rays were closely related to the vague nervous debilities of 'neurasthenia' and 'tropical neurasthenia'. In the years leading up to the Great Depression actinic rays were blamed for depression, mood swings, 'outbursts of passion' and even causing Europeans to become sterile.<sup>110</sup> In India, for instance, Sir Joseph Fayrer, the president of the medical board at the India Office, warned that '[i]n hot climates ... as a rule the European does at length become debilitated, and needs to change to a cooler climate which he should take, if he can, after five or six years'.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> A. B. Wolfe, 'The Population Problem since the World War: A Survey of Literature and Research', *Journal of Political Economy* 36, no. 5 (January 1928): 674 — 675.

<sup>108</sup> Nancy Stepan, 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places', in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 98—104.

<sup>109</sup> David N. Livingstone, 'Race, Space and Moral Climatology: Notes toward a Genealogy', *Journal of Historical Geography* 28, no. 2 (April 2002): 159—80.

<sup>110</sup> Dane Kennedy, *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia, 1890-1939* (United States: Duke University Press, 1987), 110.

<sup>111</sup> Joseph Fayrer, *On Preservation of Health in India* (London: Macmillan, 1894), 25.



The danger of tropical degeneration and disease was not limited to the actual tropics. The U.S. South had long been viewed as a distinct region, not least because of its warmer and wetter climate. It was not hard for contemporary observers to relate it to the dangerous tropical regions of the world. The South was '[a] land and people ravaged by what one writer in the *North American Review* called "tropical poverty"'. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, colonists considering transplantation to Virginia and the West Indies harboured anxieties about the dangers hot climates posed to English constitutions. In the travel diary of John Milton Mackie (*From Cape Cod to Dixie and the Tropics*) he marvelled at the "primeval aspect of things" in the South and wrote of Louisiana that "it had the beauty of the garden and the desolation of the wasteland combined."<sup>112</sup> The South was exotic. It harboured diseases unknown to the rest of the country but familiar to the inhabitants of the tropics: hookworm, pellagra, malaria. The *Southern Medical Journal* declared that 'it falls to the lot of southern physicians to act as outpost sentinels, guarding the land from being unconsciously invaded by devastating diseases'. The South as tropical Other was a view shared by a number of philanthropic experts. In *World's Work*, Walter Hines Page argued that the hookworm campaigns and public health work of the Rockefeller philanthropies would lead to the 'reclamation of other tropical peoples'. The International Health Division held that health-work experience in the South was useful training for men 'given responsible posts in foreign countries'. In Puerto Rico, the work of an army surgeon inspired Charles Stiles, the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission's scientific secretary, to begin his search for the hookworm parasite in the U.S. South.<sup>113</sup>

Proponents of environmental determinism were quick to employ the figure of the Poor White as a symbol of racial degeneration. In *The Passing of the Great Race*, for instance, Madison Grant, chairman of the New York Zoological Society, argued that when the Nordic race emigrates to a warmer climate 'they grow listless and cease to breed'. Thus '[i]n the lower classes in the Southern States of America the increasing proportion of "poor whites" and "crackers" are symptoms of lack of climatic adjustment. The whites in Georgia, in the Bahamas and, above all, in Barbados are excellent examples of the deleterious effects of residence outside the natural habitat of the Nordic race'.<sup>114</sup> Frederick Osborn, later president of Rockefeller's Population Council, wrote the preface. In 1915 Ellsworth Huntington, Professor of Geography at Yale University, published *Civilization and Climate* in which he argued for a 'climatic hypothesis of civilization'. According to Huntington 'human character' had a physical basis, and this could be scientifically determined. Huntington argued that warmer climates slowed the brain activity of the white race. Thus 'when the white man migrates to climates less stimulating than those of his original home, he appears to lose in both physical and mental energy ... it is only in adverse climates

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<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Ring, *The Problem South*, 84.

<sup>113</sup> Ring, *The Problem South*, 84-87.

<sup>114</sup> Madison Grant, *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (United States: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 39.

that we find the type of ‘poor white trash’ developing in appreciable numbers’.<sup>115</sup> According to Huntington, the U.S. South had certain ‘climatic handicaps’. The inhabitants ‘did not feel the eager zest for work which is so notable in parts of the world where the climatic stimulus’ was greater. The climate, together with tropical diseases, meant that Southerners were ‘falling below the level of their race’ to become ‘Poor Whites and Crackers’. In fact, Southern whites as a whole were sinking ‘dangerously near the level’ of blacks.<sup>116</sup>

The environmental determinist theories of experts such as Grant and Huntington were racist, but they were also the scientific orthodoxy of the day. And they were sometimes wielded against colonial and settler interests, such as on the issue of racial segregation. This was particularly clear in Australia, where the tropical northern part of the country had long been regarded as dangerous to white settlement. Proponents of environmental determinism and white prestige clashed in the first decades of the twentieth century over the institution of the White Australia policy that sought to limit immigration to Europeans. A significant body of critics objected — not on moral grounds, but because, as the white race degenerated in the tropical north, Australia would need the labour provided by immigrants from Asia and the Pacific Islands. As historian Russell McGregor points out, this was effectively an argument about where to draw the colour line: somewhere beyond the northern tip, or somewhere near the Tropic of Capricorn.<sup>117</sup> In the 1922 book *A White Australia: Is it possible?* the medical scientist D. Hastings Young argued that ‘the vigour and health of the various races of mankind — white, yellow and black — can only be maintained by residence in the zone apportioned to them by nature’; whites who lived for extended periods in the tropics would ‘degenerate physically, mentally and morally’.<sup>118</sup> Concerns over white survival in the north, as well as further possible settlement led the federal government to establish the Australian Institute of Tropical Medicine in Townsville in 1910. Unlike other research institutes for tropical medicine, the Townsville institute was directed primarily at finding out whether the ‘white working race’ could survive on the continent.<sup>119</sup> Its researchers investigated various factors such as humidity, temperature, soil type and more familiar theories of tropical decline: in their investigation of the sunlight and actinic rays, Townsville researchers explained that, due to the longitude of the tropics, the sun’s rays pass through a thinner layer of atmosphere and are thus more intense, though this remained a theoretical issue, as tests on live monkeys, rats and white and black rabbits proved inconclusive.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ellsworth Huntington, *Civilization and Climate* (United States: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 33.

<sup>116</sup> Huntington, *Civilization and Climate*, 42-43.

<sup>117</sup> Russell McGregor, ‘Drawing the Local Colour Line’, *The Journal of Pacific History* 47, no. 3 (June 8, 2012): 329—46.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 335.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, 336

<sup>120</sup> A. Breinl and W.J. Young, ‘Tropical Australia and Its Settlement’, *Annals of Tropical Medicine and Parasitology* 13 (1920): 351-411.

During the course of the 1910s, the Townsville Institute, which was also a centre for the Australian hookworm campaigns of the International Health Division between 1916 and 1924, released studies that pointed to the possibility of continued white settlement. In 1920, the Australasian Medical Congress stated that it was ‘unable to find anything pointing to the existence of inherent or insuperable obstacles in the way of the permanent occupation of Tropical Australia by a healthy indigenous white race’.<sup>121</sup> The congress noted that none of the ‘classical tropical diseases’ showed any substantial influence on communal health, and malaria was a rare phenomenon. Racial degeneration was not caused by climate or disease, but by other factors such as eugenic transmission. The conference argued for a robust public health system to ensure national health, which was thoroughly conflated with the White Australia policy. J.H.L Cumpston, then Australia’s federal director of quarantine and later first Director-General of the Australian Department of Health, argued that ‘at this stage in the national development [few things are of] more importance to Australia than the maintenance of White Australia. As the Medical Congress pointed out, this policy is bound to fail unless a properly organised scheme of control of disease is brought into operation without delay’.<sup>122</sup> Thus ‘[i]t is all very well to have a white Australia’, he said, ‘but it must be kept white. There must be immaculate cleanliness’.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the findings of the Medical Congress that tropical disease did not affect communal health, a belief in the degenerative properties of hookworm and malaria persisted. In 1922 Raphael Cilento was appointed head of the Townsville Institute, and later director of the Commonwealth Government’s Division of Tropical Hygiene in Brisbane. Cilento held that disease could be racially degenerative, but that white Australians had adapted in a eugenic fashion. In particular, the northern Australian had evolved into a specific racial type who ‘moves slowly, and conserves his muscular heat-producing energy’. However, as a prominent Adelaide geographer pointed out, this sounded like tropical lassitude and ‘one could ask whether the conservation of muscular heat-producing energy to which Cilento refers may not indicate some loss of vitality and some degree of physical decline’.<sup>124</sup> Cilento strongly rejected theories of environmental determination and attacked Ellsworth Huntington’s ‘climatic hypothesis of civilization’ as unfounded.

The debate between Cilento, the Australian health expert, and Huntington, the American geography expert, as to the origins of Poor Whiteism was of particular relevance in far-away South Africa, which had also been grappling with theories of climatic degeneration, particularly in the Bushveld. For their investigation into the environmental causes of Poor Whiteism, the Carnegie commissioners did not start from scratch but drew on the debates of the transnational network of experts in Poor Whiteism that had already been established. The Carnegie Report firmly situated Poor Whiteism in the context of

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<sup>121</sup> ‘Slaves and Drudges’, *The Daily News*, May 12, 1921.

<sup>122</sup> James A. Gillespie, *The Price of Health: Australian Governments and Medical Politics 1910-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 41.

<sup>123</sup> Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 139.

<sup>124</sup> McGregor, ‘Drawing the Local Colour Line’, 337-338.

European degeneration, which stretched across the globe, from the U.S. South to Kenya to India and to Australia.

In his volume on *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem* Murray investigated the claims of W.B. Osborn, a South African scientist, that the country's sunlight was far more intense than in Europe. In 1929, when the Commission's investigation was well under way, Osborn published his theory in the *South African Journal of Science*, and argued that South Africa had more than twice as many 'sunlight hours' than London. African sunshine, he claimed, was found to be richer in ultra-violet rays and the 'mean intensity of the actinic rays' in South Africa was between seven to ten times as great as that experienced in London.<sup>125</sup> His findings were used to argue — most notably by Leipoldt — that such intensity of sunlight was 'harmful to the white race and may be a material factor in the physical and mental deterioration of the European indigents in South Africa'.<sup>126</sup> By the time of the Carnegie Commission, however, belief in the scientific validity of actinic rays and the degenerative power of sunlight had greatly fallen. Concern over solar radiation had declined as the settler societies became more established and Murray was able to dismiss the theory out of hand.

The 'climatic' hypothesis of Huntington was less easy to dismiss and it is indicative of just how seriously the Yale professor was taken that his theories were addressed in two separate volumes of the Carnegie report. Huntington had looked at the South African Poor White Problem and concluded that it was only when white settlers had trekked north and tried to settle in more tropical conditions that Poor Whites had started to appear. Even when it was not dangerous and degenerating, the climate of the country as a whole failed to stimulate white bodies. 'Even the best parts of South Africa cannot approach England and Holland in the excellence of their climate. Hence the white settlers are everywhere at a disadvantage', he said.<sup>127</sup> This was controversial. Critics had pointed out that, Poor Whites aside, the white settlers of South Africa and Australia seemed healthier, stronger and taller than their equivalent in England, where the pollution, poverty and cramped conditions had long been a source of concern. The robust health of the settlers was an illusion, Huntington's supporters argued. The degeneration would only show in the third generation of settlers. Leipoldt, using his European shrubs as an example, wrote that '[t]heir first and second generations were invariably superior to the parents, the stems and foliage more robust, the flowers larger, their fertility excellent. But in the third generation there is a sudden and surprising degeneration, that is perpetuated into succeeding strains...'<sup>128</sup>

Murray, in his refutation of climatic theories, related the furious debate between the Townsville Institute's Cilento and Huntington — between disease and climate as the cause for degeneration.

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<sup>125</sup> W.B. Osborn, 'Preliminary Observations to Determine the Ultra-Violet Content of South African Sunlight', *South African Journal of Science* 26 (1929): 527—40.

<sup>126</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 88.

<sup>127</sup> Huntington, *Civilization and Climate*, 33.

<sup>128</sup> Leipoldt, *Bushveld Doctor*, 56.

According to Cilento ‘the most outstanding fact in the world’s history is disease and its distribution and it is considered that almost all the points made by Huntington are readily explicable in relation to it’. He noted that the Townsville Institute was in Queensland, and firmly in the tropical north of the country. The Queenslanders did not show any disability due to climate and neither were their children handicapped. ‘It is true that not every person can live, thrive and multiply in the tropics, just as the same statement may be applied to many people who fail to live in comfort in a cold climate’.<sup>129</sup> According to Murray, the work of the Townsville Institute had shown that in many countries ‘the presence and distribution of malaria and ankylostomiasis (hookworm disease) are more than sufficient to account for the retardation ascribed by Huntington to climate alone’. Years later, when Huntington toured Australia, he visited the Townsville Institute. Unable to find evidence of racial degeneration he declared that the Queenslanders had escaped their fate thanks to the ‘most strenuous and persistent selection of the right types of people’.<sup>130</sup>

Like malaria and hookworm, the Carnegie Commission could find no evidence to support Huntington’s claims and it could find no evidence of climatic degeneration more generally. Murray pointed out that only a small part of South Africa actually falls within the tropics, and that this area was relatively unpopulated by Europeans. Further the low humidity and generally dry climate was not comparable to the high humidity of the tropical regions. Finally, the Poor Whites had first appeared in the dry semi-desert of the Karoo, he said, which, together with the Highveld region, was known for the ‘stimulating’ effect of its cold winters and sharp frosts.<sup>131</sup> What is important to note here is not whether the climate caused Poor Whiteism — certainly scientists and laymen held firmly to these beliefs until very recently — but that the climatic debate was a transnational one. The Carnegie commissioners drew on a number of international debates to situate and understand the phenomenon in their own country, even when these theories patently did not apply, such as hookworm and actinic rays. Those were transnationally accepted explanations for Poor Whiteism, evidence that the investigators viewed the South African Poor White Problem through a transnational frame. The Poor Whites of South Africa were not seen in isolation to the Poor Whites of the U.S. South and the Poor Whites of Australia. Theories of climatic degeneration linked them in a shared concern over European racial health and racial destiny. The transnational fraternity of White Men’s Countries extended to a transnational fear of the White Man’s Grave. The ‘appearance’ of Poor Whites, as Murray put it, was the proverbial canary in the coal mine — an indication that the race had reached too far and settled shores too strange.

Although it now seems a relic of Victorian racial science, belief in the degenerative powers of the environment persisted until comparatively recently — and even won over firm adherents to the disease theory of racial degeneration. In 1944, George Strobe, director of the Rockefeller Foundation’s

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<sup>129</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 85-86.

<sup>130</sup> Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 170.

<sup>131</sup> Murray, *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, 85.

International Health Division, suggested the organisation establish of a new field of medical research known as 'physiological hygiene'. The IHD, he said, had devoted its energy to disease control, yet it had neglected man's function response to the environment:

Whilst the white race during the last 400 years have conquered the greater part of the earth, they have conquered tropical areas only at the expense of their own power if by chance they have settled there. The story of 'The Poor Whites' in portions of South Africa, the southern United States and the West Indies may be placed in evidence of this. When white men settle in warm climates the first generation appears to maintain its energy practically unimpaired, but those that follow show a gradual deterioration, a social and economic retrogression until the white man becomes not only lazy but at times something considerably lower than a decent native.<sup>132</sup>

It was not just a matter of disease, he said, as the Bahamas had no hookworm and practically no malaria. Instead it was a combination of disease and some hostile element in the environment — humidity, temperature, sunlight, gas. Poor Whiteism was not only pathology, but place. Purely by existing in certain regions could the white race descend to the level of the native.

## **Conclusion**

To the philanthropies of the early twentieth century, the Poor White was not confined to the far reaches of South Africa, or the cotton plantations of the U.S. South. The Rockefeller and Carnegie philanthropies recognised the Poor White as but a local manifestation of a global problem — that of racial degeneration. Although the cause of that problem changed over time, the ultimate goal was the maintenance of racial health. Poor Whites threatened white health in various ways. Eugenicists believed that their inferior blood, and their proximity — physically, morally, sexually — to lesser races, weakened the white race by diluting the strength of the stock. It was widely held by elites that the maintenance of racial stock and racial dignity was paramount. U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, at the Committee of One Hundred, part of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, announced that '[t]o prevent possible deterioration of the American stock should be a national ambition. We cannot too strongly insist on the necessity of proper ideals for the family, for simple living and for those habits and tastes which produce vigor and make men capable of strenuous service to their country'.<sup>133</sup>

The idea of inherent inadequacy, though influential, was difficult to sustain in places, such as settler societies and colonies, where white numerical inferiority meant white racial unity was crucial, such as

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<sup>132</sup> Comments on Policy and Program, Folder 135, Box 13, series 908, RG 3.1, RF.

<sup>133</sup> Ring, *The Problem South*, 80.

the repeated calls for unity between Boer and Briton in South Africa. Far more palatable was the idea of an external cause for the Poor Whites. This had a more redemptive appeal. The Rockefeller Foundation saw disease as a primary source of misery in the world. Hookworm and malaria sapped energy and intelligence and made Poor Whites out of strong European stock. By curing Poor Whiteism, health experts and philanthropies would be vastly expanding the potential labour pool for unskilled and semi-skilled labour, and increasing the efficiency of those already employed. The owners of capital had a significant monetary interest in “curing” the Poor Whites.<sup>134</sup> Yet that is not the whole story. As Ernst Malherbe wrote in his volume of the Carnegie Report:

We do not wish to go into the big problem of deciding which is the most potent factor ... heredity or environment, nature or nurture ... Whichever one of these we take as the root cause the phenomenon is disquieting enough as it stands. The fact remains that if one takes into account the double handicap due to inferior environment (which is certain) add to that inferior heredity (which is probable) under which (to put it conservatively) not less than 50% of our future white population is being recruited, it is doubtful whether, if this sort of thing is allowed to continue over a long period of time, the white race in South Africa will not lose much of that stamina and virility so necessary for the maintenance of white civilisation in Africa.<sup>135</sup>

The diseases of Poor Whiteism, various as they are, were as much moral as they were physical. The sickness of Poor Whites made them steal, drink, laze about and consort with other races. Their poor hygiene and unsanitary homes dragged the race down and threatened white prestige. By curing Poor Whiteism, experts would morally uplift the group and essentially ‘whiten’ them. The greater earning capacity of newly healthy families meant better living conditions, better nutrition and better sanitation — better white communities. Curing Poor White disease meant curing Poor White regions such as the U.S. South or Northern Australia. In a similar way proponents of environmental explanations for Poor Whites were quick to point out the economic advantages of white settlement in the tropics — an overflow of the overcrowded and overworked Global North — as well as emphasizing the moral decay that was inherent to the strange and sinister tropics. By ensuring white durability in these regions they would be ensuring white prosperity; by saving the Poor Whites they would be ensuring white prestige. Curing Poor Whiteism was crucial to the simple fact of white survival.

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<sup>134</sup> E. Richard Brown, ‘Public Health in Imperialism: Early Rockefeller Programs at Home and Abroad’, *American Journal of Public Health* 66, no. 9 (September 1976): 897—903.

<sup>135</sup> Malherbe, *Education and the Poor White*, 237.



# Housing the Poor White

## *Town planning, garden cities and racial uplift*

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‘Garden Cities Improve the Race’, proclaimed *The New York Times* in 1912. The newspaper reported on the visit of Henry Vivian, chairman of England’s Co-Partnership Tenant’s Movement, to the city. Vivian was a convert to the British garden city movement and encouraged his New York audience to start a similar campaign on the grounds of racial health. As evidence he argued that children raised in garden cities were larger than those raised in slums and their death rate much lower. If white Americans continued to live in large cities, Vivian warned, it would, over generations, lead to ‘the decay of the race on [the] continent’.<sup>1</sup>

Previous chapters of this thesis have touched upon the relationship between eugenics and environmental determinism, such as the belief that clean, bright and sanitary schoolhouses had an intrinsic uplifting quality or, conversely, the belief that substandard and overcrowded housing conditions in slums ‘bred’ Poor Whites and moral perversion. What *The New York Times* article indicates, however, is that this link was scaleable. Whereas the environmental/eugenic conception had previously been limited to individual buildings, the newspaper did not blink at the thought of an entire city having a racially uplifting effect.

This chapter argues that the shift in scale was only possible because a eugenic and deterministic logic had long been coded into the building blocks of urban spaces: town and city planning. Although it has a protracted history, the ‘new’ profession of town planning that developed from Western urban concerns such as Victorian housing conditions only became formalised at the turn of the twentieth century. Town planners were not oblivious to the eugenic basis of their discipline and, in various contexts, enthusiastically embraced its potential to create new spaces that uplifted inhabitants physically, morally and racially. Moreover town planning developed right as new technologies of transport and communication made internationalism possible. Town planners and architects, and the professional and social groups they moved in, constituted early examples of transnational networks that facilitated the transfer of eugenic ideas and best practices. As these ideas spread to places such as the United States and South Africa, town planning was used to build suburbs and towns in which to house, and ultimately discipline, the Poor White. Although the focus so far has been on the rural Poor White, his or her urban counterpart was regarded as related but distinct — a different ‘type’ — and with a separate set of

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<sup>1</sup>‘Find Garden Cities Improve the Race’, *The New York Times*, September 28, 1912.

problems and solutions.<sup>2</sup> Rural Poor Whites were often, but not always, viewed as racially pure descendants of Anglo-Saxon stock. Urban Poor Whites were by contrast a constantly shifting group, their makeup changing as immigrant groups negotiated access into whiteness. This, however, only made them a more pressing challenge for the social and spatial reform that the transnational agenda of town planning presaged.

This chapter attempts a genealogy of transnational governmentality through a study of the spatial governance of Poor Whites. The chapter does not have a traditional flow. Instead it builds upon each preceding section, showing how new theories of spatial governance drew upon older, existing theories and so formed part of the framework of transnational governmentality. It demonstrates that this framework was not universal, but adapted, built upon and refined. It concludes with two case studies demonstrating how existing scholarship can be reread using these theories. They are not meant to be read in isolation, rather they should be considered genealogically. The chapter follows two distinct applications of town planning — different theories of the city that, at heart, had the same goal. Following Osborne and Rose, I suggest that these ‘diagrams’ of the eugenic city and the sanitary city were applied to urban citizens in general and, eventually, specifically to Poor Whites as a form of disciplinary biopower.<sup>3</sup> Although they were not initially developed to train the habits of Poor Whites, but rather of problematic populations, the eugenic and disciplinary logic of these diagrams proved irresistible to planners in countries with a substantial Poor White population. In the first section I show the development of the sanitary city from Victorian health concerns to colonial town planning; then to its application on Poor Whites in the colonies and finally how it was implicated in the design of Apartheid town-planning legislation. The second section tracks the eugenic city from the philanthropic company towns and garden cities in Britain, to the United States, where it was adapted to discipline Poor Whites, and then repackaged and exported to South Africa.

What this chapter argues then is that the transnational career of the Poor White — who as we have seen could be found in several places, produced by a range of proximate causes, and who refused to be aligned with national boundaries and destinies — was, in the urban phase that held the greatest dangers of racial degeneration, inextricably bound to a town-planning movement that represented one of the most distinctive manifestations of the transnational governmentality of the early twentieth century, a governmentality that, as will be argued here, was eugenic to its core.

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Lis Lange, *White, Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg* (United Kingdom: Ashgate Publishing, 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, ‘Governing Cities: Notes on the Spatialisation of Virtue’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17, no. 6 (1999): 737—60.

## Space and sanitation in the Victorian city and colony

A central image of the Victorian imagination is that of the city. The industrial revolution had given rise to a new urban landscape that was a site of progress, innovation and modernity. Yet the city was also the site of a host of new social problems caused by progress: overcrowding, pollution, poverty, disease and vice. Solving the social problems of the city became the preoccupation of a host of experts from a variety of different fields. The Jekyll-and-Hyde nature of cities like London and Manchester, and the efforts to tame their spaces, meant that the Victorian city was, above all, a site of reform.

Although the cause was strongly debated by medical professionals, the city seemed to be particularly prone to diseases such as cholera and influenza which swept through populations and which particularly affected the poorest. In the period this gave rise to a sanitary science which saw a very close relationship between disease and the built environment.<sup>4</sup> In particular, Victorian sanitary science relied on the concept of the ‘miasma’, which was conceived as an invisible atmospheric substance given off by decaying organic matter, and through the ordinary function of human bodies. It was this invisible miasma that facilitated disease. According to contemporary experts, miasmas adhered to physical laws. They concentrated in low-lying areas and were thicker in more densely populated areas. Thus the slums and rookeries of Victorian England, dense with unclean bodies, were sites of disease because they were choked on the miasma of the city. In the conflation of diseased space with diseased bodies, government and civil-society efforts to improve the health of the urban population such as slum clearance, sewers, quarantine, and clean water, were as much about spatial reform as medical intervention.

Crucially, as geographer Felix Driver showed, the conflation of space and medical science also encompassed a moral element. There were moral miasmas as well as physical miasmas. Instead of spreading disease, these invisible atmospheres spread corruption and degeneration — derived from the perceived lack of morals amongst the poorer classes as well as, paradoxically, giving rise to these very vices. Social problems such as crime and alcoholism were spread, contagion-like, amongst the tenements. In the Victorian city disease and morality were spatially constituted. Efforts to control the spread of disease were mingled with efforts to contain the spread of vice.<sup>5</sup> By reforming space, reformers would be ‘curing’ not only disease but degenerate morals most often associated with the poor and working class.

According to Osborne and Rose these efforts to reform the Victorian city transformed it into a ‘laboratory of conduct’ where citizens were taught new ways of behaving, such as in hygiene and sanitation.<sup>6</sup> They conceive of the city as a diagram — understood in its literal sense, but also as a dense and interconnected ‘space of power, regulation, ethics, and citizenship’ where regulation and reform

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<sup>4</sup> Felix Driver, ‘Moral Geographies: Social Science and the Urban Environment in Mid-Nineteenth Century England’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 13, no. 3 (1988): 275—87.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 281.

<sup>6</sup> Osborne and Rose, ‘Governing Cities’, 737—60.

played out. A diagram is ‘a discursive code that organises reality in order that it may be both visible and usable’.<sup>7</sup> Osborne and Rose offer the idea of the eugenic diagram of the city, a space where interventions were carried out in order to improve the health of citizens and to prevent the weakening of racial stock. Here spatial reform is focussed on improving the potential mental and physical health of inhabitants. An alternative but related diagram is what I will term the sanitary diagram of the city. This encompasses efforts to control the spread of disease in its physical and moral forms. Spatial reform in this diagram is focussed on control, on segregation and on isolating the dangerous elements from the healthy social body.

In my emphasis on the discipline of conduct I am again drawing on Foucault’s conception of governmentality. Governmentality relies on certain technologies of the state such as statistics, data collection and surveillance in order to gather knowledge on its population and then to train them into certain modes of conduct; it is a form of political knowledge. As geographers such as Margo Huxley have shown, governmentality relies heavily on the management of space, and that it is in these governable spaces where techniques to discipline the individual and the population meet.<sup>8</sup>

Governable spaces are not limited to the street or to the square. The spatial aspects of control are eminently scalable. Matthew Hannah has demonstrated how disciplinary power is found at a variety of levels, from the architectural discipline found in the construction of prisons, to the compound discipline of public spaces, and to large ‘disciplined’ urban spaces such as suburbs.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the very technologies that enabled discipline and regulation were developed in a colonial era that was increasingly connected via telegraph wires and steamships. Technologies such as town planning and statistics were easily packaged and transmitted to new colonial possessions where a network of governors and experts were trying to fashion the colonial ‘liberal’ state. Colonialism saw governmental ideas of control exported from London, and from Europe, to places as diverse as Singapore and Mumbai, Lagos and Nairobi.

The resulting colonial-city model is unique in urban planning, but it is a model nonetheless, with a defined structure and design.<sup>10</sup> At its simplest it is premised on ‘high standard, intensely regulated space for the colonial population, and low-quality, poorly regulated space for the indigenous population’.<sup>11</sup> It evolved from the military lay-out of the barracks and the cantonment, with a separate space given over to civil servants and managers. It was deployed as a solution to the problems caused by overpopulation,

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<sup>7</sup> Hyungmin Pai, *The Portfolio and the Diagram: Architecture, Discourse, and Modernity in America*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 164.

<sup>8</sup> Margo Huxley, ‘Spatial Rationalities: Order, Environment, Evolution and Government’, *Social & Cultural Geography* 7, no. 5 (October 2006): 771—87.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Hannah, ‘Space and the Structuring of Disciplinary Power: An Interpretive Review’, *Geografiska Annaler, Series B: Human Geography* 79B, no. 3 (January 1997): 171—80.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony D. King, *Colonial Urban Development: Culture, Social Power, and Environment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Books, 1976).

<sup>11</sup> Susan Parnell, ‘Winning the Battles but Losing the War: The Racial Segregation of Johannesburg under the Natives (urban Areas) Act of 1923’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 28, no. 2 (April 2002): 259.

such as the disease that inevitably followed. In rapidly growing and heavily populated parts of the empire, housing shortages and traffic blockages reached crisis point in cities such as Madras and Mumbai.<sup>12</sup> The colonial government responded by clearing slums and laying down streets in a gridiron pattern that encouraged the free movement of air and people, and was far easier to monitor.

By the early twentieth century, the colonial model incorporated the logic of the new town-planning movement exported from Britain. Scholars of colonial governmentality have studied the various ways discipline and the colonial urban form interacted.<sup>13</sup> The most well-known example is New Delhi, which was constructed in 1911 as the ideal colonial city. New Delhi's streets and squares were made wide for salubrity, access and surveillance; the government buildings made imposing to instil a sense of authority and control.<sup>14</sup> The blueprint for the European section of the colonial city was London, of course, where the necessary sanitary intervention had already taken place. This design was copied so slavishly that in South Africa, for example, the main thoroughfare of Adderley Street in Cape Town immediately recalls Whitehall.

The colonial-city model as a whole was predicated on control — both of the native population and of the new diseases it carried. The space was built to a sanitary diagram. There was little desire to uplift native populations along eugenic lines. In many ways, the ideal colonial city was the sanitary city where European bodies were protected and insulated from the populations they governed. The doctors, architects and planners involved in the design of colonial cities were not neutral experts, but agents of empire. The facts they uncovered and truths they created were very often in service to colonial commercial and political interests, such as the purposeful misdiagnosis of smallpox on the Kimberley diamond mines as 'Kaffir pox' in order to prevent profit-shrinking quarantine.<sup>15</sup>

Colonial medical and sanitary logic was closely bound with the segregation of the native populations, who were seen as reservoirs of disease. In his well-known tract *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, Lord Frederick Lugard, governor of Hong Kong and Nigeria, gave his recommendations for the design of new colonial settlements. 'The first object of the non-residential area is to segregate Europeans, so that they shall not be exposed to the attacks of mosquitoes which have become infected with the germs of malaria or yellow fever, by preying on Natives, and especially Native Children, whose blood so often contained these germs', he wrote. Such segregation would also safeguard against bushfires and lessen the sound of native drumming.<sup>16</sup> Lugard recommended a type of *cordon sanitaire* around European zones which would safeguard white populations from disease. The link between

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Home, 'Town Planning and Garden Cities in the British Colonial Empire 1910—1940', *Planning Perspectives* 5, no. 1 (1990): 23—37.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Peter Redfield, 'Foucault in the Tropics: Displacing the Panopticon', in *Anthropologies of Modernity: Foucault, Governmentality, and Life Politics*, ed. Jonathan Xavier Inda (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), 50—82.

<sup>14</sup> Legg, *Spaces of Colonialism*.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Home, *Of Planting and Planning: The Making of British Colonial Cities* (London: Routledge, 2013), 48.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

malaria and mosquitoes had only recently been made and, although the flying range of the insect was still unknown, Lugard recommended that the *cordon sanitaire* be wide enough not to offer ‘resting places for mosquitoes’.<sup>17</sup>

As medical opinion oscillated between germ theory and miasma as the cause of disease, colonial medical experts such as Sir William Simpson, co-founder of the London School of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene, recommended colonials construct sanatoria and hill stations in order to, amongst other considerations, preserve their health from miasmas.<sup>18</sup> He also suggested segregating European residential zones away from native housing as ‘native children are seldom not infected with malaria’. He insisted that ‘it is part of the duty of governments that the traffic between infected and healthy localities of natives and native porters on a large scale for commercial purposes, should be supervised and medically controlled’.<sup>19</sup>

In the early nineteenth century, planning activity was largely the responsibility of military engineers and the knowledge disseminated through army academies, then engineering academies. As the century progressed, planning became the domain of metropole-trained civil engineers and surveyors who were often attached to colonial municipalities, and who transferred urban designs between Asia and Africa. By the twentieth century, the town planning movement, supported by legislation and a specialist press, led to the establishment of the Town Planning Institute. This in turn enabled an elite corps of British-trained professional town planners who moved with ease throughout British colonial possessions and who incorporated the ideals of the sanitary colonial city into their work.<sup>20</sup>

The British town planners were certainly not alone in their profession, and formed part of an extensive, emerging transnational network of planning professionals, a ‘global intelligence corps’ that was perhaps one of the first transnational communities of the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> Planning and architectural professionals came from countries such as Germany, Finland, the United States and Japan. They read the same planning journals, attended exhibitions, competed for contracts and careered through the late-imperial Anglo-Saxon world.

A good example is Charles Reade, a New Zealander who became Assistant Secretary to the Garden City and Town Planning Association in London, as well as founder associate of the Town Planning Institute. Between 1916 and 1921 he held the post of Government Town Planner in South Australia, where he drew up plans for Colonel Light Gardens in Adelaide. The same year he accepted a post as

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<sup>17</sup> Home, *Of Planting and Planning*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> William J. Simpson, *The Principles of Hygiene as Applied to Tropical and Sub-Tropical Environments* (London: John Bale, Sons + Danielsson, 1908).

<sup>19</sup> William J. Simpson, *The Maintenance of Health in the Tropics* (London: John Bale, Sons + Danielsson, 1916), 118.

<sup>20</sup> Anthony D. King, ‘Exporting Planning: The Colonial and Neo-Colonial Experience’, in *Shaping an Urban World*, ed. Gordon Cherry (London: Mansell, 1980), 201–26.

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Ward, ‘A Pioneer ‘Global Intelligence Corps’? The Internationalisation of Planning Practice, 1890—1939’, *Town Planning Review* 76, no. 2 (2005): 119—41.

Government Town Planner in Federated Malay States, where he worked for nine years. He then moved on to Northern Rhodesia at the invitation of the Colonial Secretary, and where he became Director of Planning and Development until his death in 1933.

Another example is the architect-planner Sir Herbert Baker who trained in London, then opened a practice in South Africa where he worked for Cecil John Rhodes, became a favourite architect of the wealthy Johannesburg Randlords, designed the Union Buildings in Pretoria as the official seat of government and was associated with Alfred, Lord Milner's Kindergarten — a group of influential imperial officials. In 1912 he went to India and collaborated with the architect-planner Edwin Lutyens on the design of New Delhi, which had recently been chosen to replace Calcutta as the headquarters of the British Indian Government. In 1913 he moved to London where he designed both India House and South Africa House and redesigned the Bank of England building. After the First World War he designed Commonwealth monuments in cemeteries in France and Belgium. In later years he designed schools in Kenya and churches in Australia. Lutyens, annoyed at Baker's fervent belief in empire, once quipped that 'his world is bound by the range of a pom-pom gun'.<sup>22</sup>

The regulation of the colonial sanitary city paid particular attention to its Poor White population. Partly, this was descended from Victorian concerns over the health of the urban working poor, but it was also because the Poor Whites and the urban spaces they occupied were closely connected to issues of race and health unique to the colonies. In South Africa the issue of modern urban segregation was tightly bound with the issue of health. Turn-of-the-century colonials were possessed of a 'sanitation syndrome' which interacted in powerful ways with South African racial attitudes to influence segregationist thinking. Sanitary legislation was used to clear the slums — locations of crime, disease and overcrowding — in an effort to instil social discipline into the wayward colonials.<sup>23</sup> The outbreaks of plague in Johannesburg and Cape Town in the early 1900s, and the devastating influenza epidemic of 1918 illustrate that colonial concern with health was not unwarranted, yet sanitary legislation was also used to segregate racial spaces over other concerns such as racial mixing.

Johannesburg, especially, attracted a large Poor White population. The city was only established in 1885 after the discovery of a massive gold-bearing reef, and it rapidly expanded as fortune-seekers converged from all over the world. The diggers were followed by mining companies who relied on cheap black labour from rural South Africa. Intensive industrialisation and urbanisation followed, stretching city authorities to the limit. Johannesburg, in the first two decades of the twentieth century, quickly developed a core of slums in the inner city. Slums such as Brickfields and Vrededorp displayed

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<sup>22</sup> Jane Ridley, 'Edwin Lutyens, New Delhi, and the Architecture of Imperialism', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 26, no. 2 (1998): 77.

<sup>23</sup> M. W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-09', in *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa*, ed. William Beinart and Saul Dubow (New York: Routledge, 1995).



a distinct mixed-race character, with Poor Whites and blacks freely mixing. For colonial elites, committed to upholding white prestige and worried about potential labour unrest, the slums were problematic sites.

In 1901 Lord Milner, then colonial administrator of the Transvaal, appointed Charles Porter, a British-trained doctor, as Johannesburg's first full-time Medical Officer of Health. Porter was a keen student of British town planning and was particularly worried about the slums, which he viewed, not unreasonably, as unhealthy. Yet his solution was racial segregation on the grounds of public health — blacks could potentially transmit diseases such as tuberculosis to the Poor Whites, but also because the Poor Whites were incapable of 'even passing cleanliness'.<sup>24</sup> This was exacerbated by overcrowding and poor housing conditions. Porter soon implemented extensive municipal anti-slum measures, such as the power to demolish buildings deemed unsanitary. In later years he would proudly point to their resemblance to the English Town Planning Act of 1909.

Porter campaigned relentlessly and publicly for provincial and national anti-slum and public-health legislation. At one point he convinced Herbert Baker to deliver a supporting public lecture on the need for low urban density. In 1914 he travelled to London for a town planning summer school where he attended lectures and networked extensively with the leading lights of the nascent town-planning movement. In 1918 an influenza epidemic raged through South Africa, killing 150,000 people. In its aftermath calls for public-health reform and increased slum controls were taken up by the press, liberal reformers and politicians. This resulted in a raft of new legislation, such as the 1919 Unhealthy Areas Bill, which was modelled in part on Britain's 1890 Housing of the Working Classes Act. As geographer Susan Parnell points out, responses to government inquiries established in the wake of the influenza epidemic, such as the Housing Commission of 1919, make clear that the anti-slum and overcrowding measures of town planning were viewed as a white, and particularly Poor White, problem. In their response to the Housing Commission, the Bloemfontein Town Council pointed out that the movement of Poor Whites to towns and 'herding in the most insanitary places thro' their lack of means and efficiency' was a 'national menace'. The council suggested national legislation to relocate Poor Whites from the slums.<sup>25</sup>

The extent to which the disciplinary logic of colonialism and the sanitary logic of the Victorian city was baked into town planning is evident in just how easily international practices were adapted for the segregation and control of South Africa's Poor Whites. According to Parnell the legislation that was eventually passed, the South African Public Health Act of 1919 and the Housing Act of 1920 bore close resemblance in its town-planning aspects to international norms, such as had been adopted at the 1920

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Parnell, 'Creating Racial Privilege: The Origins of South African Public Health and Town Planning Legislation', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 3 (September 1993): 479.

<sup>25</sup> Parnell, 'Creating Racial Privilege', 486.

Inter-Allied Housing and Town Planning Congress in Paris. In sum, ‘South African adoption of international planning principles on overcrowding, housing funding, and slum removals were a deliberate endeavour to forge segregationist urban policies by enhancing the urban conditions of whites’.<sup>26</sup>

The Poor Whites could not just be removed from the slums via anti-slum and public-health legislation. They needed somewhere to be relocated to — no easy task in a city suffering from a severe decades-long housing crisis. This meant the construction of sanitary public housing for Poor Whites, as well as better control of housing conditions in slum areas. These efforts worked in concert with ever-increasing racist legislation and extensive urban segregation so that the health concerns of Poor Whites soon formed part of the logic of apartheid segregation. In 1923 the Natives (Urban Areas) Act legalised the forcible removal of blacks from cities. That year Porter was assigned to conduct a survey of working-class housing in Johannesburg in order to assess the need for the white housing scheme. He criticised ‘the close housing association of poor whites with Native and Coloured persons’ and ‘unreservedly expressed the view that the necessity for assisted white housing was relatively negligible compared with the urgency for the segregation and decent housing of “Natives”’.<sup>27</sup> The need to implement the Natives (Urban Areas) Act subsumed efforts to implement a white housing scheme, however, and the council concluded that housing conditions for whites in the inner-city would be improved once blacks were removed from the slums and relocated in townships outside the city. Racial mixing in the slums increased, however, as more impoverished blacks and whites streamed into the slums. In the 1930s, as the Poor White Problem reached a climax, the slums of Johannesburg had a significant Poor White population, which resulted in even louder calls for suitable white housing. The political climate, by then thoroughly Afrikaner nationalist, was also particularly sympathetic to the plight of the Poor Whites. The Johannesburg City Council was even criticised for constructing black accommodation (after their removal from the slums) at the expense of whites.

In 1930, the Central Housing Board of Johannesburg was given state authority to provide loans for white housing schemes at very low interest rates (1.5%). This state intervention also led to white public housing schemes in most major cities, and facilitated the removal of Poor Whites from the slums to council housing estates. Furthermore, the Slums Act of 1934 also gave local authorities the power to expropriate whole sections of slum land for the building of housing schemes. In summation, the early 1920s saw the removal of blacks from slums to discourage racial mixing and improve the housing conditions of whites. A decade later, the political climate had changed but the slums were still mixed. Thus the state directly intervened by agreeing to massive white public housing schemes — this time removing the whites from the slums. Burgeoning Afrikaner nationalism and political attention had

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<sup>26</sup> Parnell, ‘Creating Racial Privilege’, 487.

<sup>27</sup> Susan Parnell, ‘Slums, Segregation and Poor Whites in Johannesburg, 1920-1934’, in *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940*, ed. Robert Morrell (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992), 119.

turned the spotlight to the Poor Whites. Afrikaner Prime Minister Barry Hertzog explicitly declared that ‘it was in order to deal with [Poor Whiteism]’ that he advocated expanded segregation.<sup>28</sup>

Apartheid, as the ultimate expression of segregation, is also the ultimate expression of the Victorian sanitary city. Through a network of health reformers, including architects and planners, a concern for urban health became a sanitary syndrome. In the segregated colonial cities the diseased population was quarantined from the healthy European population. Space and race were inseparable. In the slums of colonial cities the poor were outside the disciplinary gaze, the spaces they inhabited opaque to surveillance. To enter the ‘governable space’ of the sanitary urban diagram, the diseased had to be inspected and then subjected to the disciplinary logic of the colonial city.

Although, at first glance, the diseased population was indistinguishable from the colonized, this category was by no means fixed. Scholars such as Ann Laura Stoler have shown how, far from the metropole, race was a mutable category that had to be continuously negotiated and renegotiated to process, for instance, the mixed-race children of the colonisers.<sup>29</sup> In countries like South Africa and colonial Rhodesia the slums were also occupied by Poor Whites. These chaotic, mixed spaces were problematic for empires intent on upholding racial prestige. The Poor Whites in the slums were thus subjected to sanitary logic. They were not only removed from the healthy European population, but isolated from the diseased colonised population. By using regulations developed from health reform, such as slum-clearance legislation, the Poor Whites were removed from the ungovernable and diseased slums, and relocated to spaces that were easier to control and survey. They were mapped onto the ideal sanitary diagram of the city.

### **Model villages, garden cities and the eugenic diagram**

The influence of health in the development of modern town planning is only partly reflected in sanitary concerns regarding contagion, whether spread by miasma or mosquito. The city was also a space where measures were carried out to improve the health of inhabitants, and prevent the weakening of racial stock — what Osborne and Rose term the eugenic diagram of the city.<sup>30</sup> As opposed to the preventative measures of the colonial city and the *cordon sanitaire*, the logic of eugenic intervention was to improve and to strengthen the population.

The overcrowded and polluted slums of the Victorian city had not only produced a sickly urban population, but a population that was markedly smaller and weaker than rural inhabitants. And, as noted earlier, moral corruption and physical corruption were deemed inseparable. The cities were thus

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, 336.

<sup>29</sup> Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power*.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Osborne and Nikolas Rose, ‘Governing Cities: Notes on the Spatialisation of Virtue’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17, no. 6 (1999): 737—60.

breeding a new race — a weak and degenerate people — which threatened notions of racial and national superiority. Efforts to improve the moral and physical health of urban inhabitants included efforts to improve the spaces they inhabited, such as the construction of green spaces and parks. These were viewed as having an invigorating effect on urban bodies and minds. In London, the efforts of social reformers to construct such ‘healtheries’ even extended to remaking disused cemeteries into gardens and playgrounds. The capital’s numerous abandoned graveyards were described by campaigners as ‘howling wildernesses’ which were ‘sources of danger to public health and public morals ... free from police supervision’.<sup>31</sup>

These ideas of the interplay between space and physical and mental well-being were enthusiastically embraced by philanthropists, particularly in their paternalistic concerns for the housing of workers.<sup>32</sup> The conception and construction of ‘company towns’ and industrial villages to produce happy and efficient workers is another origin of the modern town-planning movement.

Planning historian Gordon Cherry has traced the development of British philanthropic town planning to the eighteenth century where it emerged from attempts to implement Utopian ideas, such as Robert Owen’s New Lanark settlement, founded in 1786 in Scotland and which attracted, at its height, thousands of visitors per year. Experiments with industrial model villages continued into the nineteenth century, including Saltaire, near Bradford, which was founded by industrialist sir Titus Salt. Similar experiments occurred in the United States, such as the model village of Pullman, near Chicago, in the 1880s, and in 1883 a Society for Promoting Industrial Villages was founded to ensure continued interest in the country. The century closed with the establishment of the two most extensive model towns: Port Sunlight and Bournville. The two settlements would have a substantial influence on the development planning thought.

Port Sunlight was established by the Lever brothers in 1887 when their existing soap factory at Warrington became too cramped. The new site was eventually expanded to 221 acres and occupied mainly by Lever employees and their families. The new model town was conceived as an experiment for the place of good housing in social reform. W.L. George, a contemporary observer of the settlement, expressed a common view of the period when he stated that ‘at the root of all forms of vice, particularly drunkenness, lies the problem of housing; evil conditions mean depression, and, for the slag of our social system, the only resource, fleeting but efficacious, is the public house and its costly hospitality’.<sup>33</sup> For social reformers, planned settlements and planned housing were an opportunity to experiment with solutions to the evils of the overcrowded and polluted city. Company towns like Port Sunlight were

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<sup>31</sup> Tim Brown, ‘The Making of Urban ‘healtheries’: The Transformation of Cemeteries and Burial Grounds in Late-Victorian East London’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 42 (October 2013): 23.

<sup>32</sup> Caroline Miller, ‘The Origins of Town Planning in New Zealand 1900—1926: A Divergent Path?’, *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (January 2002): 210.

<sup>33</sup> Gordon E. Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning* (Leighton Buzzard: Leonard Hill Books, 1974), 18-19.

established primarily for the working-class employees of philanthropic industrialists — the labourers in the mills and factories. These were experiments in remaking the spaces that the poor inhabited. Instead of dark, overcrowded and diseased, housing in Port Sunlight was light, airy and healthy. Every house was fronted by a garden. And these spaces were intended to be morally as well as physically uplifting. The Lever brothers provided employees with a range of facilities, including a museum, a library, an auditorium and a hospital.

The inhabitants were closely monitored by company-appointed supervisors, reinforcing company towns as disciplinary spaces where the poor and the working class were taught healthy and moral habits. And when they could, or would, not do it themselves, the company would do it for them, such as with the communal maintenance of the front gardens of houses. W.L. George wrote approvingly in 1909 that ‘at one time these front gardens were given up to the tenants, but their aesthetic possibilities were not appreciated; they were used as fowl-runs, and even as dustbins, while the family washing was unblushingly exposed on the palings’.<sup>34</sup> And these interventions had noticeable results: the physical fitness of children and adults was deemed superior to that in nearby Liverpool. Infant mortality was half that of the city. According to Cherry there was no record in the period of drunkenness, spousal abuse or assault.<sup>35</sup>

The establishment of Bournville by the Cadbury brothers in 1895 was a similar experiment in social and housing reform. This was coupled with the strong Quaker sensibilities of George Cadbury, who designed the settlement in close cooperation with the architect William Alexander Harvey. Unlike Port Sunlight Bournville was not intended only for the employees of Cadbury, but was specially designed for the closer mixing of classes who rented the houses at very low cost from the company, and later from a trust.<sup>36</sup> The settlement also contained 33 almshouses endowed by rent from the neighbouring properties. Like Port Sunlight there was great emphasis on the invigorating aspects of green spaces. Houses were built with specially elongated back gardens so that inhabitants could grow their own food and to garden. There were also large communal greens for the same purpose. According to the architect, George Cadbury believed the great drawback to the moral and physical progress of the working class to be the lack of leisure activities. He sought to encourage gardening, which encouraged outdoor habits and industry, and had the added advantage of producing food.<sup>37</sup>

In 1900 Cadbury transferred ownership of the estate to a trust so that his reforms would continue to be implemented after his death. The trust was established for the ‘amelioration of the condition of the working class and labouring populations, in and around Birmingham, and elsewhere in Great Britain,

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<sup>34</sup> Cherry, *The Evolution of British Town Planning*, 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> Gordon E. Cherry, ‘Bournville, England, 1895-1995’, *Journal of Urban History* 22, no. 4 (1996): 493—508.

<sup>37</sup> Adrian R. Bailey and John R. Bryson, ‘A Quaker Experiment in Town Planning: George Cadbury and the Construction of Bournville Model Village’, *Quaker Studies* 11, no. 1 (2006): 89—114.

by the provision of improved dwellings, with gardens and open spaces' which would secure 'workers in factories some of the advantages of outdoor village life'.<sup>38</sup> One tenth of the village's total area was to be set aside for parks, recreation grounds and open spaces. Like in Port Sunlight there was also an attempt to train the habits of the poor and working class. Each new resident, upon arrival, was issued George Cadbury's *Suggested Rules of Health*, which contained diet and sanitation advice. The pamphlet also included advice on what food to eat and how to brew tea. It advocated separate beds for married couples, exercise, early rising and fresh air. It also recommended village residents avoid liquor, pork and tight-fitting clothing. It should be clear that Cadbury intended the space of his village to be a space where the poor and the working class were taught — at times literally — how to behave and live as the non-threatening middle-class.

Port Sunlight, Bournville and the tradition of philanthropic planned villages were milestones in the development of town planning, but they dealt only with small villages and settlements. The idea of an entire planned eugenic city was popularised by Ebenezer Howard through his concept of 'garden cities'. Howard, a parliamentary stenographer and part-time inventor, introduced his ideas in his 1898 book, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*.<sup>39</sup> This was revised and reissued four years later as *Garden Cities of To-morrow*. Howard, like other social reformers, was concerned over the conditions of life in the large cities. He summarised his concerns in a well-known diagram of three magnets — metaphors for rural and urban living. He contrasted the high wages and opportunities in the town with overcrowding and the 'isolation of the crowds'. The countryside had beauty, health and low-rent housing, but had limited opportunity for social interaction and low wages. His solution was a hybrid town-country model that boasted the advantages of rural and urban living, and few of the drawbacks: a new, planned community set between the countryside and the city. The end goal would be a small city of 30,000 people which contained separate districts for low-density housing, commercial activity and industrial activity — essentially introducing the concept of zoning. The houses would each have gardens and the avenues would be broad. There would be ample space for parks and public gardens. The city would be bounded by a green belt of agricultural and pastoral land, and connected via rail to a network of similar garden cities.

The garden city was to be a home for the poor and working-class. Howard believed the planned garden city was a moral imperative, arising, he said, from a responsibility 'towards the weakest, the poorest, the most outcast'.<sup>40</sup> The garden city would not only improve the health and morals of inhabitants, but would alleviate the overcrowding in large metropolitan areas and reduce unemployment. Howard

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<sup>38</sup> Bailey and Bryson, 'A Quaker Experiment in Town Planning,' 101.

<sup>39</sup> Ebenezer Howard, *To-morrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> G. Montagu Harris, *The Garden City Movement* (London: Garden City Association, 1906).



believed that the labour needed to build new garden cities would provide jobs for those who needed it. In an 1892 lecture entitled *Commonsense Socialism* he asked listeners to:

‘[i]magine for a moment: the people of England ... pouring themselves out of our crowded squalid cities into the now deserted fields and slopes of our beautiful England. They are leaving the slums of the great city behind them: they must build themselves homes. They are dissatisfied with conditions of labour in unhealthy workshop or still more unhealthy garret, they must build themselves new and better working places ... they must build themselves cities with wide and beautiful avenues, with spacious parks and public gardens’.<sup>41</sup>

Howard insisted that the land the garden city was built on be owned co-operatively and administered by the city. The residents would lease the houses and any profit earned would be returned to the communal treasury. This would prevent rent speculation, which would ordinarily price the poorer classes out of the city, and ensure a single, cohesive vision for the city, undeterred by individual profit.

Howard was certainly not alone in his concern for the place of the poor in garden cities. At the very first conference on town planning, held in London in 1910, the organisers expressed their enthusiasm for the first garden city, then recently established at Letchworth. The ‘splendid work’ would be worth it, they said, ‘not for its own sake only, or for the sake of the fifty or sixty thousands who may directly benefit from it, but for the sake of the millions now living in slums to whom it will bring hope’. Inspired by its example, ‘authorities in every town and city, hamlet and village, will work with more skills, knowledge and enthusiasm’ for the rescue of the poor.<sup>42</sup> The organisers were also enthused over the recent passage of the 1909 Town Planning Act which gave municipalities various planning tools, including the power to plan and create suburbs.

The conference was organised by the Town Planning and Garden City Association, which had been founded by Howard in 1899 to promote the idea of the garden city. The Garden City Association (GCA), as it was then called, was the first town planning pressure group, pre-dating the Royal Town Planning Institute. As such, in the first decade of the twentieth century, town planning and Howard’s garden city were synonymous. Howard was not the first to suggest planning principles such as green belts — similar ideas had already been implemented in Germany and Austria, particularly Vienna — but the GCA, and its passionate transnational supporters ensured that Howard’s garden city became the default model on offer during the rapid spread of planning principles in the period. Careering colonial administrators, architects and planners such as Charles Reade and Herbert Baker transmitted the garden city idea to

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<sup>41</sup> Stephen Heathorn, ‘An English Paradise to Regain? Ebenezer Howard, the Town and Country Planning Association and English Ruralism’, *Rural History* 11, no. 1 (2000): 118.

<sup>42</sup> Ewart. G. Culpin and Thomas Adams, *The Practical Application of Town Planning Powers: A Report of a National Town Planning Conference Arranged by the Garden Cities and Town Planning Association, Held at the Guildhall, London, on December 10th, 1909* (London: P.S. King & Son, 1910), 5.



their professional and personal associations, incorporating some of its principles in the construction of the colonial city model. In 1913 the GCA created the International Federation for Housing and Town Planning as an international extension of the garden city movement. The federation was tasked with lobbying internationally for garden city planning principles, and providing a forum for international dialogue on planning issues.<sup>43</sup>

Although only two garden cities, Letchworth and Welwyn, were actually established, the garden city movement spread internationally as a result of the tremendous interest in and enthusiasm for garden city principles, as well as the work of the various affiliated pressure groups. Garden city principles were used in the design of villages, suburbs and settlements in, amongst others, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Brazil and Israel.<sup>44</sup> Particularly popular was the ‘garden suburb’, which simplified the idea of the garden city to such an extent that it bore very little resemblance to Howard’s original concept, and which his supporters passionately disavowed. Instead of a co-operatively owned, mixed-use and egalitarian semi-city, garden suburbs were small extensions to an existing city, mostly residential and, in many cases, beyond the price range of the poor and working class. Nevertheless, garden suburbs such as Hampstead Heath in London and Colonel Light Gardens in Adelaide incorporated many of the planning principles of the garden city movement, if not its spirit. Thus, in the early decades of the twentieth century, one could find planned suburbs — communities unto themselves — with wide streets, green spaces and gardens in the major cities of the English-speaking world. They stood in stark contrast to the slums and tenement buildings in urban centres.

The garden city movement did not develop in an intellectual vacuum, however. It existed alongside various ideologies and programmes for social change, amongst which we must count programmes with evident, and uncomfortable, eugenic associations. Ideas of labour colonies and the model settlements of Cadbury and Lever all formed part of the garden city makeup, long recognised for their concerns for sanitary modernity. In its international expansion and advocacy, the movement carried with it these ideas, as well as the Victorian hygiene and sanitary concerns that had already found fertile ground in the colonies. Particularly relevant was the fast-growing science of eugenics, which expanded internationally in the same period. According to historian Stephen Heathorn, the garden city movement was ‘thoroughly implicated with late-Victorian theories of eugenics, environmental determinism and racial “degeneration”’. Key campaigners for Howard’s ideas ‘were also advocates of the social hygiene and national efficiency movements which espoused profoundly anti-urban/pro-rural ideologies and linked urbanisation to “racial decay”’.<sup>45</sup> For Heathorn, there was significant overlap in membership of

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<sup>43</sup> Michel Geertse, ‘The International Garden City Campaign: Transnational Negotiations on Town Planning Methods 1913-1926’, *Journal of Urban History* January 30, 2015: 1-20.

<sup>44</sup> See Kate Murphy, ‘“The Modern Idea Is to Bring the Country into the City”: Australian Urban Reformers and the Ideal of Rurality, 1900—1918’, *Rural History* 20, no. 1 (March 24, 2009): 119—136; Caroline Miller, ‘The Origins of Town Planning in New Zealand 1900—1926: A Divergent Path?’, *Planning Perspectives* 17, no. 3 (January 2002): 209—225.

<sup>45</sup> Heathorn, ‘An English Paradise to Regain?’, 125.

the garden city, town planning, social hygiene and eugenicist movements, and which advocated policies of social engineering to reverse the damage excessive urbanisation had done to the health — physical, moral and genetic — of the English race. Theories of environmental determinism and eugenics became linked in what historian Gareth Stedman Jones called ‘hereditary urban degeneration’.<sup>46</sup> According to this view urban dwellers, particularly the urban poor, were affected by the poor conditions in the city on a genetic level. Children raised in the city were thought to be physically and mentally stunted, and the process would continue in their offspring, until the cities were filled with the genetically inferior who could potentially weaken the race as a whole. Here the focus is not on the physical and moral miasmas and contagions of the Victorian sanitation specialists, but on the hereditary degeneration caused by the corrupted environment of the city. For many in the town planning and garden city movement Howard’s ideas prefaced the creation of a eugenic city where the stunted, sickly and corrupted urban dwellers would be replaced by the tall and strong and healthy children of empire.

In fact, Howard himself never directly mentions eugenics, but his supporters nevertheless made strong use of eugenic language and thought in their own tracts. Perhaps tellingly, Howard’s diagrams for a series of satellite garden cities pay special attention to the placement of the blind, the drunk, the insane, epileptics and orphans, who are all isolated and placed in institutions in the green belt.

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<sup>46</sup> Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship between Classes in Victorian Society* (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1971).

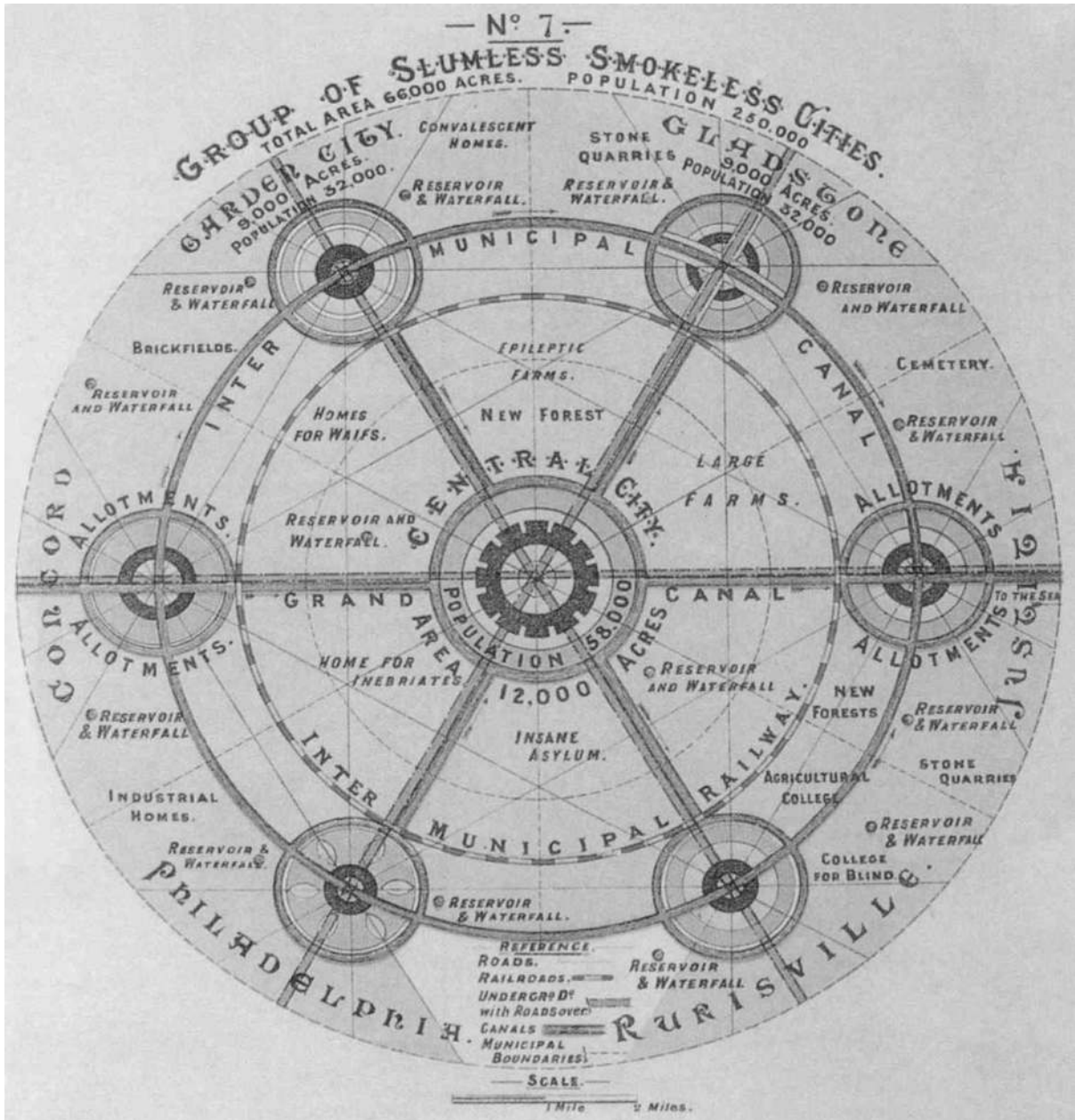


Fig 8. Howard's garden city concept, with separate spaces for the blind, orphans, alcoholics, and those with learning disabilities.<sup>47</sup>

In *The Garden City Movement*, a promotional book produced and published by the Garden Cities Association, and for which Howard wrote the preface, hereditary urban degeneration was a very real fear:

<sup>47</sup> Reproduced from Howard, *To-morrow*, cover page.

The strongest and most healthy of parents migrating from the country to a London slum, cannot hope to bring up their child in the same conditions of health and strength which they themselves enjoyed. Born into evil surroundings, its physical and mental development is poisoned from the outset, and, remaining in those surroundings, the evil eats deeper and deeper into its being every year of its life. This child's children have not even the advantages their parents possessed of a healthy father and mother. Born of debilitated parents, their start in life is even worse, and so it goes from generation to generation.<sup>48</sup>

A few years earlier the popular adventure novelist H. Rider Haggard had written in another GCA pamphlet that '[t]owns are all very well, but you want strong, steady, equal-minded men, who can only be bred on the land'.<sup>49</sup> Thomas Adams, another key Howard supporter and secretary of the GCA, wrote that '[t]he health and character of all civilised races is at present suffering great injury as a result of the unequal distribution of the population between town and country'.<sup>50</sup> According to him the improved housing conditions in garden cities would result in 'a new race of sturdy English yeomen [who] will grow up to bulwarks of our Empire'.<sup>51</sup> He warned that '[t]he very foundation of our national prosperity is involved in restoring and maintaining the physique and moral character of the people of the country by getting more of the "back to land"'.<sup>52</sup>

Most tellingly, the final publication of the notorious founder of eugenics, Francis Galton, was a novel about a fictional city called Kantsaywhere. According to his biographer, Karl Pearson, Galton attempted to describe a eugenic polity in the style of Plato's *Republic* and More's *Utopia*. Galton's city was a eugenic utopia where citizenship was governed by a Eugenic College that judged racial fitness. Importantly, the novel was published in the same period the GCA was established and Galton 'quite obviously presents the citizens of his Utopia as garden city dwellers'.<sup>53</sup> The houses are spacious and light, with large gardens for flowers and vegetables. The inhabitants are keenly aware of a relationship between health, a high birth rate and country life. Finally, about half the houses were privately owned, while the rest were managed by the Eugenic College and rented out at a low rate to eugenically valuable couples. The hero of Kantsaywhere attempts to obtain a first-class P.G. or Passed in Genetics degree by proving his fitness — moral, physical and genealogical — before the Eugenic College. He is then fingerprinted and issued a certificate of fitness.

Kantsaywhere did not remain a utopian fiction, however. As the historian Susan Currell has shown, a eugenic garden city was planned, built and administered: in 1921 the French industrialist Alfred Dachert planned and funded the small garden city of Ungemach, outside the French city of Strasbourg, in order

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<sup>48</sup> G. Montagu Harris, *The Garden City Movement* (London: Garden City Association, 1906), 21.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Adams, *Garden City and Agriculture* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1905), 9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>53</sup> Wolfgang Voigt, 'The Garden City as Eugenic Utopia', *Planning Perspectives* 4, no. 3 (September 1989): 296.

to counteract race suicide and the devastation of the First World War. The inhabitants were specially selected for racial fitness and potential. The environment — both built and natural — was carefully designed. Kitchen dining-rooms, for instance, were centrally positioned in the house so that the housewife could cook, clean and attend to the children at the same time. Schools and kindergartens were centrally located so that children could attend without crossing dangerous roads.<sup>54</sup> The suburb still exists, although its eugenic agenda was abandoned after the Second World War. It is also testament to just how much garden cities incorporated a eugenic logic that the garden city movement was enthusiastically supported by German eugenicists. Among them was Alfred Ploetz, who served on the board of the German Garden Cities Association. Ploetz was the founder of the German branch of eugenics and coined its German name — *Rassenhygiene*.<sup>55</sup>

In summary, the Garden City model was easily adapted and embraced by eugenicists because it was a literal eugenic diagram of an urban space — something that lent itself to the promulgation of eugenic racial ideals, and to the redemption of the Poor White. In the ideal garden city authorities intervened to improve the racial stock of citizens by raising their living standards as well as their health and morals. Howard himself emphasized that these were to be interventions on and for the poor of the cities. If the sanitary diagram underlying the colonial city was predicated on exclusion, isolation and protection, the eugenic diagram was predicated on ideals such as growth, purity and renewal. ‘Better babies’ and not better walls. Both employed a disciplinary logic to achieve these goals. It goes without saying that the diagrams overlapped. There is not always a clear distinction and both diagrams are found in the genetic code of modern town planning. Garden cities are influential not only for their part in the development of British town planning and the creation of the suburb, but for the activities of the garden city movement as a whole. The GCA and its international extension propagated the idea of garden cities throughout the European, and particularly Anglo-Saxon, world. As such it actively and enthusiastically spread the spatial logic of eugenic intervention which was soon to be applied to Poor White bodies in slums.

### **Town planning in the United States: philanthropy, suburbs and slums**

As we have seen, it is relatively easy to trace the development of British urban planning from the hygienic concerns of the Victorian sanitary movement, through to philanthropic model villages and garden cities, and finally to the modern discipline via the colonial and racialised inflections imposed by eugenic thinking. There was, as we will see, the definite and direct export of British ideas and planners to the United States, where garden city enthusiasts played an influential role in the development of U.S. planning and attracted the attention and devotion of the large Northern philanthropies. But the picture is complicated by the size and complexity of the country. Unlike in Britain, the garden city movement

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<sup>54</sup> Susan Currell, ‘Breeding Better Babies in the Eugenic Garden City: ‘Municipal Darwinism’ and the (anti)cosmopolitan Utopia in the Early Twentieth Century’, *Modernist Cultures* (October 2010): 281.

<sup>55</sup> Voigt, ‘The Garden City as Eugenic Utopia’.



in the United States was not as dominant, and competed with a number of other contemporary philosophies of planning that had developed out of Victorian concerns.

Mirroring the health and sanitation concerns of the Victorians, from the mid-nineteenth century the major cities of the United States were host to an interrelated series of movements to improve the health of the urban body, including campaigns for clean drinking water, efficient sewers and green space and parks. Urban reformers had also long campaigned for the creation of playgrounds in slum areas where poor children could be supervised, exercise and be kept out of trouble.<sup>56</sup> These pressures resulted in, among others, the design and creation of Central Park in New York City by Frederick Law Olmsted. The park, novel in its egalitarianism in allowing all classes access, was intended to give city-dwellers the equivalent of a healthy day in the country. Olmsted's landscaping work influenced the City Beautiful movement which sought to integrate nature into the urban form through large parks and tree-lined boulevards and of which Washington, D.C. is the best example.<sup>57</sup> The movement was superseded by the City Functional and the closely-related City Social movements which sought to make the city more efficient, accessible and healthy. The garden city thus emerged as another in a long series of planning movements. Although adherents tried to remain true to Howard's original vision of green belts and communally-owned land, it was the idea of garden suburbs such as London's Hampstead Heath that resonated strongest with American planners. In the ensuing decades, as the automobile was invented and gained prominence, Howard's concept strongly influenced the creation and planning of the suburbs that so characterise U.S. cities.

By the end of the nineteenth century, overcrowding in tenements had resulted in severe slum conditions in cities such as New York, Chicago and Boston. Conditions were especially severe in New York, which was a hub for mass migration to the United States. In 1894 the State Legislature's Tenement House Committee found that overcrowding on Manhattan exceeded that of the most crowded cities in England, France, Germany and parts of India.<sup>58</sup> In 1895 the legislature authorised expenditure of \$5 million for the creation of parks in slums and the expropriation of tenements. Yet space had to be found to house the people expelled from the soon-to-be-demolished tenement blocks. The planning of houses and towns to house the urban poor of the period — often European immigrants of ambiguous and contested race — would occupy the attention not only of city authorities but of the great Northern philanthropies.

The largest of these early philanthropies was, of course, the various Rockefeller organisations. Although John D. Rockefeller, Sr. had invested in property in the nineteenth century, it was his son, John D. Rockefeller, Jr., who manifested an intense and long-lasting interest in housing reform and urban

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<sup>56</sup> Thomas L. Daniels, 'A Trail across Time: American Environmental Planning from City Beautiful to Sustainability', *Journal of the American Planning Association* 75, no. 2 (March 2009): 181.

<sup>57</sup> Bonj Szczygiel, "'City Beautiful' Revisited: An Analysis of Nineteenth-Century Civic Improvement Efforts', *Journal of Urban History* 29, no. 2 (January 2003): 109.

<sup>58</sup> Mellier Goodin Scott, *American City Planning since 1890; A History Commemorating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the American Institute of Planners* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 10.

planning. By the 1920s, despite sustained attention from city authorities, the housing situation in New York had steadily worsened. The urban area struggled with the unprecedented migration and urbanisation. Slum conditions were still extensive, especially on Manhattan. Progressive-era social reformers as well as the federal government began to pay serious attention to alleviating urban housing pressures. Rockefeller philanthropy in the period took two forms: the extensive financing of pressure groups, conferences, research and publications advocating housing reform and slum clearance and, secondly, the actual construction of a number of housing developments in what amounts to a series of experiments in new forms of low-cost housing for the poor and working class. It is important to note that, in the period before the Second World War, the population of New York City was overwhelmingly white, even if that whiteness was still being negotiated. The US Census puts the white population at 97% in 1920 and 95% in 1930. Despite the growing presence of African-Americans in areas like Harlem, the rhetoric and reform of housing for the poor in the period focussed almost exclusively on Poor Whites.<sup>59</sup>

In the early 1920's Rockefeller, Jr. had made several attempts to create a central housing agency in New York to undertake research in new forms of housing and slum-clearance, not least because he was opposed to government intervention in housing. In the same decade the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM) fund made a very large series of grants to the Better Homes in America organisation for an education campaign. In 1923 alone Better Homes received a grant of \$225,000.<sup>60</sup> The Rockefeller Foundation and the Rosenwald Fund, a similar philanthropy, unsuccessfully tried to set up a National Institute of Housing Research. Another Rockefeller offshoot, the Spelman Memorial Fund of New York, funded the administrative budget of the National Association of Housing Officials for over twenty years. The association provided expert consulting services for low-cost housing projects. In the 1930s the Rockefeller family provided funding for the National Public Housing Conference — again with the aim of slum clearance and low-cost housing, as well as various reports, surveys and pamphlets dealing with these issues. Housing conditions in New York were of special interest. In 1933 Rockefeller, Jr. provided funding for a Slum Clearance and Low-Cost Housing Plan for New York. He also gave grants to the New York- based Citizens Committee on Slum Clearance and Low-Cost Housing and National Public Housing Conference; from 1928 to 1931 he financed the Housing Association of the City of New York. His activities and interests were recognised when, in 1932, Rockefeller, Jr. was asked by Congress to develop a research and training programme for the federal government's low-cost housing interests.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> U.S. Census, New York City, New York, Race and Hispanic Origin for Selected Large Cities and Other Places: Earliest Census to 1990. Table. Accessed 13 January 2016, <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0076/NYtab.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> Gaia Caramellino, *Rockefeller Family Involvement in New York Housing during the 1930s: European Models and the American Legacy*, (Sleepy Hollow: Rockefeller Archive Center, 2009), 6.

<sup>61</sup> Caramellino, *Rockefeller Family Involvement*, 8.



Rockefeller, Jr. did not limit his advocacy to research and pressure groups. By 1930 he had invested an estimated \$10 to \$12 million in housing projects. Notable were the ‘garden apartments’ which seem to have internalised and adapted Howard’s principles as an alternative to government housing. The apartments were intended to be a demonstration — not just of the planning and architectural principles, but of a specific type of financing intended to put home ownership within the reach of the Poor Whites and the working class. In 1925 Charles Heydt, who managed Rockefeller’s real-estate affairs, wrote that ‘the matter of housing has been given careful study by our office, and the question of Mr. Rockefeller’s policy with reference to the matter is now under discussion. The purpose is to build better homes and communities for people of moderate incomes, and by careful experiment to improve house, block and community planning’.<sup>62</sup>

For the planning of the apartments Rockefeller, Jr. relied on a young rising star named Andrew Thomas. In 1924 he had proclaimed to a newspaper that his goal was ‘to abolish every slum in New York City’ with the help of philanthropic organisations and the state.<sup>63</sup> Adams’s plan was the garden apartment. The *Evening World* newspaper devoted a series of articles called ‘Garden Apartments to replace slums’ to Thomas in which he boasted that his garden apartments could replace slums at a rent of ‘\$10 a month or less per room and still yield the builder a fair return on his investment’. Thomas proposed a large garden-apartment housing scheme to replace the slums. His plan was for twenty apartment houses of six stories each. This would house over a thousand families in half the land area of the slums. Each apartment would have its own bathroom and be constructed to let in air and light. Green spaces would be provided for health and recreation.<sup>64</sup> What is more, the apartments would be owned on a cooperative basis, similar to the principles that Howard had favoured.

Heydt was evidently impressed with the young architect and, between 1923 and 1930, Thomas designed and constructed eight projects for Rockefeller. Of these, seven were apartment buildings in New York and New Jersey. The other, Forest Hills, was uncharacteristic: a planned park-like suburb outside Cleveland which was part conservation area, and part upper-middle class suburb. Of the other apartments, some were for Rockefeller employees, or were commercial projects, but others were adaptations of Adams’ garden apartment ideal. Three — Bayonne in New Jersey, Thomas Garden Apartments in the Bronx, and Dunbar in Harlem — were intended as demonstration apartments for low-income housing. The last, Dunbar, was built specifically for African-Americans. Dunbar and Thomas Garden were also sold on a cooperative model which Rockefeller, Heydt and Thomas believed would allow easier financing and foster a sense of ownership and responsibility amongst the poor and working

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<sup>62</sup> Caramellino, *Rockefeller Family Involvement*, 5.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth W. Rose, ‘Partners in Housing Reform: The Apartment Developments of John D. Rockefeller, JR., Charles O. Heydt, and Andrew J. Thomas’ (paper presented at the Conference on New York History, Cooperstown, New York, 2007.) 3.

<sup>64</sup> Rose, ‘Partners in Housing Reform’, 5.

class.<sup>65</sup> Yet the apartments were also a business venture and intended to demonstrate their commercial feasibility, as well as encourage others to build garden apartments. As such Rockefeller practised a sort of ‘passive philanthropy’. As Rockefeller, Jr. put it: ‘[t]he only philanthropy ... which enters into our housing enterprises is that we waive commissions, fees and charges of one kind or another over and above actual costs, and we keep our interest charges down to a reasonable basis...; in other words, we do not make any gift, but we allow the use of our money for a flat 6% net charge and also give our services free of charge. To the extent that these things are more than anyone else will do, our project is philanthropic’.<sup>66</sup>

Rockefeller, Jr. also directly participated in an ambitious attempt to adapt the English garden city model to U.S. conditions — specifically to house the Poor Whites and the working class. In the 1920s Rockefeller was closely associated with the City Housing Corporation (CHC). He was personally subscribed for at least \$250,000 worth of shares and the CHC received funding from the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial fund.<sup>67</sup> The corporation was made up of experts, planners, philanthropists and social reformers, and led by the real-estate magnate (and regional planner) Alexander Bing and the well-known statistician and philanthropist Beardsley Ruml, a senior figure at the LSRM. The corporation was formed to help overcome the shortage of homes for workers by lessening housing costs, and to offer means of escaping socially undesirable and congested parts of New York by ‘offering better and more healthy environments at less cost’.<sup>68</sup> The best way to do this, the CHC believed, was through the construction of garden cities. Money raised by stock investment from philanthropies would be used to construct an initial city in New York, and then to ‘dot the country with these greatly improved communities’. In 1923 it commissioned Richard Ely, an economist and leader of the Progressive Movement, to conduct a pilot study for a garden city in Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn. The findings of Ely’s study were positive — a garden city could be successfully constructed, but it would need to be adapted to American conditions. Ely proposed the garden tenement city, a series of apartment complexes owned cooperatively by and built for the Poor Whites and the working class. ‘The intention is very definite to devote most of the housing space to the use of workers of limited means’, he wrote, ‘and to reduce the cost in every possible way’.<sup>69</sup>

The CHC shopped its first garden city to many of the leading Northern philanthropists of the day, including the Phelps-Stokes family, and Frederick Keppel of the Carnegie Corporation. Eleanor Roosevelt, whose husband was appointed head of the American Construction Council that year, also attended CHC meetings.<sup>70</sup> The architect and planner Charles Stein was appointed to oversee design,

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<sup>65</sup> Rose, ‘Partners in Housing Reform’, 20.

<sup>66</sup> Caramellino, *Rockefeller Family Involvement*, 4.

<sup>67</sup> ‘City Housing Corporation Memorandum’, June 4, 1925, Folder 98, Box 10, OMR.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Memorandum No. 1’, Folder 860, Box 82, Series 3, LSRM, 1.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Memorandum No. 3’, Folder 860, Box 82, Series 3, LSRM, 6.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander M. Bing to Beardsley Ruml, October 24th, 1923, Folder 860, Box 82, Series 3, LSRM.

assisted by the community planner Henry Wright. Andrew Thomas, of Rockefeller garden apartment fame, consulted. The CHC also sought the advice of two luminaries of the garden city movement in Britain — Raymond Unwin, who designed Letchworth and Hampstead Garden Suburb, and Thomas Adams, secretary of the Garden City Association, and lately exporter of planning principles to Canada. The two British garden planners were enthused at the thought of an American garden city, but objected to the idea of tenements, which was far removed from Howard's original vision. To philanthropists CHC marketed the project as an 'urban laboratory' to reform housing standards, replace tenements and encourage home ownership amongst the working class. Owning a home was regarded as the 'basis of good citizenship'.<sup>71</sup>

Once the necessary funds were obtained, the CHC bought land in the borough of Queens on the basis that land was cheaper on, what was then, the outskirts of the city, but not so far that it made transport costs for workers unaffordable. It was also within reach of industrial districts. Construction began in 1924 and, by 1926, nearly 300 families were living in the new development, named Sunnyside. Despite the CHC's intentions of providing homes for poor tenement dwellers, the new development was priced beyond their reach. The bulk of the new inhabitants were in the building trades, followed by store and office employees — people who showed strong potential to enter the middle class.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Richard T. Ely, 'The City Housing Corporation and 'Sunnyside'', *The Journal of Land & Public Utility Economics* 2, no. 2 (April 1926), 181.

<sup>72</sup> Ely, 'The City Housing Corporation and 'Sunnyside'', 177.

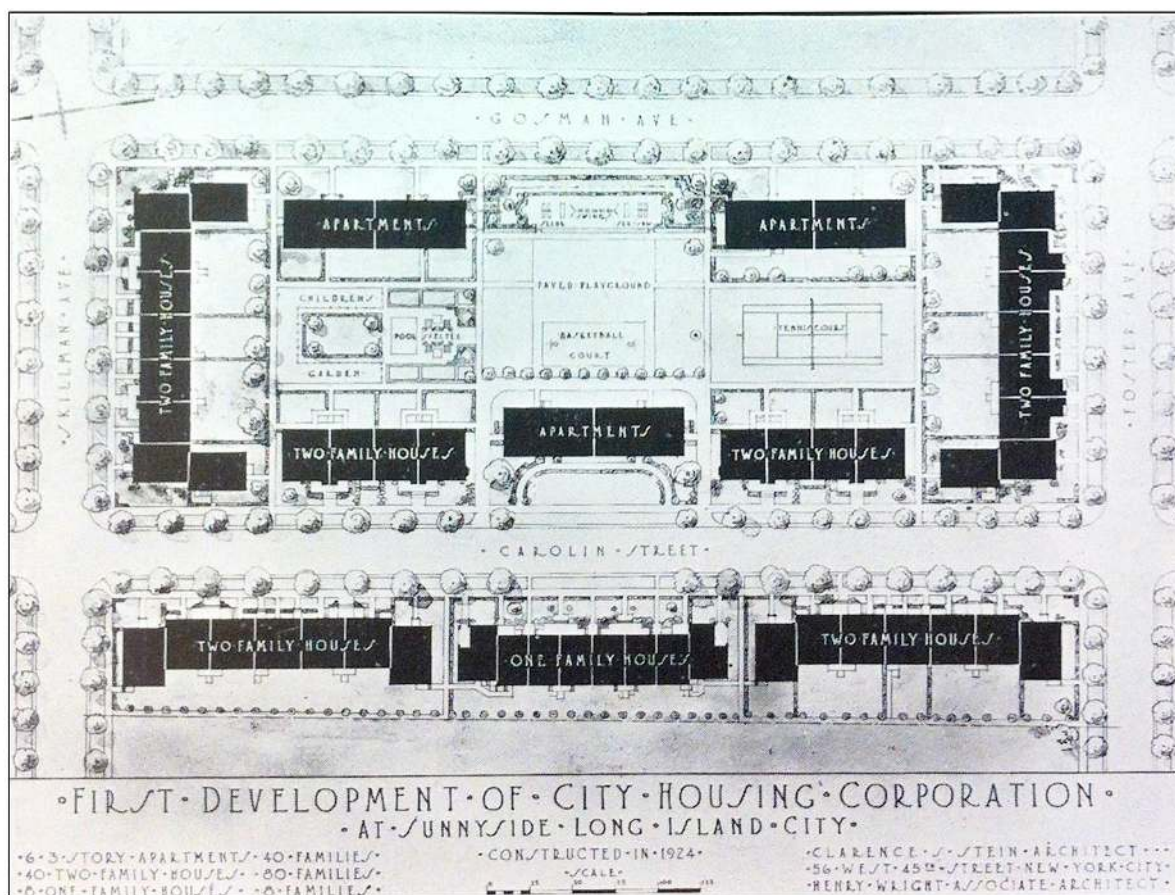


Fig 9. The proposed layout of Sunnyside.<sup>73</sup>

They benefited from a site where conditions were designed to be ‘sanitary and wholesome’. Sunnyside was a mixture of row houses and apartment buildings. Houses were two rooms deep to afford light and air in the front. The buildings faced inward and backed, via the kitchen, onto a central courtyard which was planted with trees and had a playground and sports facilities for children, including a swimming pool. This was done deliberately so that mothers could work in their kitchens and keep an eye on the children. As with garden cities, the focus was on space, light, and nature.

The CHC was dissatisfied with Sunnyside, however, regarding it only as a ‘first step toward a garden city’.<sup>74</sup> The land was expensive and, because the streets were already laid out, Sunnyside was constrained to the grid system. The CHC then embarked on designing a new, larger garden city — one that was located outside of a major metropolitan area, and which could be planned from the outset. Stein and Wright, the designers of Sunnyside, presented plans for Radburn, NJ, a ‘garden city for the motor age’. The ‘Radburn model’ proved highly influential and was exported in later years to Canada and Australia. The planners attempted to accommodate the motorcar, but without making it a dominant

<sup>73</sup> ‘Sunnyside and the housing problem’, Folder 98, Box 10, Series J, OMR, 9.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Sunnyside and the housing problem’, Folder 98, Box 10, Series J, OMR, 27.

feature.<sup>75</sup> They adapted a ‘superblock’ model, with major traffic diverted around the community, and not through it. A hierarchical system of smaller streets was meant to provide low-traffic access to houses. Houses were clustered in enclosed neighbourhoods and facing common parkland — Radburn was among the first towns in the United States to employ cul-de-sacs. The separate, enclosed neighbourhoods, which were later implemented in the planning of postwar suburbs, were intended to foster a sense of community. Pedestrian traffic was kept separate, not least to protect children from dangerous roads — and all community facilities were accessible on foot. To uplift the community, the planners provided tennis courts, softball fields, and a community centre with a library, gymnasium, clubroom and kindergarten. Despite these achievements, Radburn still fell short of the designers’ intentions to create a large and self-sufficient garden city. Development was halted by the Great Depression and only a quarter of Radburn was ever in fact completed.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, its principles were clear, its ambitions widely shared.

Rockefeller, Jr. and his various philanthropic organisations were a powerful impetus behind housing reform and planned communities, but he was certainly not the only major Northern philanthropist interested in garden-city ideals. In 1909 Margaret Sage, founder of the Russell Sage Foundation (RSF), funded the design and construction of Forest Hills Gardens in Queens, New York. The planned garden community was, again, originally intended to house the poor and working class as an alternative to tenement housing, but this focus changed very early on, not least because, in an effort to recall English ruralism, the mock-Tudor building designs of architect Grosvenor Atterbury and the extensive gardens of landscape designer Frederick Olmsted, Jr., were very expensive to construct and maintain.<sup>77</sup> The RSF also funded the work of the Garden Cities and Regional Planning Association of America (later shortened to Regional Planning Association of America), a think-tank for urban spatial reform which, through Stein and Wright, effectively designed Sunnyside and Radburn.

In the early 1920s, the association wanted to provide a comprehensive regional plan to better manage the burgeoning growth of New York City. Thomas Adams, who had been secretary of the Garden Cities Association in London two decades earlier and had consulted on Sunnyside, was put in charge of the New York project. The RSF provided funding to the Association for what would become the Regional Plan of New York and its Environs. In 1922 a working group was established with many of the leading philanthropists and Progressives. Frederick Keppel, of the Carnegie Corporation, was appointed secretary and the plan received the enthusiastic support of President Herbert Hoover on the grounds that ‘New York is the gateway of Europe into the United States, and the dumping of great hordes of people

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<sup>75</sup> Susan L. Klaus, *A Modern Arcadia: Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. And the Plan for Forest Hills Gardens* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> Chang-Moo Lee and Barbara Stabin-Nesmith, ‘The Continuing Value of a Planned Community: Radburn in the Evolution of Suburban Development’, *Journal of Urban Design* 6, no. 2 (June 1, 2001): 151—184.

<sup>77</sup> Klaus, *A Modern Arcadia*.



into our slums is a poor introduction to Americanization'.<sup>78</sup> Although twenty years had passed since Howard first published his work on garden cities, eugenics had only grown more popular, and the regional plan was promoted on grounds of racial improvement. The regional plan was in its essence a eugenic diagram. In promotional material for the regional plan Elihu Root, outgoing president of the Carnegie Corporation, said that 'I do not think one can obtain a virile and dominant race where the children have paving stones between themselves and the earth'. He was clear about the eugenic link:

If this project is supported and developed and made public, if it strikes the imagination of the people and receives the support of the public authorities and of public opinion, we may believe that our children and our children's children will see a great metropolis in which there may be homes where children can see the sun and breathe the air and grow up in strength and beauty instead of the tenement house life that disgraces our civilization.<sup>79</sup>

Despite this initial enthusiasm, the regional plan was only released in 1929. It is now largely forgotten, except for the recommendations of a relatively unknown employee of the Russell Sage Foundation, Clarence Perry. Perry, who had been a school headmaster and immigration agent, developed in some detail the concept of the 'neighbourhood unit', an element of town planning that is today ubiquitous. '[I]t has no rivals or even challengers ... the neighbourhood concept has been adopted and adapted throughout the world'.<sup>80</sup> The neighbourhood unit formed an essential part of post-war New Town developments in, amongst others, the United States, England, Israel, Sweden and the Soviet Union. It popularised the cul-de-sac. The plan is the basis of many council housing developments in Britain. In 1936 a version of the concept was adopted by the newly-created Federal Housing Administration and 'thus had an enormous influence on the form of American suburbs'.<sup>81</sup> And the neighbourhood unit was created as a means of rehousing the Poor Whites and white immigrants in slums, and 'rehabilitating' slum areas through physical determinism — eugenically uplifting Poor Whites through the use of space. How intentional the physical determinism behind the design of the neighbourhood-unit concept was, is a matter of some debate.<sup>82</sup> Certainly it was viewed by many in the period as a means of disciplining the poor. In 1931 the influential President's Conference on Home Building and Home Ownership said that '[a] physical plan of this nature will tend to produce neighborhood organisation and a local social control which are lacking in many parts of the modern city'.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Plan of New York and its environs. The meeting of May 10, 1922'. Folder 254, Box 32, Series 3, RSF.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Tridib Banerjee and William C. Baer, *Beyond the Neighbourhood Unit: Residential Environments and Public Policy* (New York: Springer, 1984), 27.

<sup>81</sup> Michael Larice and Elizabeth MacDonald, eds., *The Urban Design Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 78.

<sup>82</sup> Larry Lawhon, 'The Neighborhood Unit: Physical Design or Physical Determinism?', *Journal of Planning History* 8, no. 2 (February 3, 2009): 111—132.

<sup>83</sup> Nicholas N. Patricios, 'The Neighborhood Concept: A Retrospective of Physical Design and Social Interaction', *Journal of Architectural and Planning Research* 19, no. 1 (2002): 79.

The neighbourhood-unit plan was based on six principles: It was a mixed-use, but mainly residential area with a population to support an elementary-school district (about 5 000 to 9 000 residents). It had to be bounded on all sides by arterial streets. A curving, hierarchical, internal street system was allowed but discouraged, with the intention that traffic accidents would be kept to a minimum and residents would never have to walk more than a quarter mile to reach the small local shopping centre or a school. Roughly 10% of the land had to be given over to small parks and recreational spaces. In the middle of the unit was the school, churches and a community centre.<sup>84</sup> Perry was a supporter of the educational extension movement that had originated partly with Seaman Knapp, as well as a long-time advocate of community centres. Following the logic of the educational extension movement the school in the centre of the neighbourhood would have an uplifting effect on the entire community. When not used for educational purposes, the hall would be repurposed for use by the Scouts and the local civic forum. It would offer a continuous programme of lectures and forms of intellectual and cultural diversion so that recreation was ‘not dependent upon the old time music hall or the discredited saloon’, and so encourage temperance. The school would become the ‘cultural centre of the community’.<sup>85</sup> Lastly, the interior-facing courtyards and recreational areas of neighbourhood units meant that the residents were subject to greater visibility as they crossed green spaces or glanced at the windows of facing apartments.

The Regional Plan was published in the same year that Wall Street crashed, triggering the Great Depression. In a period of intense poverty and high unemployment, Perry promoted the neighbourhood-unit concept as a method of rehabilitating ‘blighted’ areas by, essentially, attracting and disciplining a better class of Poor White. According to Perry blight was an ‘insidious malady’ that appeared first as deterioration of an urban area until it gradually degenerated into a slum. The biological connotation was deliberate. Perry viewed neighbourhoods as cells of an urban organism. His definition of blight, intentionally or not, also hews close to the older concept of miasma. Blight was caused by many factors — the wrong class of tenant, for instance, or, before mandatory zoning, converting a dwelling into a business or industry, such as a grocer or tanner. The change in use caused respectable families to move out, and be replaced by a lower class. ‘Frequently, especially in large cities, the newcomers would be of a different race’, said Perry, meaning Irish or Italian, rather than black. They would ‘differ in character, habits and status’ from the rest of the neighbourhood and irritate the surrounding families, who would also move away.<sup>86</sup>

Once degeneration was in progress, Perry said, it was almost impossible to stop the area developing into a slum. Housing reform was not enough, he said. ‘You can bring sky-light into a tenement home by rebuilding it, but to give it genuine sunshine you are compelled to do something to the surrounding

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<sup>84</sup> Clarence Arthur Perry, ‘The Neighborhood Unit’, in *Regional Survey of New York and Its Environs* (New York: New York Regional Plan, 1929), 7.

<sup>85</sup> Clarence Arthur Perry, *The Rebuilding of Blighted Areas* (New York: Regional Plan Association, 1933), 21.

<sup>86</sup> Perry, *The Rebuilding of Blighted Areas*, 9.



structures, it is not enough to change the dwelling; its environs also must be modified'.<sup>87</sup> His solution was to clear a part of the slum, demolish buildings, and replace them with a planned neighbourhood unit. 'It is believed ... that desirable quality emerges under certain definite conditions, that it can be consciously sought and successfully created, and that it has a real relation to area', said Perry.<sup>88</sup> 'Good residential quality is just as contagious as blight'.<sup>89</sup> The planned area, morally and physically regenerative, would begin to reverse the blight. 'The gradual growth of a slum is stopped and, instead, there is created a physical environment which is favorable to the evolution of the best moral, social and civic conditions'.<sup>90</sup> The physical environment of the slum would be improved which, in turn, would have a moral effect, such as by lessening crime. The environment of the slum itself 'bred' crime in young people and led to the development of gangs, Perry said. Thus 'when a deteriorated district is replaced by one favorable to wholesome living, the environment which causes crime is to that extent reduced'.<sup>91</sup> The intentions behind the neighbourhood-unit plan were clear. Perry directly stated the deterministic designs of the neighbourhood unit on the Poor Whites in the slums. The plan's chief claim for public support, he said, is that it would

prevent the increase of the classes that are beyond the reach of housing reform because of either social or economic reasons ... provide resistance against the extension and influence of deteriorated neighborhoods, and ... give needed object lessons in improved housing environment and community organisation which will of themselves ultimately aid the reform of slum areas.<sup>92</sup>

Although certain New York philanthropic housing projects in the period focussed on the needs of African-Americans, such as the Dunbar projects in Harlem, the planners and architects were focussed on reforming the spaces inhabited by Poor Whites and racially ambiguous immigrants. Perry's efforts to combat blight with morally and physically regenerative spaces recall colonial efforts to uphold the whiteness of bodies in climes that were alternately tempting or hostile. Neighbourhood units upheld — or reclaimed — white spaces that were in danger of falling to non-white standards, or had already done so. The popularity of the neighbourhood-unit concept has meant that rarely-considered elements in the design of modern neighbourhoods, such as the planning of suburbs, the amount of green space, proximity to a school, and the construction of cul-de-sacs, arose from philanthropic efforts to rehabilitate these Poor White spaces. And, descended as it was from Victorian company towns, colonial racial discipline and garden cities, the neighbourhood-unit concept was heir to a tradition of physical determinism and disciplinary logic.

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<sup>87</sup> Perry, 'The Neighborhood Unit', 129.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>89</sup> 'Reshaping the city through neighborhood values', Folder 119D, Box 13A, RSF, 12.

<sup>90</sup> Perry, *The Rebuilding of Blighted Areas*, 58.

<sup>91</sup> Perry, 'The Neighborhood Unit', 128.

<sup>92</sup> Perry, 'The Neighborhood Unit', 128.

If the concerns of town planning took on distinctive racial accents as they transcended their British and European hatching, taking on a particularly eugenic character in the racialised environment of the United States, where they were directly aimed at the Poor White, how then were these interests reflected back in the Old World, and in the explicitly colonial world of early twentieth-century South Africa? The next section compares and contrasts the experiences of spatialised urban planning as it related to the Poor White.

### **Making pure white spaces out of poor white communities**

In the 1930s, as we have seen, the sudden and widespread poverty caused by the Great Depression led to a great increase in the number of Poor Whites in countries such as the United States and South Africa. In such racially-based societies this was distressing on humanitarian grounds, yet it also threatened the foundations of white prestige. The inherent claim to superiority made by whites could not be maintained when races mixed in the breadlines. Among the various solutions sought to poverty and its causes, governments also turned to eugenics — then at the height of its popularity — in the hopes that it would rehabilitate the mass of Poor Whites. The career of the eugenic urban diagram — from Victorian model villages to the neighbourhood unit — is particularly pertinent here as the Poor Whites were rehoused in planned suburbs and towns built according to the eugenic diagram, and where they were monitored and disciplined to ensure they adhered to racial standards — white spaces to produce pure whites. As such this section presents two case studies of the implementation of the eugenic diagram: the creation of rural eugenic white spaces in the United States, and the construction of urban eugenic spaces in South Africa.

These case studies are part of the attempt to demonstrate a genealogy of transnational governmentality. They explicitly show how theories of Poor White governance were drawn upon, adapted and refined in two very different regions. All the elements previously discussed in this chapter — space and sanitation, garden cities, and town planning — are employed and built upon. The case studies are not meant to be considered in isolation — they are meant as genealogical, iterative examples. They also show how existing scholarship should be reconsidered in the light of transnational governmentality. In the case of South Africa, a nationally-oriented study by the social scientist Annika Teppo is reconsidered to demonstrate transnational governmentality and to illustrate how the theory can be applied to existing scholarship.

#### *The greenbelt towns and Arthurdale*

The Great Depression in the United States facilitated unprecedented federal government intervention to halt the process and, if possible, uplift the poor. The resulting New Deal programmes and policies

orchestrated a wide range of efforts to rehabilitate the lives of poor citizens through, for instance, public works, financial assistance, and the relocation of the most helpless to temporary subsistence camps as well as more permanent settlements. Driven by necessity the federal government funded, designed and constructed a number of planned new towns and suburbs to house the urban and rural poor. These towns provided an opportunity for planners and architects to design spaces expressly for the purpose of the rehabilitation of the Poor Whites. The racial norms of the era dictated that, although resettlement camps and communities for both white and, to a lesser degree, African-Americans existed, the new towns were planned with Poor White communities in mind and, after construction was completed, excluded other races either formally, or through financial and cultural pressures.

The housing programmes of the early New Deal efforts are many and varied, but the bulk initially fell under the purview of four agencies: the Public Works Administration, the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), the National Resources Planning Board, and the Resettlement Administration (RA). In planning these new towns to house the poor, architects and planners drew on familiar concepts such as the garden cities, garden suburbs and the ‘community-enhancing’ theories of the neighbourhood unit — in essence they planned according to the eugenic diagram. The TVA, for instance, was a series of large public-works projects with the goal of providing employment to the poor communities in the Tennessee Valley. In order to house the workers needed three new TVA towns were planned and constructed: Norris, Pickwick Landing and Wheeler. The towns incorporated many of the characteristics advocated by the Regional Planning Association and trialled at Sunnyside and Radburn. The largest town, Norris, included a large green belt as well as the internal footpaths and hierarchical streets of the Radburn ‘superblocks’. Houses were located in neighbourhood units, around cul-de-sacs and short-loop streets.<sup>93</sup>

The Resettlement Administration, another New Deal agency responsible for housing, had two functions — developing self-contained communities in the poorest rural areas, and creating satellite towns on the fringes of large urban areas. Thus the RA had the task of resettling both the urban and the rural Poor White. Rexford Tugwell, the charismatic director of the RA, described the agency’s function as ‘to go outside centers of population, pick up cheap land, build a whole community and entice people into it. Then go back into the cities and tear down whole slums and make parks of them’.<sup>94</sup> The desire for parks was no accident. Tugwell was an enthusiastic disciple of Howard’s garden city theory, and convinced Franklin Roosevelt to support the construction of American garden cities — or greenbelt towns — in order to house the poor.<sup>95</sup> Tugwell and the RA initially planned the creation of several hundred greenbelt towns across the country, but this idea was abandoned in the face of fiscal realities and political

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<sup>93</sup> K. C. Parsons, ‘Clarence Stein and the Greenbelt Towns Settling for Less’, *Journal of the American Planning Association* 56, no. 2 (June 30, 1990): 164.

<sup>94</sup> Parsons, ‘Clarence Stein and the Greenbelt Towns Settling for Less’, 165.

<sup>95</sup> David Myhra, ‘Rexford Guy Tugwell: Initiator of America’s Greenbelt New Towns, 1935 to 1936’, *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 40, no. 3 (May 1974): 176—188.

opposition.<sup>96</sup> Eventually only three greenbelt towns were constructed: Greenhills, Ohio; Greenbelt, Maryland; and Greendale, Wisconsin. A fourth, Greenbrook, NJ, was in the final stages of planning when it was halted by a court injunction. The towns were constructed as satellite suburban towns on the outskirts of large cities such as Washington and New York.

The link between the New York philanthropic experiments in low-cost housing and the greenbelt towns was strengthened when Tugwell put Clarence Stein in charge of formulating overall policy, and drawing up the design standards. It was Stein and his partner Henry Wright — who was also involved in the design of the greenbelt towns — who had designed Sunnyside and Radburn for the CHC. In Stein's own works, the purpose of the Greenbelt towns was to 'give useful work to men on unemployment relief; demonstrate in practice the soundness of planning and operating towns according to certain garden city principles; and provide low-rent housing in both socially and physically healthful surroundings for families in the low-income bracket'.<sup>97</sup>

The desire for 'socially and physically healthful surroundings' indicates that the greenbelt towns were drawn up with the same belief in physical determinism that characterised the eugenic city. Nearly all the towns made use of the neighbourhood unit and cul-de-sacs, were surrounded by a green belt, and contained large tracts of green space for parks, gardens and allotments. 'The Greenbelt Towns project put the federal government in the new and curious role of codifying a wide range of social values, including those concerning the family and particularly women's role in the family'.<sup>98</sup> The greenbelt towns, for instance, did not make provision for public transportation — men were expected to commute to work by car, and the women to remain at home. The RA's promotional material emphasised housekeeping, child-care and gardening. Tenant rules forbade women from using their homes to engage in a trade. In order to discourage overcrowding and slum conditions houses were only to be occupied by the tenant and his immediate family. Applicants were comprehensively screened through interviews and social-worker visits before being selected to live in the towns. They were rated according to a number of criteria. One of these was 'family integration', where a score of one indicated 'questionable family life and social attitudes' and five indicated a 'lack of family solidarity or evidence of social problems in the family'. A score of ten showed a 'well-integrated family group — normal, home-loving, self-respecting'.<sup>99</sup> They wanted Poor Whites with the potential for rehabilitation and improvement — those who would, in the right environment and with the right stimulus and discipline, better their situation and social standing, and enter the middle-class.

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<sup>96</sup> Philip K. Wagner, 'Suburban Landscapes for Nuclear Families: The Case of Greenbelt Towns in the United States', *Built Environment* 10, no. 1 (1984): 36.

<sup>97</sup> Gordon Edwards, 'Comment: The Greenbelt Towns and the American New Towns', *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 32, no. 4 (1966): 226-227.

<sup>98</sup> Wagner, 'Suburban Landscapes', 35.

<sup>99</sup> Wagner, 'Suburban Landscapes', 38.

The greenbelt towns, pastoral as they were, did not address rural poverty — nor were they meant to. These towns were constructed to serve the large metropolitan centres they were located near, and were thus concerned with the management of the urban Poor White. New Deal attempts to address rural poverty were broad and ranged from emergency relief camps to direct aid to farmers. Like the greenbelt towns, the Depression also provided an opportunity for large-scale social and regional planning experiments in rural areas. In 1933, the Division of Subsistence Homesteads was created with M.L. Wilson, an agrarian economist, at its head. Wilson tied the construction of subsistence homesteads to the resurgent ‘back to the land’ movement which sought to discourage rapid urbanisation on the grounds that it exacerbated poverty and slums. The movement had more than hint of the pastoral ideals of the Victorian urban reformers. Wilson’s goals echoed those of Ebenezer Howard thirty years before when he wrote in 1934 that the subsistence homesteads would represent ‘a balance between urban and rural life ... which will offer the crowning advantages of both ... in a new structure of civilization’.<sup>100</sup>

Wilson and his department set out to plan, develop and construct a series of rural towns that would serve as demonstrations of his ideas for decentralisation, community and folk tradition. Each town would house a few hundred Poor White farming families. They would be allowed to purchase low-cost homes at very low interest rates, and each homestead would have enough land to allow a limited amount of household farming. The towns would also be located around light industry in order to encourage a cash economy and families would need a minimum income — such as from farming or mining — to ensure they had the means to repay their mortgages.<sup>101</sup> Wilson encouraged the families of the homesteads to form cooperative associations — not only for economic reasons but also to foster a sense of community and community reliance. Wilson believed that decades of urbanisation, industrialisation and rural neglect had weakened the ‘cultural inheritances, folkways and traditions’.<sup>102</sup> The homesteaders had, essentially, forgotten their identities and their pioneering spirit, and this had corrupted family life. They had been allowed to stagnate and then to decay, until finally the good white stock had become Poor Whites. A long-term goal of the subsistence homesteads was to rehabilitate the Poor Whites and their traditions through continual discipline and instruction.

The Division of Subsistence Homesteads designed and constructed four towns in Appalachia, among the mountain Poor Whites. The towns were intended to house unemployed coal miners in the region. The first of these was the town of Arthurdale, West Virginia. Arthurdale was to be the pilot project for the entire subsistence homesteads programme, and attracted considerable attention, not least due to the efforts of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. Despite government funding for construction, the town required significant fundraising in order to ensure employment and community projects for the coal miners and

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<sup>100</sup> Russell Lord and Paul Johnstone, eds., *A Place on Earth; a Critical Appraisal of Subsistence Homesteads* (Washington, D.C.: USDA Bureau of Agricultural Economics, 1942), 43.

<sup>101</sup> Stuart Patterson, ‘Constructing Ideal Families in Ideal Communities: The Case of Arthurdale, West Virginia’, Unpublished working paper (The Emory College of Arts and Sciences: Atlanta, GA, 2002), 3.

<sup>102</sup> M.L. Wilson, ‘How New Deal Agencies Are Affecting Family Life’, *Journal of Home Economics* 27 (1935): 273.

their families. As such Roosevelt and the New York financier Bernard Baruch made the town a philanthropic project and closely managed its construction and development in the early years. Their oversight was not always appreciated or unopposed. Roosevelt favoured a racially integrated town, but met with vocal opposition from the homesteaders themselves, as well as from site managers, who objected to the cost of building separate facilities for African-Americans. Local newspapers vocally opposed the rehabilitation of groups that were not white. Although subsistence homesteads for African-Americans were planned, only a handful were ever completed. Soon after the Division of Subsistence Homesteads adopted policies stating that homesteaders were selected to keep the towns 'culturally homogenous'.<sup>103</sup> Thus the population of Arthurdale was exclusively Poor White. Homesteaders were selected by faculty members of the nearby University of West Virginia and were subject to a number of interviews as well as a home visit to judge suitability. Married couples and families were preferred.

The planning of Arthurdale clearly recalls Ebenezer Howard's garden cities. Homes were well-built and spacious, with large yards. Each house also had enough acreage to grow food for household use. Streets were wide, sinuous, tree-lined and laid out in such a way as to promote neighbourhoods. A number of industries, most notably a furniture factory, were located on the outskirts so that the farmers would have employment in the winter. In the centre of the town were cooperative facilities such as a store, a clinic and canning facilities. There was also a large experimental farm run by agricultural extension agents.

The planners of Arthurdale had a long tradition of Progressive social-planning techniques to call on. The husbands were disciplined in their new vocation as farmers by the county agricultural extension agents created by Knapp a few decades earlier. Wives were guided by female home-demonstration agents in housecleaning, cooking and new labour saving devices such as refrigerators and fireless cookers that had been provided by the government. Education, too, was in the Progressive tradition so encouraged by the Southern Education Board. The school was near the centre of town and the curriculum specially designed by educational director Elsie Clapp so that it would 'not be hampered by traditional and formal courses of study'. Instead 'the community activities will constitute the laboratory through which the children will get their educative experiences ... Lifelike problems will constitute the curriculum material, rather than the conventional school subjects'.<sup>104</sup> Adult education was encouraged, especially with regards to nutrition. Clapp opined that 'If I can teach these mothers that cold pancakes and coffee aren't good for babies my two year olds will be much healthier'.<sup>105</sup> According to newspaper reports from the period children were taken to the nursery school at the age of two.<sup>106</sup> The educational programme for Arthurdale was 'much like surgery', Clapp said. 'We remove mental and physical

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<sup>103</sup> Stuart Patterson, 'Constructing Ideal Families in Ideal Communities', 6.

<sup>104</sup> Elsie Clapp, *Community Schools in Action* (New York: Viking, 1939), 73-74.

<sup>105</sup> Nancy Hoffman, *Eleanor Roosevelt and the Arthurdale Experiment* (North Haven, CT: Linnet Books, 2001), 56.

<sup>106</sup> *The New York Times*, October 28, 1938.



impediments and graft on the things that help. Negative thoughts and attitudes do not flourish here'.<sup>107</sup> Arthur Dale's Poor Whites, Roosevelt said, 'must be taught to live'.<sup>108</sup>

It must be noted that, despite sustained interest from the press and philanthropists, Eleanor Roosevelt's dream of Arthur Dale as a sort of communal experiment did not last long. The project was hampered by budgetary constraints, overspending, and poor planning, and attracted significant opposition from Congress, who viewed the project as 'communist' and objected to the idea of the government owning a town. After the Second World War Arthur Dale was put in private hands, and it still exists today. Despite Arthur Dale's failure, however, it provided a model for the great number of successful subsistence homesteads that were created in its wake.

### *Ruyterwacht*

This case study is a re-evaluation of existing scholarship to demonstrate the applicability of transnational governmentality. It highlights a transnational understanding already existing, unseen, within the text.

South Africa was not spared the Great Depression of the 1930s. Nor was it isolated from the great concerns that animated projects such as Arthur Dale. In an effort to house the great numbers of unemployed whites, a number of new 'Poor White' suburbs were constructed in cities throughout South Africa. These suburbs had the express and familiar aim of uplifting the poor. The inhabitants were taught how to become 'good' whites and respectable members of the Afrikaner *volk*. Although those who lived there were poor, they were expected gradually to enter the middle-class. They would then move out of the suburb and be replaced by the next candidates for 'upliftment'.

The first of these suburbs was Jan Hofmeyer, established in 1936 in central Johannesburg. Two years later, Epping Garden Village was established in Cape Town. As its name implies, Epping Garden Village stemmed from the garden city movement and the development of garden suburbs. Along with Howard's ideals of green spaces, light and air, Epping Garden Village also embraced the implicit eugenic diagram of the garden cities. 'Eventually every South African town of substance had at least one poor white area', says social scientist Annika Teppo:

The end product of the rehabilitation conducted in the suburbs was supposed to be a successful and respectable citizen who moved out to live in a middle-class area. But while many of the poor whites of Epping Garden Village managed to leave the suburb, some never did ... those who could not succeed became stigmatised. In the era of apartheid, the

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<sup>107</sup> *The New York Times*, May 5, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> Stuart Patterson, 'Constructing Ideal Families in Ideal Communities', 7.

poor white suburbs became places where those who were unable to comply with the ideals of being a good white were placed, or into which they just drifted.<sup>109</sup>

Epping Garden Village serves as a model of the white spaces that were built in South African cities during the middle decades of the twentieth century. It still exists and is known today as Ruyterwacht — a Cape Town suburb notorious for its white poverty.

In 1926 the Dutch Reformed Church, the *Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereniging* (ACVV) welfare organisation and prominent Cape business leaders formed the Citizen's Housing League (CHL), an Afrikaner housing company, to provide accommodation for the poor. The church had been involved in similar efforts since the discovery of the Poor White problem in the 1880s, creating farming settlements such as one at Kakamas, in the Northern Cape, for the upliftment of the poor. The church also established institutions to house orphans, the disabled and the aged. 'Between 1919 and 1932 the church had also built 160 boarding schools in the Cape "for the needy". In 1932 approximately 8000 children lived in these boarding houses'.<sup>110</sup>

The CHL's first housing scheme for Poor Whites was the Good Hope Model Village in Cape Town. Its successor, Epping Garden Village was opened in 1938 with 700 'white' houses for the respectable and deserving poor. 'Everyone classified as white had to be situated in a space that would uplift this person. It was considered self-evident that whites needed more of everything: larger houses, more space in the yard, better services, and, in order to maintain all this, higher incomes'.<sup>111</sup> 'White' spaces produced proper whites.

In 1948, J.H. Albertyn, Dutch Reformed minister and sociologist for the Carnegie Commission, voiced his favour for these poor suburbs:

There is a real need for model villages or residential areas near our cities. An example of this is the village of Epping Garden near Cape Town ... Most of the houses are inhabited by less affluent Afrikaners ... with a true Afrikaans spirit ruling in the village ... in spite of all the men working in the city, the home atmosphere is Christian-Afrikaans. The new situation, created by the influx into town, necessitates the church to strive for the construction of similar villages or residential areas in the future. Not only in the countryside, as had been the case thus far, but particularly near the cities. In this way newly arrived congregation members can acquire healthy and affordable housing, and the church can maintain its influence over them.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Annika Teppo, 'The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town', (2004), 18.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>111</sup> Teppo, 'The Making of a Good White', 22.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 34-40.

The idea behind the CHL's projects was to provide housing at very cheap rates to poor whites. This would remove some financial pressure and allow residents to save a little money, eat better, be more productive and eventually buy their own homes and move out of the suburb. But not every Poor White was suitable. The CHL had a stringent selection process for allowing people to live in its houses. As with the greenbelt towns and Arthurdale, they wanted poor whites with the potential to improve their status and enter the middle class. The CHL stipulated young white families who earned more than £10 per month, but less than £20. The selection process involved an initial application and interview, as well as a visit by a social worker to the prospective family to determine suitability. The CHL was also not too strict about race purity: 'Although the first residents were chosen very carefully, their racial purity was not as important as their ability to become good whites, their perceived potential for upliftment. A suitable tenant, who behaved and managed his finances correctly, who appeared neat and civilised, could be of darkish complexion, although too obvious blackness was frowned upon'.<sup>113</sup> The company's more relaxed attitude towards race did not last, however. From the 1950s, as Pass Laws and identification documents came into effect, the company could not allow any candidates who were not 'certified' as whites on their official papers.

As well as cheap rates, Epping Garden Village offered new residents 'white' standards they had not previously been able to afford. The houses were newly-built and large, with big yards where residents were encouraged to grow their own food and do gardening. As with Victorian model villages and the later garden cities, gardening was viewed as beneficial for the body and mind, and aided in moral rehabilitation. To ensure that they upheld white standards and practices of living, the inhabitants were monitored by social workers and ministers, who would visit the families at home and question them about their progress. Naturally this partly stemmed from a genuine concern for the well-being of the residents, but any deviation from the expected norms — abuse, inbreeding, marital trouble, straying too close to the colour line — was quickly discovered and acted upon.

Monitoring was essential as Ruyterwacht was designed to be isolated from the surrounding neighbourhoods. Industrial and commercial space lies to the east and west of the suburb. Train lines border on the north and south. At the time of its design planner Martin Adams imported a fairly new planning concept from the United States — Clarence Perry's neighbourhood unit. Ruyterwacht is made up of several smaller units, such as a central space surrounded by houses with a single entrance road leading up to a roundabout. The purpose was fostering community, stability and co-operation while increasing visibility. These neighbourhood units were designed to reduce crime and restlessness: 'It was effortless to spot any deviant activities, since the houses were only surrounded by wire fencing, and

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<sup>113</sup> Teppo, 'The Making of a Good White', 49.

each house faced several neighbours at once'.<sup>114</sup> Initially only two roads connected the suburb with the surrounding area, making it easy to monitor who entered and who left:

The original layout even included strategically dispersed homes for schoolteachers, *dominees* and police who would thus have a wide view of the suburb from their strategically placed houses on the street corners. The area was characterised by the openness of spaces, and the lack of private gardens. The yards only had low fences, if any. The only privacy was to be found within the houses, which were also carefully designed for the purposes of rehabilitation.<sup>115</sup>

The houses were designed to be large enough to accommodate white families. 'Overcrowding was perceived as a constant problem that had to be avoided through the several small bedrooms in the houses. Ideally, there would be enough space for everyone to have a bed in a bedroom and there were to be no more than three children per bedroom'. After the age of seven, male and female children had to sleep in different rooms; 'parents were also to have a separate bedroom. Ideally, bathrooms were to be separate'.<sup>116</sup>

Ruyterwacht, or rather Epping Garden Village, was initially successful. Those who were selected did improve their situation and move into the middle-classes. Their houses were emptied, and new families selected to move in. As the years went by, however, fewer and fewer families decided to leave the suburb. Legislation such as the Urban Areas Act and the Population Registration Act prevented the Poor Whites from moving into the black slums, where rent and living costs were cheaper. It also meant that suitable candidates (according to the CHL's criteria) were harder and harder to come by, as the company could no longer bend the racial rules. The name of the suburb was eventually changed to Ruyterwacht on the suggestion of the local headmaster, who believed the suburb to be on the site of an old Dutch watchtower built by governor Simon van der Stel. From the 1960s the suburb stagnated, the Poor Whites hidden, protected and taken care of. They were a world unto themselves, much like the many other pockets of Poor Whiteism in the country.

Change came again in 1994, with the victory of the ANC in the country's first democratic elections. The new government removed the extensive state support for Poor Whites in favour of broadening support for all the impoverished in the country. The social workers left, and with them the last of the *volk's* systems for uplifting itself. The CHL, now Communicare, continued to act as a landlord for many of the properties, but on a racially inclusive basis. The Poor Whites that remained were left to themselves, and the racial make-up of the area gradually changed as young coloured families moved into the suburb. Ruyterwacht remains as an example of the eugenic suburbs planned and constructed in

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<sup>114</sup> Teppo, 'The Making of a Good White', 116.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 117. 'Dominee' is an Afrikaner church minister. My emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 117-118.

most of the major cities of South Africa. Today it is a reminder of the lengths that racially-based regimes went to in order to preserve racial prestige and ensure their own survival.

## **Conclusion**

The eugenic and sanitary city was a particularly distinctive phenomenon of the transnational governmentality of the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. Their ideas, principles and programmes could be packaged in such a way as to travel across the Western world and to its colonies. Despite their national inflections, which have dominated scholarship — the garden cities in Britain, the City Beautiful in the United States, and so on — there is no essential distinction between the concerns of, say, sanitary and social reform, progressivism, or colonialism; as such these racial diagrams of the city are epitomes of transnational governmentality. The nascent profession of town planning, and its networks of eager, proselytising professionals, provided a busy conduit for a disciplinary logic that was embraced by officials, philanthropists, religious experts and scientists. Although developed in regions far from the Poor Whites, the techniques of disciplining problematic populations through space and planning transcended their origins and eventually provided countries such as the United States and South Africa a forum for the exchange of methods to train their own Poor White populations.

The diagram of the sanitary city arose out of Victorian health concerns that implicated space as much as it did the body. And space, through phenomena such as miasmas, could corrupt the spirit and the morals as well as the lungs and the heart. Reformers and officials developed techniques that would keep citizens both physically and mentally healthy through discipline and surveillance. These techniques were exported to Britain's colonial empire and implemented by colonial governors and administrators keen to discipline their own problem populations on medical grounds. This 'sanitation syndrome' was incorporated into efforts to physically separate population groups on grounds such as race and class. Together with the other technologies of discipline it became an intrinsic part of the colonial city model that was distributed via town planners and architects to countries as diverse as Singapore and India. In South Africa it was easily, straightforwardly adapted for the management of the Poor White population by a colonial government intent on preventing class discord and upholding white prestige.

The diagram of the eugenic city can be traced not only to Victorian health concerns but to the model villages of philanthropic industrialists that sought to breed better, healthier and, ultimately, more productive workers through theories of environmental determinism and the logic of discipline. This in turn influenced the later garden city movement. It is established that the garden city was derived partly from eugenic ideals to breed a stronger and healthier British race and was easily repurposed in service of eugenics. The garden city was built to a eugenic diagram which the planners and advocates of the garden city movement exported across Europe and the colonies and to the United States, where it was

adapted to local conditions and concerns. Northern philanthropists funded efforts to create garden cities, suburbs and even apartments. These managed spaces would discipline and rehabilitate urban Poor Whites, a group which included immigrants that had successfully negotiated white status. These efforts gave rise to new models of town planning, such as the neighbourhood unit, which still incorporated the DNA of eugenics, environmental determinism and discipline. These models were exported back to the Western world, and used to discipline Poor Whites in countries such as South Africa. Suburbs such as Ruyterwacht in Cape Town, and the planned New Deal towns in the United States, such as the greenbelt towns and Arthurdale, show that, when necessary, governments, planners and philanthropists would not hesitate to use town planning to apply biopower to Poor White populations. The reform of space had become yet another means for the transnational management of Poor White populations. Here, as elsewhere, the problems of race were ameliorated by the promise of space.

# Representing the Poor White

## *Photographs, encounters and whiteness*

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Fig. 11. Dresie and Casie, twins, Western Transvaal, 1993.<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has argued for the return of the Poor White from his or her contemporary social and political isolation to a transnational history and geography whose origins lie in the nineteenth century, and whose ends are not yet in sight. Returning the Poor White to history means returning the Poor White to geography — to the globally framed if locally inflected concerns with racial deterioration. In this chapter, I change tack by deliberately colliding these historical concerns with contemporary reactions to white poverty, taking the identification and objectification of the Poor White in documentary photography as an index of the shifting affective and political concerns of the past century and more. I

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Ballen, 'Dresie and Casie, twins, Western Transvaal, 1993', in *Platteland*, Roger Ballen (Rivonia: William Waterman, 1995).



forward the argument that photography played a distinctive role in the transnational emergence of the Poor White problem, but also in the Poor White's obscurity and disappearance nearer our own day.

In some ways the story of the Poor Whites ends with the photograph above, one of the most well-known photographs by South African photographer Roger Ballen. It indicates the discursive journey of Poor Whites in the twentieth century. The efforts of reformers in the United States and South Africa to whiten and redeem their respective Poor Whites succeeded in as much as the class faded from public view. Indeed, white poverty, already relatively rare by the start of the century, became even more exceptional, and invisible, as the decades passed. But, a century later, 'Poor White townships' were being rediscovered by the press in South Africa, their appearance hailed as something new, and moreover a direct consequence of the democratic transition to black majority rule. Their rediscovery was accompanied by a series of photographs showing their appearance and living conditions. Yet this was only the latest in a long line of rediscoveries of the Poor Whites — a process that has employed photography nearly from the start.

Photographs of the white poor have a long history and an instructive place in the development of the medium. In 1889, Jacob Riis shocked the American middle-classes with his photographs of the inhabitants of New York's slum yards. The invention of flash photography enabled him to photograph unlit slums and tenements that were usually inaccessible and unknowable to the richer classes.<sup>2</sup> Here the poor, including the Poor Whites, were discursively constructed as an 'Other' owing to their class position — the poor were another race entirely. Yet as the twentieth century progressed this depiction changed as the racial status of the Poor Whites changed. The gradual whitening of the group is particularly evident in the Depression-era photographs of the Farm Securities Administration. Images such as Dorothea Lange's celebrated *Migrant Mother* very deliberately and artfully constructed the Poor Whites as deserving, hard-working and inherently noble — the Poor White as one of 'us' rather than one of 'them'. A similar process was underway in South Africa, where the photographs of Constance Stuart Larrabee highlighted the beauty and humanity of her Poor White subjects. The gradual whitening of the group — in discourse and through economic measures — was so successful that, as will be shown, post-war photographs of the group were dismissed as false or misrepresentations. But as Ballen's photograph above shows, the end of Apartheid saw the Poor Whites once more constructed as an Other, only this time on the grounds of their race, rather than their class. The very whiteness of the Poor Whites had made them, in this new political order, an Other.

Previous chapters have examined the discursive construction of the Poor Whites in the reports, inquiries and commissions of experts. This chapter will examine how they were constructed in images and photographs. At the same time it is also a methodological reflection on the relationship between

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<sup>2</sup> Though not completely, see Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

photography and race in historical photographs, including the ethical and political questions raised in our viewing of the subjects of photographs. It is divided into two sections. The first section examines the history of, and methodological approaches to, the representation of Poor Whites in photographs. The second section examines how their representation changed over the course of the twentieth century via an analysis of individual photographs and photographers.

### **Documentary photography and the production of truth**

Photographs of the poor are complex things. They give rise to a host of ethical questions about representation — not only what and who and how we should photograph, but also how they should be viewed and interpreted. Their analysis in recent geography has often been related to questions around charity and the representation of homeless and vulnerable people. Andersson and Valentine, for instance, examining the role of images of homelessness in attracting charitable donations, conclude that the most effective images are ‘depoliticised’ — presented ostensibly without any geography or context.<sup>3</sup> Katharina Schmidt has similarly argued that photographs of the homeless construct them as the ‘Urban Other’ that inhabit a different, incommensurable geography to those with fixed homes.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Johnsen et al have contributed methodologically innovative photo-elicitation work on ‘auto-photography’; by asking homeless people to take pictures of themselves and the spaces they inhabit, the researchers attempted to trace the hidden geographies, both real and imagined, of homelessness.<sup>5</sup>

These researchers have looked at contemporary subjects. Images of the poor are surely more difficult to analyse when they are historical images, where the discursive and political distance between subject, photographer, and audience is even greater, and where the tension between representation and truth is even stronger. Photography, and documentary photography in particular, of course makes a strong and unique auratic claim to truth. As historians, we are also inclined to trust that historical images are accurate, that the image before is truthful and objective, and that we can believe our eyes — even across the intervening years. Yet John Tagg argues that ‘every photograph is the result of specific and, in every sense, significant distortions which render its relation to any prior reality deeply problematic’.<sup>6</sup> Even when photographers attempt to mirror reality as closely as possible, they are still bound by imperatives such as taste, morality, geometry and their own conscience. Before the age of Photoshop and digital editing, photographs were still subject to a chemical developing process that was vulnerable to manipulation both intended and unintended, such as exposure to light and the proper mix of chemicals.

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<sup>3</sup> Johan Andersson and Gill Valentine, ‘Picturing the Poor: Fundraising and the Depoliticisation of Homelessness’, *Social & Cultural Geography* 16, no. 1 (August 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Katharina Schmidt, ‘Seeing the “Homeless City”? Some Critical Remarks on the Visual Production of Homelessness through Photography’, *European Journal of Homelessness* 9, no. 2 (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Johnsen, Jon May, and Paul Cloke, ‘Imag(in)ing “Homeless Places”: Using Auto-Photography to (re)examine the Geographies of Homelessness’, *Area* 40, no. 2 (June 2008).

<sup>6</sup> John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), 2.

With a computer the possibilities are nearly limitless, the potential for manipulation infinite — and our scepticism perhaps all the greater. But photographs have not become less truthful as technology has advanced. Lying has merely become easier. This claim to truth means that photographs and images are a powerful means of influencing representation — a recognition that historians and historical geographers have to confront head on.

From an historical perspective, photography's relationship with truth can be traced almost to the emergence of photography, and the use of this new technology as a form of evidence and record-keeping for institutions that were intent on observation and record-keeping. The technologies of surveillance formed part of a new strategy of governance that Foucault describes in his writing. Foucault suggests that photography was co-opted into these methods of governance as a means of establishing power: 'Rather than us freely using photography as a tool under our control, his writings would suggest that photography controls us with the images produced through it becoming additional means of control'.<sup>7</sup> Thus the knowledge produced by photography cannot be disinterested or neutral and forms part of an 'apparatus of ideology'.<sup>8</sup>

This argument can be taken even further. As evidential proofs, photographs classify. As such they are an important and powerful means of structuring society. They define the margins and centre, establishing what is normal, what is dangerous and who is different. This power was quickly capitalised upon by elites. In 1869, the British Empire's Colonial Office, for instance, instructed T.H. Huxley, President of the Ethnological Society, to prepare guidelines for the 'formation of a systematic series of photographs of the various races of men comprehended within the British Empire'.<sup>9</sup> The development of photography and anthropology are closely entwined, as is well known; yet, rather less so, this relationship did not necessarily start in the far-off colonies.<sup>10</sup> In Victorian England, social researchers and photographers undertook anthropological studies of their own. In 1878, the crusading journalist Adolphe Smith published *Street Life in London*, a series of articles detailing the lives of the London poor, such as chimney-sweeps, shoe-blacks, dustmen and flower-sellers. This was unexceptional; the book's unique selling point, however, was a series of photographs taken by John Thompson which showed 'typical' street scenes. *Street Life* was popular enough to warrant an abridged version, *Street Incidents*, in 1881.<sup>11</sup> Both publications classified the poor into different classes and types based on their appearance, their occupation and their geography. They defined what a 'typical' poor flower-seller should look like in a process not dissimilar from colonial photographers who took, and collected, pictures of Masai warriors and Kalahari Bushmen.

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<sup>7</sup> John Pultz, *Photography and the Body* (London: Weidenfeld Nicolson, 1995), 9.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>10</sup> Christopher Pinney, *Photography and Anthropology* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Hamilton and Roger Hargreaves, *The Beautiful and the Damned: The Creation of Identity in Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2001).

In their quest for accurate representation Victorian photographers of the poor had a troubled relationship with ‘truth’. Perhaps the most well-known case is that of Thomas Barnardo who set up a photography studio in his Home for Destitute Children and used it to record each new arrival. The photographs were a means of record-keeping, as well as a way of advertising the good work of the home to potential supporters and subscribers. Images of the destitute children rescued were circulated by Barnardo’s in order to raise awareness and income — the origin of similar methods employed today. In 1877, Barnardo was accused of, amongst others, ‘artistic fiction’ — of staging the photographs in order to make the subjects look even more poor and helpless. Although he was cleared of these charges, Barnardo did admit to some measure of staging, the result of difficult circumstances. His defence was that many children arrived at the home already washed and clothed ‘from natural feelings of pride or kindly benevolence common among the poor’. This was not how they typically lived on the street, and so, in order to present what he felt to be the more accurate portrait, the children were re-clothed in rags, performing a state close to ‘their normal one’.<sup>12</sup> Other complications also arose — at times the children arrived in clothes so filthy that they had to immediately be destroyed for reasons of hygiene, and the children had to be photographed at a later stage. The studio was not open certain days and, in the winter months, the poor light and bad weather made ‘descriptive photographs’ difficult. Essentially, Barnardo’s chief justification was that the photographs, if not always accurate, were representative of the poor as a type. They were not photographs of individual children so much as of the specific class of street children. Thus, in order to accurately represent the class, Barnardo sometimes employed children:

of a less destitute class, whose expression of face, form, and general carriage may, if aided by suitable additions or subtractions of clothing, and if placed in corresponding attitudes, convey a truthful [sic], because a typical picture of the class of children received in unfavourable weather, and whom we could not, for the reasons given, photograph immediately.<sup>13</sup>

Barnardo was one of the first to take advantage of photography’s power of representation, and one of the first to bend actuality to a higher truth. Yet the ability of photographs to classify the London poor into classes could be taken much further than street children, flower-sellers and bootblacks. Photography could establish what the morally deviant could look like. Francis Galton, the originator of eugenics, was keenly interested in photography’s divinatory power and combined it with his interest in hereditary. By placing photographs of different faces on top of each other Galton was able to combine different faces into what he believed represented a type, rather than an individual. In his studies of ‘composite portraiture’ he combined different portrait photographs to produce racial and moral types: from the relatively benign, such as producing the image of a future child from the portraits of two

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<sup>12</sup> Caroline Bressey, ‘Forgotten Geographies: Historical Geographies of Black Women in Victorian and Edwardian London’, (PhD diss., University College London, 2002), 217.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

hopeful parents, to the more problematic, such as merging pictures of criminals in an attempt to discern a ‘criminal type’ or pictures of the chronically ill to produce a portrait of the invalid. As with much eugenic thinking the moral and the physical were treated as the same. In the late 1870s, Galton presented his research to the Anthropological Society in London. He displayed composite portraits of men convicted for the likes of murder, theft and violent robbery and argued that each was a specific and recognisable type — though, crucially, they were pictured before they were fallen into vice and crime. The combination process had blurred the features of the individuals themselves. Galton argued that this reduced the ‘special villainous irregularities’ of the individual and highlighted the common humanity of the subjects. The result was ‘not the criminal, but the man who is liable to fall into crime’.<sup>14</sup> Perhaps inevitably Galton’s thinking turned to applying his method to race. In a previous paper he had included a letter sent to his cousin Charles Darwin by A.L. Austin in New Zealand, a photographer experimenting with the composite technique. Austin wondered whether ‘something might be made of this by photographing the faces of different animals, different races of mankind, &c. [He thought that] a stereoscopic view of one of the ape tribe and some low cast human face would make a very curious mixture’.<sup>15</sup>

Such reflections attest to the fact that the technologies of photography were established in the period of European empire. Photography still carries with it traces of that period. European colonialism was a violent encounter with other races and cultures and the photograph was used to establish this difference. Photography established the racial centre — white, European — and it defined the racial margins as those it newly encountered. Anthropologists, ethnologists and Victorian scientists embraced photography as a means of racial classification. As travel to remote parts of the world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was not always practical, these early scientists were reliant on networks of colonial informants such as missionaries, doctors and civil servants to provide them with material, such as charts and sketches. These were, however, notoriously unreliable. Photography promised to be more accurate and truthful. The results could be reproduced, repeated and the methodologies standardised. T.H. Huxley and the Colonial Office, for instance, carefully stipulated the distance the photograph should be taken from, as well as the pose, gender and age of the photographic subject. A measuring stick was to be placed in the frame to give researchers a sense of scale.<sup>16</sup> Yet it was not only through its ability to classify that photography became a tool of empire. The geographer James Ryan has shown how photography, which made distant imperial possessions accessible to an appreciative audience in the metropole, was used to classify and to stereotype.<sup>17</sup> Soldiers and hunters made photographic ‘trophies’ of natives and exotic Others, which were passed around networks. Photography allowed

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<sup>14</sup> Bressey, ‘Forgotten Geographies’, 212.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Efram Sera-Shriar, ‘Anthropometric Portraiture and Victorian Anthropology: Situating Francis Galton’s Photographic Work in the Late 1870s’, *History of Science* 53, no. 2 (June 2015), 160-161.

<sup>17</sup> James Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

imperial audiences to culturally ‘possess’ and define these new lands, and their people, in a way similar to that of travel writing.<sup>18</sup> In a similar vein the geographer Joan Schwartz has argued that dissemination of travel photographs in the nineteenth century helped citizens in the metropole construct imaginative geographies of the far-off colonies.<sup>19</sup>

It should be clear from these examples that photography has an unparalleled ability to discursively delineate class and race, and to present this as an artless truth, a direct encounter with Otherness, whether this be in the far-off colonies or in the near-at-hand slums. Photography’s place in the rediscovery and reproduction of Poor Whites cannot be separated from this wider production of class and racial difference. The role of photographic images is especially relevant to this imagination of the Poor White. If the Poor Whites were defined and created in the textual discourse of inquiries, commissions, investigations and reports, the Poor White was also created in photographs — and perhaps with even greater impact. These images defined what the Poor Whites looked like, what they acted like, and how they lived. The philanthropic experts of previous chapters were well aware of this, in fact, and their reports often contained photographs of the Poor Whites they were discussing. This is especially true of both the Rockefeller philanthropies and the Carnegie Corporation.

The report of the Carnegie Commission contains a significant visual element in order to better illustrate the plight of the Poor Whites, including the conditions in which they lived. Like the images of Riis, photographs typically sutured the somatic condition of the Poor White — his or her appearance, demeanour, deportment — to their environments or milieux. The report by Wilcocks, for instance, has fifty-four consecutive photos of Poor Whites and their dwellings. The majority of the published photographs were taken by Malherbe, and many more exist in his private albums. Very little has been done on the commission’s photographs. The most significant discussions have been by Sally Gaule, on the ‘visual othering’ of Poor Whites, and Marijke du Toit, on Malherbe as photographer.<sup>20</sup> Both have struggled to characterise the commission’s photographs. Gaule argues that they should be treated as social documentary ‘despite their impression as snapshots’, while Du Toit argues that they are a form of ‘sociological note-taking’.<sup>21</sup> However, it is better to think of the photographs as coming from another tradition entirely. They function rather as a form of anthropological classification directly descended from Victorian racial science.

The commission was not only taking photos to illustrate, and to record. Rather it was meticulously classifying the Poor Whites in the same way that scholars of the previous century classified Australian

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<sup>18</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992).

<sup>19</sup> Joan M. Schwartz, ‘The Geography Lesson: Photographs and the Construction of Imaginative Geographies’, *Journal of Historical Geography* 22, no. 1 (January 1996).

<sup>20</sup> Sally Gaule, ‘Poor White, White Poor: Meanings in the Differences of Whiteness’, *History of Photography* 25, no. 4 (December 2001).; Marijke DuToit, ‘“Binnelandse Reise” (Journeys to the Interior): Photographs from the Carnegie Commission of Investigation into the Poor White Problem, 1929/1932’, *Kronos* 32 (November 2006).

<sup>21</sup> Du Toit, ‘Binnelandse Reise’, 50.



Aborigines or Native Americans. Very few of the commission's photographs contain names, for instance. The majority are portraits of Poor Whites and their families, or wide shots of their dwellings. The photographed subjects are known only by their profession: an old hunter, a settler, a transport rider — types, in other words. The first collection of images is grouped under the title 'disappearing types' in reference to a chapter title. Later collections are titled 'family groups' (with the caption 'types of rural poor families'), 'types of womenfolk', 'Menfolk-impooverished type'. The latter two, which are portrait images of individuals, are captioned simply 'types of rural poor'.<sup>22</sup> With these titles in mind it should be clear that the commissioners were photographing in the same tradition as Barnardo or Thompson in *Street Life*. Instead of orphans or boot blacks these were settlers, woodcutters and hunters. This impression is strengthened by Malherbe's private collection of photographs of Poor Whites that he took during the commission's work, many of which were later published in his autobiography. There is no deviation in style from those published in the Carnegie report, but his captioning is striking for the use of the word 'typical'. Again these were not individuals but types: 'Typical English (1820 Settler) Poor White', 'typical Poor White dwelling', 'a typical group of school children', and 'typical Poor White children'.<sup>23</sup> In the same tradition Malherbe's autobiography also includes photographs of Australian Aborigines photographed in the same way as the Poor Whites and he relates a trip to the Allegheny Mountains in the United States where he found 'that there were, as in South Africa different types of Poor Whites depending on the kind of environment, physical and social, in which they lived'.<sup>24</sup> To illustrate Malherbe included photographs, his own and from archival collections, of 'typical ... Mountain Whites' and their 'typical homes'. For the Carnegie Commission and its experts the Poor Whites were a collective anthropological subject, and, as not limited to South Africa, a transnational type at that.

If, as the Carnegie photographs show, images of the Poor Whites had the power to discursively construct, and the photographic methods employed to photograph the population were derived from broader discourses, then we should take seriously the role of what we may call the photographic expert — expert here being a preferred alternative to either artist or artisan, the aesthetic innovator or the lowly technician. Crucially, we should regard photographers as experts in the same way that the philanthropic commissions of previous chapters were made up of experts who 'format social relations, never simply to report or picture them'.<sup>25</sup> The link between photographers and scientific expertise has been made before, most often in their role as anthropologists and ethnographers. We may also regard photographic experts as belonging to networks. They communicated with each other in journals, letters and through the photographs themselves, teaching new techniques and perspectives to an eager audience. These

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<sup>22</sup> Raymond W. Wilcocks and Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, *The Poor White* (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia Drukkery, 1932).

<sup>23</sup> Ernst G. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment* (Cape Town: Timmins, 1981), 125-140.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

<sup>25</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002)



networks did not function in isolation but overlapped, and formed part of, other networks of expertise. Malherbe, for instance, was a keen amateur photographer who kept lifelong photographic diaries. He was also active in media circles, serving as a trustee of the photography magazine *Libertas* where he came into contact with professional photographers such as Constance Stuart Larrabee. These transnational networks also contributed to the discursive creation of the Poor White. We should take care, then, to consider the photographers of Poor Whites as much as we consider the photographs themselves.

### **Race and the problems of methodology**

The consideration of photographs and the photographic experts that produced them is no easy task, and a host of visual methodologies have been employed. This is necessary as technology has allowed photographs to proliferate in academic discourse. Human geography has certainly, even distinctively, been enriched by ‘the visual’ — though in the last twenty years a more critical appreciation of the visual and of visuality has emerged.<sup>26</sup> Photographs have been used ‘as illustrations, as means of comparison, as visual data, as (found) objects of analysis, as means of engaging participants through photo-diaries and interviews, to explore spaces through auto-ethnography, in photo-essays, and more’.<sup>27</sup> Yet proponents of critical visual methodologies have repeatedly warned against using images and cameras uncritically.<sup>28</sup> A mistaken or shallow reading of a photograph means that images can disempower as easily as they empower. Relevant here are the ideas of Foucauldian discourse analysis which regard images as part of a discourse, if not an episteme. They are not static representations but actively contribute to creating their own reality — or ‘regimes of truth’, as Foucault puts it.<sup>29</sup>

Reflecting critically on photographs of Poor Whites means engaging centrally with depictions of race. Photography’s relationship with race is a complicated one, however. As photographic technology developed and the camera became mass-produced, it was no longer restricted to the elite. The democratisation of the photographic technique gave the power of representation to virtually anyone. If the photograph could define race and create representation, it could also be used as a means of resistance by those it had categorised. bell hooks argues that ‘cameras gave to black folks, irrespective of our class, a means by which we could participate fully in the production of images ... the camera was a central instrument by which black folks could disprove representations of us created by white folks’.<sup>30</sup> An

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<sup>26</sup> Gillian Rose, ‘Using Photographs as Illustrations in Human Geography’, *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 32, no. 1 (January 2008).

<sup>27</sup> Mia Hunt, ‘Urban Photography/cultural Geography: Spaces, Objects, Events’, *Geography Compass* 8, no. 3 (March 2014), 154.

<sup>28</sup> Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (London: Sage, 2012).

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, ‘Truth and Power’, in *Power-knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

<sup>30</sup> Erina Duganne, *The Self in Black and White: Race and Subjectivity in Postwar American Photography* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2010), 11.

excellent example is the subversion of *Migrant Mother* by the Black Panthers, who added an afro to the portrait photograph.<sup>31</sup>

It should be no great stretch to imagine that whiteness, representation and photography are epistemologically and ethically intertwined. If photography can present idealised images, such as of the female body in modern fashion magazines, then it is able to present an even more problematically idealised ‘race’. Various studies, for instance, have looked at the relationship between advertisements and skin lightening in African and Asian cultures.<sup>32</sup> This is certainly not a new phenomenon. Arthur Fellig, the early twentieth-century photographer known as Weegee, describes in his autobiography his use of contrast in the developing process in order to lighten the faces of the poor European immigrants to New York, and so make them appear more white. Weegee ‘quickly realised that a slightly idealized and altered racial image would sell to those parents for whom the buying of a photograph represented a distinct luxury’.<sup>33</sup> The twentieth century also gives us a ready example of idealized racial images in the form of Nazi racial propaganda. In photographs, films and illustrations, the Nazi Party represented the ideal of ‘white’ to audiences and, by contrast to Weegee and others, stripped Jewish citizens of their ‘white’ status.<sup>34</sup>

The report of the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission (RSC), among the earliest reports by the Rockefeller organisations, also makes heavy use of images to show both the ravages of hookworm, and the efficacy of the cure. As previously established, the RSC considered improving the health of the Poor Whites equivalent to whitening them. In Chapter 2 this was mostly considered through reports and letters, but the commission also used ‘before/after’ photographs to illustrate a particular ideal of a healthy white. The reports do not specify a photographer, and the subjects in the photographs range over a wide geographical area. We must thus assume that the photographs were taken somewhat haphazardly by county agents and physicians rather than a directed media campaign, and if their subsequent anonymity takes us away from the prestige status of the artist, it does not take anything away from their role as experts.

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<sup>31</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life beyond Limits* (London: Norton, W. W. & Company, 2009), 238.

<sup>32</sup> For instance: Eric P.H. Li et al, ‘Skin Lightening and Beauty in Four Asian Culture’, *Advances in Consumer Research* 35 (2008). Also see especially Alastair Bonnett, *White Identities: An Historical and International Introduction* (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1999).

<sup>33</sup> Caroline Blinder, ‘Not so Innocent’, in *Photographs, histories and meanings*, ed. Marlene Kader, Jeanne Perreault, and Linda Warley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 15.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey Herf, *The Jewish Enemy: Nazi Propaganda during World War II and the Holocaust* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routledge, 2002).

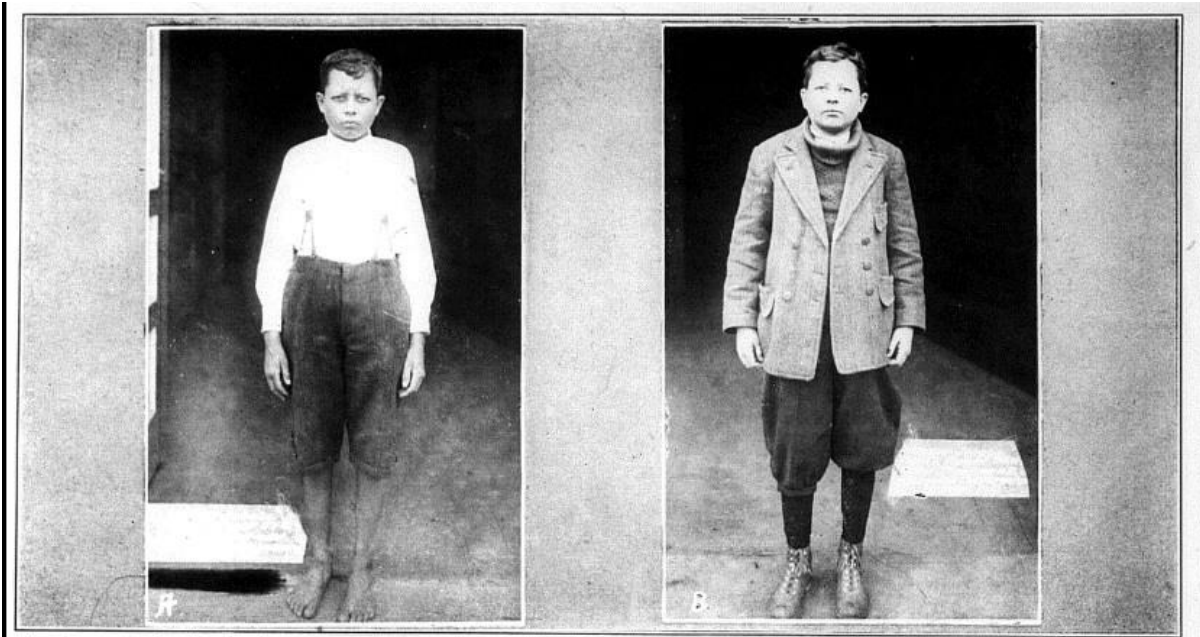


Fig. 21—Oscar Jacobs, Hamlet, N. C.; age 17, weight 67 pounds. a. Before being treated; b. Three weeks later; weight 77 pounds; general physical condition much improved.

Fig. 12. Oscar Jacobs, Hamlet, N.C.<sup>35</sup>

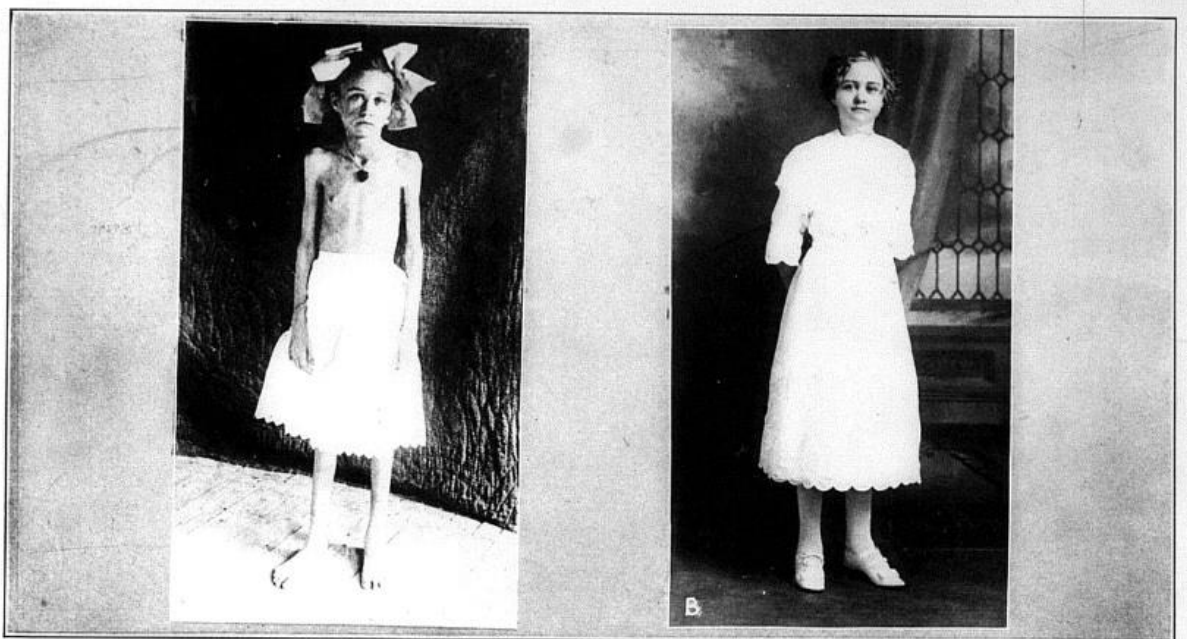


Fig. 23—Della Carder, Grant county, Arkansas; age 16; practically an invalid from childhood; had been treated for malaria and tuberculosis; found heavily infected with hookworms; treated. b. Della Carder as she is to-day.

Fig. 13. Della Carder, Grant County, Arkansas.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Author unknown, 'Oscar Jacobs, Hamlet, N.C.', in *Second Annual Report*, Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

<sup>36</sup> Author unknown, 'Della Carder, Grant County, Arkansas', in *Second Annual Report*, Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

The same technique of ‘before’ and ‘after’ juxtapositions had been used just a few decades earlier by Barnardo’s in London, who distributed complimentary pairs of cards with the photograph of the same child separated in time, and illustrating the care the home provided.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the ‘before/after’ technique was discovered early on, and remains a central technique for the presentation of transformation — a kind of ellipsis or jump-cut that edits out the intervening process of reclamation and redemption to powerful effect.

Yet it is not just about the crude editing, but also the subtle staging and framing of this moral and physical transformation. The Rockefeller photographs here juxtapose an unhealthy, unsanitary Poor White child with a healthy, disciplined white. As such they provide insight into what the RSC considered a disciplined white looked like. The photograph of Oscar Jacobs (Fig. 12) on admission shows him with his hair uncombed and barefoot.<sup>38</sup> His chin is lowered, and his clothes are threadbare. The bare surroundings give the impression of cold. In the second photograph, taken three weeks later, he is wearing shoes and socks as well as a thick jersey and coat. According to the caption Jacobs has gained ten pounds, but the impression of increased bulk is mostly given by the much heavier clothing. His hair is now combed and his chin is raised in a confident manner. According to the RSC the disciplined white was properly dressed, was proud and healthy. They were larger, cleaner and neater. They wore shoes — the lack of which was an important marker of poverty, ignorance and vulnerability to hookworm, which often entered the body via the bare soles of feet. The photograph of Della Carder (Fig. 13) is less subtle. The caption notes that she was ‘practically’ an invalid from childhood, and had suffered from malaria, tuberculosis and hookworm. The first photograph is taken against a bare, cold wall. This contrasts against her pale, bare skin and shocking malnourishment. She is not wearing any shoes, or even a complete dress. Her chin is lowered and her arms hang limply by her side. The impression is of fragility and vulnerability. In the second photograph, a disciplined and white Della is wearing shoes, socks and a proper dress. Her hair is washed and curled. She is standing up straight and her chin is raised. Instead of a bare wall the background is a richly appointed room with a thick curtain. Thus the disciplined white was cleaner, healthier and proud, but also civilised and wealthy. The gap between the photographs becomes a disciplinary ellipsis, a pause before whiteness is taught.

The RSC photographs also commented on the moral degeneracy of the Poor Whites. The caption to a photograph of two Poor White children — one small and infected with hookworm, one large and healthy — notes that the smaller boy, who was actually eighteen, was known as ‘Chalky’ due to his paleness. Chalky was, in fact, the uncle of the larger boy and ‘uses chewing tobacco, snuff and profane language’. Another photograph of an infected Poor White notes that his appetite was ‘often perverted’. In fact he

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<sup>37</sup> Lindsay Smith, ‘The Shoe-black to the Crossing Sweeper: Victorian Street Arabs and Photography’, *Textual Practice* 10, no. 1 (March 1996).

<sup>38</sup> Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease, *Second Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

had ‘eaten one whole Bible and almost all of a second one’.<sup>39</sup> Thus the RSC photographs constructed the Poor Whites both physically and morally. They showed not only what a disciplined white looked like but, crucially, what a Poor White looked like — thin, perverted, sickly, barefoot etc. The photographs were part of the same broader discursive construction as the reports and inquiries. They defined, and reinscribed, the race of the people they depicted.

When the photographs are part of commissions on Poor Whites, the matter of identifying race is seemingly simple: the images are all of people who are both white and poor — although their whiteness is by no means certain. Yet this simplicity should not be assumed, and the matter of identifying race on photographs is often a far more complex task. In her work on photographs of black women in Victorian London, the historical geographer Caroline Bressey has argued that ‘on one level [identifying them as black] is incredibly obvious. They had physical characteristics that I thought identified them, or could identify them, as black women’. The irony of this methodology, entirely recognised by Bressey in her anti-racist work, is that it perpetuates the visual signifiers of race as a means to classify. Thus Bressey notes that her work ‘is bolstered by evidence that would not seem entirely out of place in the “racist” world of Victorian phrenology and physiognomy’.<sup>40</sup> Identifying race can quickly become complicated. Contrast and lighting, especially in black-and-white photography, can easily ‘trick’ the viewer into misidentifying race. Context outside the frame is also important. In Nazi-era Germany, a well-known photograph of a ‘perfect Aryan child’ was actually of a Jewish girl named Hessa Levinsons Taft.<sup>41</sup> Dorothea Lange’s *Migrant Mother*, Florence Thompson, that icon of poor but pure white motherhood, was of Cherokee heritage — a fact that did not become clear until she was traced in 1979. Moreover, this ‘whitening’ of subjects also works in reverse. Another of Lange’s photographs, *Hoe Culture*, shows a Depression-era farmworker dressed in rags and clutching a hoe. His face is not visible. The only skin showing is his forearms and hands, which dominate the photograph — worn, tanned and calloused. So tanned in fact that the man has been identified as African-American, and the photograph used to demonstrate rural black poverty.<sup>42</sup> The assumption of whiteness displayed by this conceptual shortcut is that an impoverished farmworker should ‘default’ to a shade other than white, as white poverty is exceptional.

Photographers are keenly aware of the racialising power of photography. The South African photographer David Goldblatt, for instance, in a collection of images of rural white Afrikaners, includes a photograph of a family standing in front of their small house near the town of Paarl. The image can

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<sup>39</sup> Rockefeller Sanitary Commission for the Eradication of Hookworm Disease, *Second Annual Report* (Washington, D.C.: Offices of the Commission, 1911).

<sup>40</sup> Bressey, ‘Forgotten Geographies’, 206.

<sup>41</sup> Terrence McCoy, ‘The ‘perfect Aryan’ Child Used in Nazi Propaganda Was Actually Jewish’, *Washington Post*, July 7, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/07/the-perfect-aryan-child-the-nazis-used-in-propaganda-was-actually-jewish/>.

<sup>42</sup> Petra Dreiser, ‘Strange Birth: Reading Hands, Reflecting Race in Richard Wright’s 12 Million Black Voices’, in *Photographs, histories, and meanings*, ed. Marlene Kadar, Jeanne Perreault, and Linda Warley (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).



easily be perceived as one of Poor Whites, as most of the other images in the collection are. That perception is broken by the caption, which says that the family feared removal under the Group Areas Act, which reserved land solely for white use. The family were thus classified by the Apartheid state as mixed race, or 'coloured' as they are known in South Africa. Art critic Ivor Powell says in his analysis of the photograph:

[A]t first glance, one would probably not identify these subjects as coloured. Then, if you have been programmed or poisoned by living or growing up under Apartheid, you look again — at the texture of the mother's hair, the unusual shape of her nose, the darkish complexion of the child. You also notice the way the woman holds back from the camera's gaze. It becomes uncomfortable.<sup>43</sup>

The photographs have been discursively constructed to represent the whiteness of the photographic subject, even if their race would have been questioned under other circumstances.

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<sup>43</sup> Ivor Powell, 'The Anxiety of Identity and Some Afrikaners Revisited', in *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, by David Goldblatt (Johannesburg: Umuzi, 2007), 21.



Fig 14. A protea grower and his family on their smallholding near Groot Drakenstein. They were uncertain of how long they would be able to continue there, for they feared removal under the Group Areas Act. Near Paarl, Cape Province (Western Cape), 1965.<sup>44</sup>

In viewing photographs of Poor Whites, we are confronted with a situation where ‘race’ is paramount; centre stage. The images are suffused with racial representation; yet, crucially, it is a contested

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<sup>44</sup> David Goldblatt. ‘A protea grower and his family’, in *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, David Goldblatt (Johannesburg: Umuzi, 2007).



representation. How then do we critically interrogate these photographs, bearing in mind our ethical as well as academic responsibilities?

### **The photographic encounter**

One method is by treating photographs as a constituent part of the photographic encounter. Ariella Azoulay argues in her recent work on photography and citizenship that the photograph is ‘a platform upon which traces of the photographic encounter are inscribed’.<sup>45</sup> It is easy to forget that a photograph is, first, the encounter between a person with a camera and the people or places being photographed. The very presence of a camera distorts the scene, like the effect of observation on sub-atomic particles. People interact with a physical camera. They change their behaviour in regards to the camera and in regards to the photographer. What is traditionally regarded as the photographic event, the eventual photograph, is produced (and reproduced) later — as only a part of the ‘event of photography’.

When we focus only on the image produced on the photograph, for instance, we typically ignore the political space — the social relations and invisible power struggles — that the photographer and the subject inhabit when they encounter each other in the act of photography, and that we inhabit as viewers and consumers of this scene. The power relations seem skewed towards the photographer, who is stylistically interpreting the scene and choosing what to include, or exclude: the angle, the focus, the auratic framing of truth. Yet relating to photographs — especially portrait photographs — as if they were only produced by the photographer denies the presence of the other persons photographed who, in giving explicit consent to be photographed, let us say, are by no means powerless in these relations.<sup>46</sup> And in all these relations, there is yet another party: ourselves, the spectators. When we look at a photograph, we are forming a relation with the photographer and the subjects, however transiently. We too encounter them. We are interpreting and judging them and, above all, we are listening to them. They, in their own turn, are equally speaking to us, for no photograph is taken without a spectator in mind, whom photographer Walker Evans called an imagined ‘public of citizens’.<sup>47</sup> But this ‘ideal audience’ is no less problematic than an ideal reader of text. If ‘they’ are problematic — as we have seen in our discussion of types and othering — equally so is the term ‘we’, the putative audience. The career of the photograph does not end with the production of the object. If it is particularly influential, such as the ones considered in this chapter, then it is reproduced and discussed in various ‘interpretive communities’, which emphasize certain aspects at the cost of others. As the literary theorist Stanley

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<sup>45</sup> Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (New York: Verso Books, 2012), 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

Fish points out, '[t]he change from one structure of understanding to another is not a rupture but a modification of the interests and concerns that are already in place'.<sup>48</sup>

Consider the two photographs below. Taken in 1947 by the photographer Constance Stuart Larrabee for the liberal South African magazine *Libertas*, both show a white man, identified as a 'tramp' by the magazine, sleeping on a bench in downtown Johannesburg. The first (Fig. 15) shows a black nanny looking down at the man with a pitying expression. In the second (Fig. 16.), severely cropped, photo, she and the other onlookers are gone; replaced by a uniformed man.



Fig. 15. Untitled photograph by Larrabee of a man sleeping on a park bench in Johannesburg.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>49</sup> Constance Stuart Larrabee. 'Untitled', in *Poor Whites & Photography in South Africa: The Backstory*, John Edwin Mason, [http://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john\\_edwin\\_mason\\_photogra/2010/10/poor-whites-south-africa-backstory.html](http://johnedwinmason.typepad.com/john_edwin_mason_photogra/2010/10/poor-whites-south-africa-backstory.html).

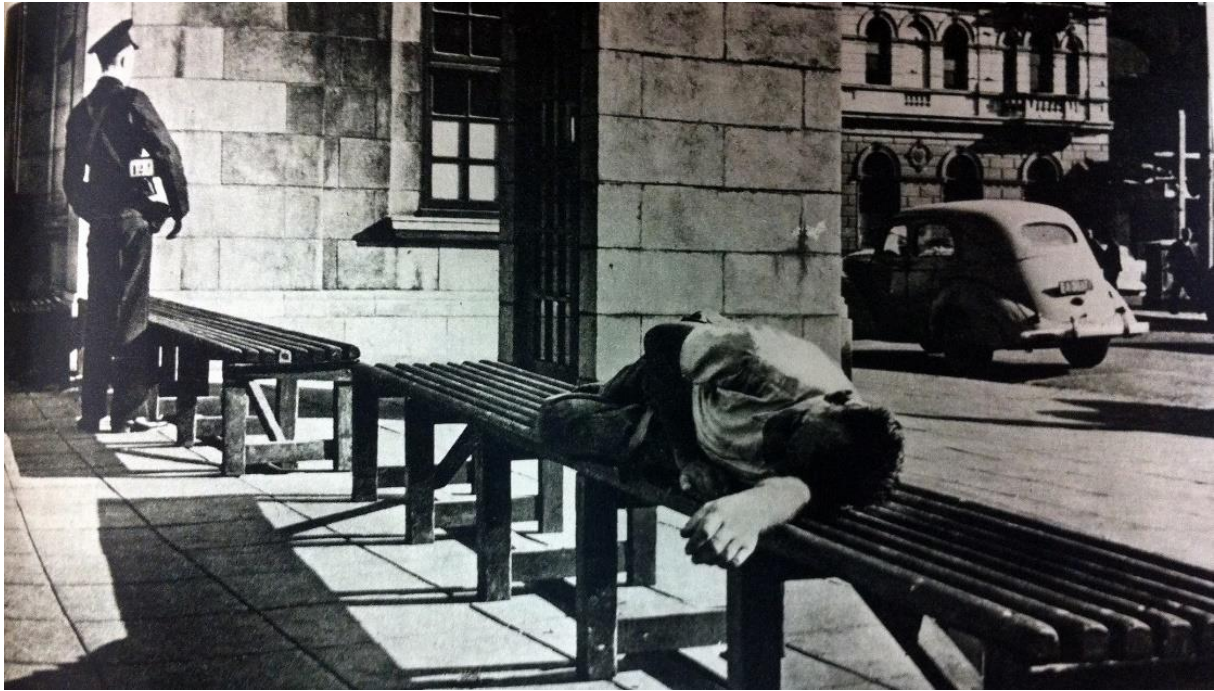


Fig. 16. An untitled photograph by Larrabee of a man on a park bench and policeman.<sup>50</sup>

The first is surely a far more powerful photograph, precisely because of the irony of a black woman looking down with pity at a white man in racially segregated, pre-Apartheid South-Africa. The photograph was not selected for publication and the weaker version chosen. The reasons are not known but it seems likely that, in a culture reliant on white prestige, the first photograph would raise significant objections. The context in which the photograph is produced, and in which the photographic encounter occurs, is crucial. In this case the photographic object has had its meaning modified in order to ‘fit’ its intended audience. By treating photographs as encounters between various, differentiated, and contending parties we can allow for these modifications. Far from being static images photographs are a mess of social and political relations, a confusion of encounters. The event of photography, to gloss Azoulay, reveals an agonistic encounter, a complex political geography to which the abstract geometry of subject, photographer, and viewer does little justice.

Photographs also possess their own geographies and their own histories. Viewing a photograph transports us in time and place. But photographs allow us to possess these unreal pasts and places, what has been called ‘the ongoing moment’.<sup>51</sup> We affix the insubstantial — the memory, the evocation — to a slip of paper or a discreet storage device: they are slices of space and time that we carry in our pockets. Yet the geography of photographs is stranger still. Susan Sontag, in her seminal *On Photography*, says that photographs are ‘surreal’ objects with a surreal geography. Photography ensures that depictions of

<sup>50</sup> Constance Stuart Larrabee. ‘Untitled’, in *Libertas*, ‘Anti-Human Waste’, Constance Stuart Larrabee, June 1947, 29.

<sup>51</sup> Geoff Dyer, *The Ongoing Moment* (London: Litte, Brown, 2005), 1.

utter poverty and complete excess are equally within reach and equally banal: '[w]hat is surreal is the distance imposed, and bridged, by the photograph: the social distance and the distance in time. Seen from the middle-class perspective of photography, celebrities are as intriguing as pariahs'.<sup>52</sup>

The normative power of whiteness is such that photographs of Poor Whites are particularly affective encounters. This has long been recognised — Walter Benjamin's conception of the auratic, and its connections to the 'imaginary encounter' between subject and viewer — is a key reference here.<sup>53</sup> But the affective has tended to be considered as a phenomenological universal rather than a culturally inflected, politically imbued, process — one that has more in common with the call-and-response business of ideological 'interpellation' (to use Althusser's term), in which the viewer is forced to recognise his identity, than the physiological concerns of much current discussion of affect and emotion. Here, of course, it is the racial and class identity of one set of viewers at one particular time and location that determines, or at least structures, the affective response to the plight of Poor Whites — and the ethical lessons we take from this 'imaginary encounter'. This is owing in part to the confluence of whiteness, representation, expectation, identification and pathos. This is not to argue that race and class identities are fixed, pre-existing characteristics of a photograph's audience: for it is the precariousness and fluidity of these categories that enables and endorses the affective work of the photographs here. The Poor Whites — virtually by definition — are on the threshold between white and black, precariously close to escaping their racial boundaries, constantly threatening to become one race or another. Photographs attest to this interstitial condition at the same time as they participate in efforts to rescue and redeem the 'whiteness' of their subjects. Certainly, photographs of the Poor Whites have their own history of racial propaganda, and of resistance to that propaganda. Such photographs have been used not only to further particular racial representations, but to bolster racial morale and promote white prestige. In the next section I will explore examples of this process in the two key, linked locales that have animated this thesis, the Depression-era United States and Apartheid South Africa.

As in previous chapters, the cases studies are not meant to be viewed in isolation, but as a product of transnational governmentality. The previous section investigated the genealogy of images of the white poor. The following case studies are re-evaluations of existing nationally orientated approaches, highlighting the unspoken connections with, and dependence on, transnational governmentality. They show how the project was mutable.

### **The FSA and the whiteness of the poor**

The Great Depression of the 1930s devastated economies in the Western industrialised world. It hit rural areas hardest, and hastened urbanisation as tens of thousands left enclaves of rural poverty and

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<sup>52</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), 59.

<sup>53</sup> Carolin Duttlinger. 'Imaginary encounters: Walter Benjamin and the aura of photography', *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (2008): 79-101.



trekked to the cities in search of a better life. Coming as it did in the aftermath of Western colonialism, it was a particularly racialised event in places like the United States and South Africa. The Depression forced the display of white vulnerability and poverty in countries which had determinedly upheld the dictum of white prestige. In the United States, for instance, intense drought and wind erosion brought on by misapplied farming methods led to ‘Dust Bowl’ conditions that forced farmers and farmworkers off the land. Migrants from the Great Plains region made their way to California in search of better working conditions. These Poor White farmers became known by various uncomplimentary names such as ‘Okies’ and ‘Arkies’ — terms which included a distinct class dimension. Historian Linda Gordon argues that ‘[w]hat made them “Okies” was their whiteness, as distinct from the customary farmworkers ... Their whiteness made their sufferings more shocking to the elite’. To many white Californians, the ‘Okies’ seemed almost to be another race entirely. ‘The farmworkers’ roadside camps were often called “jungles”, a word later applied pejoratively to black urban neighbourhoods’.<sup>54</sup> In an echo of the Irish struggle for whiteness in nineteenth-century New York, Californian establishments put up signs saying: ‘No Mexicans or Okies’.<sup>55</sup>

The United States government responded to the crisis of the Depression through the New Deal, a series of radical economic reforms proposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt. These reforms included the establishment of the Public Works Administration and the National Recovery Administration, which negotiated for fairer labour practices. The Farm Security Administration (FSA) undertook various projects to improve agriculture and the living conditions of farmworkers and sharecroppers. Rexford Tugwell, an influential economic advisor to Roosevelt, first headed the FSA (initially known as the Resettlement Administration). The agency is chiefly remembered today for the work of its Information Division which, under the guidance of photographer Roy Stryker, conducted a photographic programme from 1935 to 1944 in order to, in the words of Stryker, ‘introduce Americans to America’.<sup>56</sup> Put less glibly, the photographic programme was established in order to show the necessity and effectiveness of New Deal agricultural programmes.<sup>57</sup> To do this, Stryker managed a group of about 20 photographers who photographed mainly (but certainly not only) the rural poor. They left behind an extraordinary archive of about 175,000 negatives, which has captured the interest of researchers since. A number of the FSA photographers, such as Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans and Gordon Parks, went on to become well-known photographers in their own right.

The FSA photographers were not unsympathetic to their subjects. In fact, many of the photographers were directly influenced by social reformers who came before them. Stryker, for instance, spent his

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<sup>54</sup> Linda Gordon, *Dorothea Lange: A Life beyond Limits* (London: Norton, W. W. & Company, 2009), 225.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>56</sup> Colleen McDannell, *Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Michael Carlebach, ‘Documentary and Propaganda: The Photographs of the Farm Security Administration’, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 8 (1988).

college years as a resident of a settlement house, a charitable establishment which sought to improve the lives of the poor. He worked with the photographer Lewis Hine, who took photographs of Ellis Island immigrants, and Paul Kellogg, a journalist and social reformer. Kellogg collaborated with both Hine and Jacob Riis, who photographed the heinous slum conditions in 1890s New York.<sup>58</sup> The FSA was deeply conscious that it was creating a narrative. Stryker, who described himself as a ‘press-agent for the underprivileged’, wrote that ‘[i]t didn’t take long to realize that photographs of the immigrants [and] the sharecroppers were a useful tool for the Information people ... My sense of PR ... grew rapidly And we were succeeding with our pictures ... to a surprising degree’.<sup>59</sup> Sontag argues that the purpose of the FSA photographs was to demonstrate the inherent value of those being photographed: ‘[I]t implicitly defined its points of view: that of middle-class people who needed to be convinced that the poor were really poor, and that the poor were dignified’.<sup>60</sup> She might also have said that the poor were really white.

Although the FSA photographers, especially Lange and Gordon Parks, spent much time and film photographing the effects of the Depression on black and Mexican farmworkers, the narrative advanced was resolutely one that emphasised the whiteness of the migrants. Stryker, for instance, discouraged Arthur Rothstein, one of the photographers, from photographing Native Americans. ‘You know’, he wrote. ‘I just don’t get too excited about Indians. I know it is their country and we took it away from them — to hell with it!’<sup>61</sup> While researching rural poverty for the U.S. Department of Agriculture with his wife, Dorothea Lange, economist Paul Taylor explicitly changed the language of his reports to be mostly about white people. The photographs that Lange took, and selected, in support of these reports were mostly of Poor Whites. Linda Gordon argues that ‘New Deal progressives like Lange and Taylor believed they could not afford not to exploit racialized sympathy for the Okies as a means of mobilizing support for better treatment of farmworkers in general’.<sup>62</sup> The first travelling FSA exhibition, for instance, had only a single, uncaptioned image of a black migrant. A mural in Grand Central Station of twenty photographs showed only whites. Even information on FSA projects was segregated. Information on the agency’s aid to black farmers was only given to the black press.<sup>63</sup> Once the images left the FSA, they were co-opted into the narrative of the deserving Poor White. By way of example Paul Kellogg, editor of *Survey Graphic* magazine, requested FSA photographs to accompany an article on farm tenancy in the March 1936 issue. The author, social scientist Edwin R. Embree, had no photographs of his own to provide, and said, ‘I think that you should see to it that most of the pictures cover white subjects, for as my article will show nearly two thirds of the cotton tenants are white and it

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<sup>58</sup> Daniel Huff, ‘Every Picture Tells a Story’, *Social Work* 43, no. 6 (November 1, 1998), 577.

<sup>59</sup> Carlebach, ‘Documentary and Propaganda’, 20.

<sup>60</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 62.

<sup>61</sup> Sally Stein, ‘Passing Likeness’, in *Only skin deep: Changing visions of the American self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), 352.

<sup>62</sup> Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 226.

<sup>63</sup> Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 226.



is very important that the nation as a whole should realize that cotton tenancy is not a Negro problem'. Kellogg replied that, 'Of course we entirely agree that the emphasis on [the photographs] should be on white tenants'.<sup>64</sup>

The narrative that emerges from the FSA photographs, and the use of these photographs both inside and outside the FSA, is of what Franklin Roosevelt called the 'Forgotten Men': a rhetorical construction that emphasised national homogeneity in a time of intense social and class difference.<sup>65</sup> The FSA defined how the poor should look: that is, dignified, knowable, and safe. It was a narrative that painted the migrants and tenant farmers as the deserving poor of rural America, and not the dangerous homeless of the slums and tenements. In this, it showed a concern for the declining status of whites in the post-war and post-crash era. Unconsciously, and perhaps consciously, the FSA photography project was an effort to rehabilitate the image of whites, to strengthen white prestige in an era that still relied on racial domination.<sup>66</sup>

By way of illustration, consider FSA photographer Walker Evans' *Bud Fields and his family at home, Hale County, Alabama*. There are a number of encounters involved in this striking photograph: between the family, the camera, the photographer, and ourselves. Each member of the family pictured has their own relations with the photographer and, separately, with the viewer, whether this relation is characterised by enthusiasm or resignation, suspicion or friendliness. Similarly, the photographer has his own encounter with the family and with the viewer. As Sontag puts it: 'The [FSA photographers] would take dozens of frontal pictures of one of their sharecropper subjects until satisfied that they had gotten just the right look on film — The precise expression on the subject's face that supported their own notions about poverty, light, dignity, texture, exploitation, and geometry'.<sup>67</sup> The viewer brings his or her context to the encounter, mediated via the skill and intention of the photographer: his or her own knowledge of the Great Depression, his or her feelings on white poverty, his or her identification with the subjects and identification with what are assumed to be the goals of the photographer.

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<sup>64</sup> Cara Finnegan, 'What Is This a Picture of? Some Thoughts on Images and Archives', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 9, no. 1 (2006), 121.

<sup>65</sup> Dreiser, 'Strange Birth', 25.

<sup>66</sup> Stein, 'Passing Likeness'.

<sup>67</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 6.



Fig. 17. Bud Fields and his family at home. Hale County, Alabama.<sup>68</sup>

Saturating the image, however, is the awareness of white poverty. The history and normative power of whiteness means that such images are novel and exotic to us — at least at this distance. Such photographs arrest our attention. The racialisation of poverty has led to black poverty seeming normal, even mundane. Poor Whites are a people of the cultural margins, yet, perversely, their whiteness forces a certain kind of identification. It is arguably far harder for Western societies to view Poor Whites as an outcast Other, following Said, and far easier to aesthetically and ethically universalise their suffering. So Lange's *Migrant Mother* ceases to be a photograph of Florence Thompson, and becomes a mater dolorosa depicting a sorrowful Virgin Mary. Images of white poverty are both exotic and powerfully familiar. The awareness of racial norms is present in all the political relations of the photograph. The family proudly pleading with the photographer (as they did Lange) that '[w]e ain't no paupers. We hold ourselves to be white folks'.<sup>69</sup> Walker Evans knew well that such images are emotive and did his best to convey the power of this image to a viewer laden with the baggage of Western whiteness.

<sup>68</sup> Walker Evans, *Bud Fields and his family at home. Hale County, Alabama*. 1935. Available from: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Digital ID: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3g04898> (accessed 15 February 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Gordon, *Dorothea Lange*, 167.

The career of the photograph did not end with Evans' encounter, but was circulated into the emotionally loaded atmosphere of the Great Depression. Contemporaries recognised the FSA photographs for their signal emotional power and, in their publication and use by media, they themselves helped construct the emotional context of the Great Depression and the racial propaganda it required. Even when the context changed, the power of that encounter remained: many of the FSA photographs were re-purposed for wartime propaganda as the country's morale requirements changed.<sup>70</sup> Through clever cropping and use of contrast, existing photographs of poor migrant workers became photographs of a strong and vibrant democracy. The FSA's representational mission changed from chronicling poverty to chronicling vigour. As Stryker instructed one of his photographers in 1940: 'Emphasize the idea of abundance — the "horn of plenty" and pour maple syrup over it ... I know your damned photographer's soul writhes, but to hell with it. Do you think I give a damn about a photographer's soul with Hitler at our doorstep?'<sup>71</sup>

The political relations inherent to the event of the Poor White photograph work together in interesting and powerful ways and it is why we may say the photographs of Poor Whites are a more emotional encounter than, say, holiday pictures on the beach. It is not only the quality of the encounter that makes it so powerful, but also the broader context of that encounter. The different encounters themselves are emotionally powerful — but the alignment between, say, the FSA photographs and the emotional narrative of the Great Depression, as well as the requirements of racial prestige upheld by elites provide an instructive example of how the different encounters in a photograph support each other.

### **Photographing whiteness in Apartheid South Africa and after**

The American photographic encounter with Poor Whites served to problematise their race and class position, to endorse an identification with their plight, and to endow them with a certain kind of dignity, a moral currency that might be redeemed in nationalist propaganda. What, by contrast, of the 'event' of Poor White photography in South Africa in the subsequent decades?

For nearly half a century the 'Poor White Question' formed part of the political discourse in South Africa. Efforts to win the political loyalty of the impoverished whites contributed to measures to reserve employment for whites and segregation. As white poverty worsened, politics gradually radicalised and the white regime introduced ever more racially repressive legislation, culminating in the establishment of the Apartheid policy in 1948. In roughly the same period, the wartime economy of the Second World War, the establishment of Afrikaner industry and a doubling of the gold price significantly eased white poverty. The racist state, so dependent on unskilled black labour to excavate its mineral wealth, was

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<sup>70</sup> David Gray, 'New Uses for Old Photos', *American Studies* 47, no. 3/4 (2006).

<sup>71</sup> Carlebach, 'Documentary and Propaganda', 23.

intent on upholding white prestige. The Poor Whites that remained were pushed out of the public consciousness and shuttered in enclaves of poverty where they were taught how to 'act white' and eventually ushered into the middle-class. With the dismantling of Apartheid in the 1980s and the advent of a non-racial democracy in the 1990s, these Poor Whites lost their preferential state treatment and began to appear again in larger numbers. The Apartheid state's deliberate amnesia with regard to white poverty resulted in the strange and ongoing 'rediscovery' of Poor Whites in the new millennium as both national and international media document the appearance of 'white townships'. For most of the previous century, then, the context was resolutely one of white prestige, a regime which emphasised the need to uphold the racial unity between the English and the Afrikaners. With the advent of democracy and black majority rule, 'whiteness' lost much of its power and the political and affective atmosphere became far less sympathetic to the Poor Whites.

Photographer David Goldblatt has chronicled South Africa for a period of over fifty years, and his work thus spans this racial revolution. His subjects have varied significantly, from black mineworkers to white suburbanites; yet race and class have been constant concerns. Moreover, there is a direct link between the work discussed in the previous section and Goldblatt's professional career. Indeed, Goldblatt cites the FSA photographers Lange and Evans as inspirations and there is a clear line from these photographs to his work, which is self-consciously political and in the tradition of social documentary. In the 1960s, during the height of Apartheid, he embarked on a photographic essay of mostly rural poor and working-class Afrikaners. Although some of these eighty photographs were sporadically published in magazines and exhibited, they were only collected and published as a whole in 1975 as *Some Afrikaners Photographed*. The photographs commented in uncomfortable ways on Afrikaner identity, highlighting the 'creole' heritage of Afrikaners in a period when the Apartheid state was determinedly emphasising only their European heritage.

Goldblatt's photographs infuriated an Afrikaner establishment intent on upholding white prestige, culminating in his interrogation by the Apartheid Security Police.<sup>72</sup> They simply ran counter to the broader narrative upheld by elites. In 1969, the *Some Afrikaners* photographs were exhibited in Switzerland and reported on by the Swiss photo magazine *Camera*. The South African Sunday newspaper *Dagbreek en Sondagnuus* published a scathing article under the headline 'These photographs will boil the blood'. It is worth quoting at length:

Afrikaners are descended from, among others, Hottentots, Malaysians and Bantus. This is what is said in a slanderous article that has been published in an international photomagazine ... The photographs accompanying the article are shocking and utterly

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<sup>72</sup> Enwezor Okwui, 'Matter and Consciousness: An Insistent Gaze from a Not Disinterested Photographer', in *Fifty-one years*, by David Goldblatt (Barcelona: Macba, 2001).

insulting to the Afrikaners. The twisted image that it gives of Afrikaners is simply unbelievable.<sup>73</sup>

The article paid particular attention to a ‘horrible picture of a middle-aged couple, ostensibly taken in their home’:

A so-called family portrait hangs against the wall. In this photograph the light is so contrived that the woman comes across as fat, slovenly and poorly dressed, with a set jaw. The same manipulation of light causes the man on the photographs to come across as a staring idiot. He is unshaven and poorly dressed. Apparently the pair are presented as a typical Afrikaner man and woman.<sup>74</sup>

The Afrikaner photographs are encounters with Poor Whites in a period when the group was intended to be hidden from the public consciousness. The couple, in their encounter with Goldblatt and with us, would know they were an aberration in a period of white domination. This knowledge is shared by the photographer. His photographic technique, particularly his use of light, is soft, even sympathetic. His professed goal is not to promote or prevent a racial agenda, but simply to understand, to engage in a dialogue.<sup>75</sup> The viewer encounters the couple, and Goldblatt, through the same lens of normative whiteness — poor whites as both exotic and universal — employed in the FSA photographs. The effect created by the encounters is different than the ‘ennobling poor’ perspective of the American photographs. Rather it is one of pity, of neglect, and of uncomfortable exposure. The Poor Whites were rediscovered (again) but they were not now part of a glorious racial project. Rather these photographs are of people in the racial margins of a white supremacist state — the real ‘Forgotten Men’.

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<sup>73</sup> David Goldblatt, *Some Afrikaners Revisited* (Johannesburg: Umuzi, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Okwui, ‘Matter and Consciousness’, 17.





Fig. 18. A pensioner with his wife and a portrait of her first husband, Transvaal (Gauteng), September 1962.<sup>76</sup>

In stark contrast to Goldblatt's documenting of the poor whites of Apartheid is the post-Apartheid photographic work of Roger Ballen, which offers a very different encounter with the Poor Whites and their problematic and precarious whiteness. The downfall of Apartheid ended not only white majority rule in South Africa, but also presaged the end of white cultural domination. Instead of being seen as part of the Western white tradition, the Afrikaners were now cut loose from the European heritage they had so emphasised and clung to. Instead they were culturally adrift in a continent they perceived as both foreign and familiar. The result was a fading, rather than a hiding, from view. Afrikaans was now one culture among many. Beginning during the dismantling of Apartheid in the 1980s, Ballen's technique is influenced by the tradition of social documentary but progresses to something more akin to theatre where the 'place of the human is as marginal as that of the mice and rats that scurry across the floor'.<sup>77</sup> In his collections *Dorps* and *Platteland*, Ballen documents mainly the white poor and working class, drawn by 'the profound irony that, despite half a century of political privilege, even in a system created to ensure their survival, were archetypes of alienation and immobility'.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> David Goldblatt. 'A pensioner with his wife and a portrait of her first husband, Transvaal (Gauteng), September 1962', in *Some Afrikaners Revisited*, David Goldblatt (Johannesburg: Umuzi, 2007).

<sup>77</sup> Robert JC Young, 'Untitled Essay', in *Lines, marks and drawings: Through the lens of Roger Ballen*, by Craig Allen Subler and Christine Mullen Kreamer (Germany: Prestel, 2013), 18.

<sup>78</sup> Ballen, *Platteland*, 1.



Ballen's photographs are certainly stark. They make harsh use of direct flash against solid backgrounds. In most of the images there is very little depth. The photographs are of outcasts and the forgotten, engaging with themes of ugliness and the body. 'The people depicted looked strange, their faces often contorted or seemingly demented, their appearance apparently the product of inbreeding or centuries of rural poverty'.<sup>79</sup> The photographs are uncomfortable and eerie. They profoundly unsettle, leading to accusations of Ballen being a 'voyeur of poverty and ugliness'.<sup>80</sup> On a broader level, Ballen's photographs relate to the post-millennial *zef* culture in South Africa, which ironically celebrates 'white trash' and is closely related to the cult music group Die Antwoord, and for whom Ballen directed a music video. Whiteness here is not reclaimed, hidden or celebrated — instead it becomes a liminal 'weird whiteness', an inversion of the FSA photographs that embraces its marginality.<sup>81</sup> White, in these photographs, becomes the Other. The subjects of the photographs know that they are outsiders in a system that has moved on.

This Othering is on full display in the photograph below (Fig. 19) The eye is immediately drawn down the dark of the doorway to the man squatting on the stoep, then moves on to take in the messy surroundings. The firewood, the stump and the pot — features more usually associated with black squatter camps than respectable white homes. It is the encounter with the man that holds our attention. His pose looks bestial and pathetic; an inhabitant of the gutters rather than the open street. His attention is focussed on his shaving mirror and not on the camera or the photographer. We are free to stare, as he does at himself. His skin is tanned and leathery; Dark enough that his race might be called into question. As a result of the technique of the photographer and the broader context of the photograph, we have encountered a human being who more closely resembles a creature. It is the opposite, the apogee, of the ennobling photographs of the FSA. Here is the Poor White as ultimate Other.

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<sup>79</sup> Young, 'Untitled Essay', 18.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Weiermair, 'Portraits as Still Lifes: The Photographs of Roger Ballen', in *Outland*, by Roger Ballen (New York: Phaidon Press, 2001).

<sup>81</sup> Amanda du Preez, 'Antwoord Gooi Zef Liminality: Of Monsters, Carnivals and Affects', *Image & Text* 17 (2011).



Fig. 19. Man shaving on verandah, Western Transvaal, 1986.<sup>82</sup>

The encounter is nevertheless filtered through the demands of normative whiteness: the subjects are simultaneously both exotic and universal. To an audience primed by more than a century of the visual construction of whiteness the othering of whiteness in these photographs is extraordinarily powerful. The viewer is left unsettled and uncomfortable. If the images of Lange and Goldblatt are evidently saturated in their humanism, however differentiated, that sympathy is as ambivalent here as the race of those photographed. The atmosphere of the broader society is one that is sometimes hostile, sometimes sympathetic, but mostly indifferent to the whiteness of these poor.

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<sup>82</sup> Roger Ballen, 'Man shaving on verandah, Western Transvaal, 1986', in *Platteland*, Roger Ballen (Rivonia: William Waterman, 1995).

## **Conclusion**

Poor Whites are continuously being rediscovered, and each rediscovery changes how we perceive them. As this chapter has shown, this is reflected in how they are constructed in photographs, particularly photographs by those we can recognise as experts. They are not simply photographs of the poor and the pale-skinned, but images that form part of a long history of photography incorporating anthropology and eugenics, producing the racialised poor as a type at the same time as recognising their ambivalent identity and precarious destiny. The photographic construction of Poor Whites is part of their larger discursive construction by experts. Both the Rockefeller and Carnegie philanthropies contributed to this construction in their separate ways. The representation of Poor Whites is saturated with the awareness of race. Photographs are also a powerful way of showing how the discursive construction of Poor Whites has changed as the racial context has changed and the requirements of white prestige have become more subtle. This chapter has analysed this changing discourse by using the analytical theory of Azoulay — the ‘encounter’ and ‘event’ of photography. In this chapter, the case study has been the representation of whiteness. The inhabitants of the slums in nineteenth-century New York were encountered again as the noble and hardworking poor of the Great Depression. Those that remained after the racial crisis was over, were forgotten. They retreated from sight, unable to exist in societies that upheld white prestige above all else. In the middle of the twentieth century they were rediscovered again — exposed to the public gaze for the first time in decades. After Apartheid fell the Poor Whites were rediscovered, but in South Africa as something different again. The Poor White had completed a moral and political transformation to become a grotesque Other, little more than a carnival freak.

# Conclusion

## *Returning the Poor Whites to geography*

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Perhaps the story of the Poor Whites is not yet finished.

Nearly twenty years after Ballen's famous photograph of Casie and Dresie, two South African journalists tracked the pair down to where they were living in a care home a few hours' drive from Johannesburg. But everything was not as they had thought. In contrast to the glowering, threatening figures on Ballen's photograph, the twins were friendly, welcoming and deeply loved by their caregivers. They were also mute, and had a learning disability that severely reduced their mental capacity. Driesie, as his name is correctly spelt, was obsessively neat and tidy. They enjoyed embracing and were very religious:

‘Pray for us, Driesie’, the caregiver asks. Driesie pinches his eyes shut and frowns with concentration. His toothless mouth contorts and noises pour forth, like the moans of a child who wants to say something but can't yet form the words. ‘Ahhhh-em!’ he concludes and his eyes snap open ... ‘That's how he says amen’, someone explains. And Driesie beams with pride.<sup>1</sup>

As in the previous century the Poor Whites are being rediscovered and reinterpreted again. Indeed, they have already been found in the slums of the New South Africa, and on television shows in the United States that promise lurid insight into the lives of white trash. But perhaps their rediscovery this time will invite more reflection. Instead of the cast-off dregs of a recently and rightly failed system of racial domination, the Poor Whites have a far longer and more complex history. And like Casie and Driesie they deserve a closer look.

This thesis has attempted to show how transnational governmentality offers us a means to take that closer look, and to reconsider, firstly, the role the Poor Whites played on the global scale rather than in the interstices of South Africa's slums, and the extent of efforts to manage them. It has looked at a number of ways in which transnational governmentality was applied to the transnational Poor White population.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannes de Villiers, ‘Two Kindly, Jovial Fellows’, *Herman Verwey Portfolio*, January 7, 2012, <http://hermanverwey.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/two-kindly-jovial-fellows.html>.



Fig. 20. Casie and Driesie, 2012.<sup>2</sup>

Each chapter has been an analysis of this governmentality, and the application of biopower to Poor White populations. Crucially, the Poor Whites of history were not restricted to South Africa.

They were found in many of the colonial outposts of the British Empire, including South-East Asia, the Caribbean and Oceania. They went under different names and were often vaguely defined. In fact, we may argue that the early twentieth century saw the drawing of a ‘global colour line’ that not only divided whites and blacks but also, of course, joined together white nations across the world. Poor Whites were perhaps the paradoxical dark side of this global colour line.

Across this White or whitened hemisphere, there was an essentially easy understanding of the term ‘Poor White’, one that we simply do not share today. The regime of truth under which the Poor White existed across the globe and across nations no longer applies. The experts of the period were of course aware of how vague the term was and tried their best to explain and defend it. This understanding required knowledge gained via not only the imperial networks of new scientific and medical theories, but also the transnational construction of racial expertise. All this happened at the same time as the birth

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<sup>2</sup> Herman Verwey. *Untitled*. 2012. From: Johannes De Villiers, ‘Two Kindly, Jovial Fellows’, *Herman Verwey Portfolio*, January 7, 2012, <http://hermanverwey.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/two-kindly-jovial-fellows.html>.

of internationalism and transnational society, which enabled the conception of, and also the anxiety about, Poor Whites to travel throughout the white world.

The transnational conception and anxiety of Poor Whites went hand-in-hand with attempts to control and manage this population – what this thesis has termed transnational governmentality. Each chapter has examined a different aspect of these strategies of governance, from education to town planning. It has also demonstrated that transnational governmentality was not a fixed, unchanging framework. It was adapted and implemented in different ways according to local political and social conditions. Crucially, this means that transnational governmentality is geographically constituted on several levels – not simply in its disregard for national borders. Experts drew on an existing transnational body of Poor White expertise but did not apply it unthinkingly. Rather they tried, tested and adapted these best practices to their local populations of Poor Whites, which they conceived of being local and differentiated manifestations of a transnational problem. Thus, in South Africa, hookworm disease was discarded as an explanation for Poor Whiteism. Malaria, already part of the transnational Poor White toolkit, was substituted in its place. In spatial planning, regional attempts to govern the poor, such as Garden Cities, were exported and adapted to govern poor immigrants in Garden Apartments, then adapted still further to govern Poor Whites in Great Depression towns such as Arthurdale and pre-Apartheid planned suburbs such as Ruyterwacht. Each was an adaption, but each drew on the same body of transnational knowledge, and added to it in turn. In every chapter this thesis has shown how the shared conception of Poor Whites arising out of the ‘White Men’s countries’ has been adapted and implemented in very different disciplines – yet each has its origin in the same transnational set of principles, the same transnational handbook of biopower.

Each chapter, thus, has demonstrated how transnational governmentality was constructed and how it was implemented. This form of governmentality was a crucial part of the governance of Poor Whites in various regions of the world. It was in the minds of the experts staffing the commissions and conducting the surveys. The chapters function as genealogies of the transnational governmentality of Poor Whites and culminate in case studies that show clearly how this thinking was employed on the ground. It was not an immutable, universal framework, but a project that was continually being negotiated, constructed and refined. It was not applied unthinkingly but adapted in different ways in different regions. Space was, and is, crucial to both its construction and its implementation. At the core of transnational governmentality lies geography.

Key conduits of transnational governmentality were various large philanthropic organisations, such as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. These globe-spanning philanthropies advanced an agenda largely defined by American moral reform — a philanthropic empire that rose as Britain’s empire dwindled. In the U.S., the Southern States also became a focus of this moral empire. In the period after Reconstruction, the South in effect became a colony of Northern capital and as such



is open to postcolonial readings. The Carnegie Report on Poor Whites is a good example of the imperial networks within these philanthropic empires. The preparation for the report drew on a global network of experts and ideas.

A significant concern of these transnational philanthropies was for training and education. Education, as much as health or housing, could make a strong man out of a Poor White. This narrative of redemption also applied to schools — the mere presence of a strong school in a community could uplift its people. Painted fences, repaired roof tiles and increased industry would result. Essentially, these communities would be ‘whitened’ and so become candidates for the middle-class.

In the early twentieth-century U. S., however, education was of a secondary concern to the pains and indignities of hunger. In order to educate the people, Rockefeller’s philanthropic experts believed that they first had to be fed. In much of the American South outdated farming methods resulted in meagre subsistence crops. The bulk of the land was given over to cotton, which was then suffering from the ravages of the Mexican boll weevil. This forced even successful farmers into a trap of increasing debt and decreasing yields. Sharecroppers — poor whites and poor African-Americans alike — were the worst affected. Rockefeller’s solution was to effectively subsidise the farm demonstration method of the federal government, under the leadership of Seaman Knapp. Demonstrations of model farming methods to increase maize yields and combat the cotton weevil had a significant impact on the agricultural fortunes of the South. Again, there was a narrative of rural uplift. Entire families participated in this uplift: boys through corn clubs and women and girls through canning clubs. The great success of the farm demonstrations emboldened the Rockefeller organisation to begin its educational programme, which subsidised public schools in the South and made use of the racial uplift propaganda of the Southern Education Board. In South Africa, by extension, the Carnegie Commission relied on international experts — trained in the United States, naturally — to advise and conduct its review of Poor White education. It came to many of the same conclusions reached by Rockefeller: isolated, understaffed schools with outdated curriculums. The conclusion is inevitably that programmes of rural educational uplift, as well as the farm demonstrations in the U.S., were prone to a narrative of whiteness and white reclamation. Training the Poor White meant the whitening of the poor.

Yet it was not enough to train minds alone. Bodies also had to be disciplined. The Poor White was closely associated with poor health, both physical and moral. His or her body was wracked by diseases such as hookworm and malaria, diseases of vitality and will as well as blood and tissue, diseases that caused the Poor White to become listless and lazy. Philanthropic experts believed that curing these diseases (which, in the case of hookworm, was relatively simple) would similarly cure the condition known as ‘Poor Whiteism’, and result in strong, healthy and white bodies. An alternative theory developed at the same time, however, was that derived from eugenics, which held that the Poor White was genetically inferior to the rest of the white race — indeed, the Poor White was almost viewed as a

separate race that was physically and morally inferior to other whites. They stole, drank and lazed around because these were inherited traits rather than accidents of infection. Moreover, the Poor White diluted the strength of the white race by his mixture. And, in light of his perceived proclivity for miscegenation, the Poor White formed part of an all-too-permeable racial boundary.

Importantly, health also had a spatial element. The majority of Poor White diseases (fatigue and anaemia-inducing) such as hookworm, bilharzia and malaria were due, in part, to where the Poor White lived: in places with poor sanitation, poor soil and poor drainage. As much as the Poor White was diseased, so did he live in places of disease: the diseased South, the diseased Bushveld. By curing the Poor White, philanthropic organisations and their experts — the Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Carnegie Commission — were curing the spaces they inhabited. Colonial medical science held that certain spaces were dangerous to the white race. Attempts to settle the tropics had failed because the environment itself was harmful. The intensity of light from the sun boiled the brain, the heat degenerated the insides. Outside his natural temperate environment, the white man decayed and died. Those that remained became, over generations, degenerate Poor Whites — more native than white. Exiled from the environments that sustained whiteness, the colonial poor became ever more tainted and morally suspect.

Outside of these clearly unhealthy spaces, Poor Whites have more broadly and closely been associated with space, whether the overcrowded and unhealthy space of the slum, or on isolated and diseased rural spaces like failing farms or swamps. Space has been open to manipulation by elites — both for discipline and for moral reclamation. Victorian moral reformers believed that by improving the space of cities, they could improve the morals of the urban poor — tramps, thieves, drunks and prostitutes were as much a product of their bad space as vice versa. This found expression in the British garden city movement, which explicitly advocated for the poor to move to these new, green spaces and thus be reborn as strong, healthy and productive citizens. The new science of town planning adapted the ideas of the garden city movement into a form of ‘physical determinism’ — creating better people through better spaces. In the United States, this attracted the attention of large philanthropies like Rockefeller and the Russell Sage Foundation. Garden cities were exported as ‘garden suburbs’ to New York and marketed as a solution to the furious pace of urbanisation in the United States. In 1929, the New Regional Plan for New York introduced the concept of the low-cost ‘neighbourhood unit’. These units were purposefully designed, not only as housing for the urban poor, but as morally and socially regenerative spaces — positive eugenics to counter the negative eugenics of degeneration.

In the British colonies town planning was used to facilitate discipline and surveillance. This found extreme expression in the segregation of races. Health legislation was used as a reason for this segregation — removing native reservoirs of disease (especially malaria) from the healthy white town. This legislation also removed Poor Whites from racially-mixed slums, where they were both vulnerable

to, and agents of, disease and moral degeneration. In South Africa, under Apartheid, town planning for white moral regeneration reached an extreme in planned Poor White suburbs, such as Ruyterwacht in Cape Town, where space was employed to discipline and improve Poor Whites and prepare them for the middle-class through, for instance, the strategic location and management of social workers, as well as restricting entry to the suburb.

The Poor White, who was defined through the commissions and investigations of experts can also be constructed and reconstructed visually. The photographs of Barnardo's and *Street Life* show that the racialised representation of the poor has long been a powerful tool requiring careful consideration. The photographs taken by the experts of the philanthropic organisations were directly influenced by this history, as in the case of the 'before/after' photographs of the RSC, or the anthropological photographs of the Carnegie Commission. The experts employed in photographing the Poor Whites should be considered the same way that we consider the experts of the commissions and inquiries. They, too, relied on networks and defined the Poor White in discourse. From immigrant photos at Ellis Island to Ballen's photographs of Die Antwoord, the Poor White moved from outsider to sympathetic everyman, and finally to freak and to Other.

One more broad theme covered by this thesis has been the agents of transnational governmentality — the transnational organisations and groups that inhabited the spaces both beyond and between nations in a period when new technologies enabled the world to grow ever closer. These organisations relied on experts to discover and understand the problems they sought to solve. These transnational experts in turn formed part of, and drew on, networks of interest and expertise that spanned the globe. This work has focussed especially on the great philanthrocapitalist organisations and the experts they employed — the Rockefeller organisations, the Carnegie Corporation, the Russell Sage Foundation. These institutions, in turn, financed and enabled a host of smaller bodies, such as the Garden Cities Association, the Town Planners Institute, the Southern Education Board.

Yet these are only a sample of the organisations and networks that constituted transnational governmentality. There is much scope for further research. Although scholars have begun to employ transnational governmentality as a methodology, such as in studies of Traveller populations, there has been very limited use of the concept.<sup>3</sup> It is hoped that this thesis can function as a demonstration of its value, not only in geography, but in related disciplines. As the case studies have demonstrated, transnational governmentality provides a new way of looking at existing scholarship. Nationally-orientated studies, such as Annika Teppo's work on Ruyterwacht, can be reinterpreted and unexamined transnational connections brought to light. The concept can be usefully applied to many different forms of transnational populations. There is also much more that can be done with transnational

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<sup>3</sup> Van Baar, 'The European Roma'.

governmentality and Poor Whites. In the first instance the role of religious institutions in contributing to, and displaying, transnational governmentality will be very interesting. Specifically concerning Poor Whites this ranges from missionaries and missionary networks in South Africa, to Baptist networks in the U.S. South, and as an engine of philanthropy. Early Rockefeller philanthropy, for instance, was very much driven by the Baptist beliefs of Rockefeller, Sr. Many senior Rockefeller officials, such as Frederick Gates, came from a background in the faith. American missionaries to South Africa also exported and adapted their church methods to Poor Whites in South Africa.<sup>4</sup> South African churches, especially the Dutch Reformed Church, played a leading role in bringing Poor Whites to popular and political attention. The churches also maintained a vast network of welfare organisations, and these organisations often concerned themselves with the Poor Whites, even maintaining work colonies such as at Kakamas in South Africa. It would also be interesting to see how South African women's organisations such as the ACVV, which played an important role in investigating Poor Whites, can be considered as part of broader organisational and philanthropic networks that were concerned with a transnational population.

The object all along has been to return the Poor White to geography as well as history. Although other disciplines have been increasingly interested in these peoples it has been, typically, in the context of individual states and localised history. Throughout, this thesis has attempted to emphasize the role of space and scale in the construction of Poor Whites and, more importantly, to emphasize how new understandings of geographic space can energise our thinking about this liminal population — both historically and in the present. An appreciation of geography is crucial to an appreciation of the Poor Whites, and this understanding has not been emphasized enough. Methods such as transnational governmentality give us a way of doing this, of bringing geography back to the debates around marginalised populations; rescuing the Poor White not only from the condescension but also the compartmentalisation of history.

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<sup>4</sup> Joel Cabrita, 'People of Adam: Divine Healing and Racial Cosmopolitanism in the Early Twentieth-Century Transvaal, South Africa', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 2 (March 2015).

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