

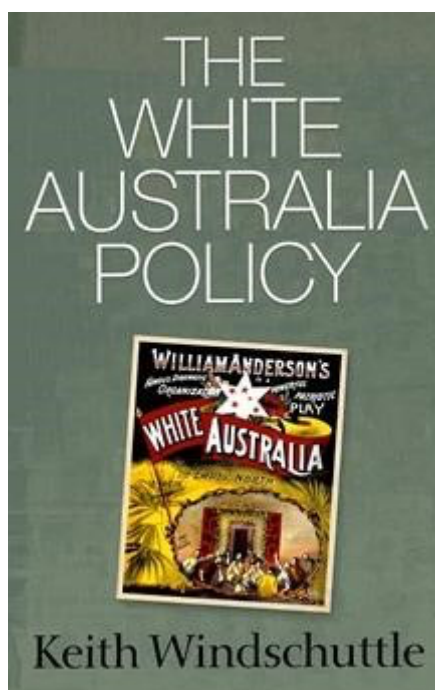
Rehabilitating (and Denaturing) the White Australia Policy

A leftist defence of Asian exclusion.

Keith Windschuttle, *The White Australia Policy*, Sydney: Macleay Press, 2004, 370 pp., \$Aust. 34.95 (soft cover) reviewed

by [Andrew Fraser](#)

Racial realists who would like to bring common sense to the Australian debate over race and immigration will be disappointed by a recent book that claims to defend the “White Australia Policy.” It promises much but delivers little because the author refuses to take race seriously. In this book, Keith Windschuttle, a former Marxist academic turned independent neoconservative, counters the orthodox leftist charge that the “White Australia Policy” — which, until it received the *coup de grâce* in 1974, limited immigration largely to whites — was “racist.”



This is a direct assault on the academic establishment. Over the last 40 years, New Left historians have routinely portrayed Australia as a racist pariah nation, comparable to South Africa. The “dispossession” and allegedly “genocidal” treatment of the Aborigines following British settlement in 1788 is commonly cited as the principal count in the indictment against Australia, but the White Australia Policy adopted in 1901 by the newly-federated Commonwealth comes a close second. Ever since the “Sixties” generation began its long march through the institutions, Australians have learned to approach their past in a self-hating mood of enthusiastic shame.

Mr. Windschuttle is no stranger to controversy or to issues of race. He poses as a fearless foe of the academic establishment, but his targets are often sitting ducks. Two years ago, he launched the first serious scholarly assault on the claim that British colonists carried out systematic genocide against the natives of what is now the state of Tasmania. His book, *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, carefully combed through the documentary evidence, easily refuting that charge and provoking a storm of more or less ineffectual outrage within university history departments.

Standard historical accounts of race relations in Tasmania have been premised on the leftist fiction that white Australians always hated and despised Aborigines. By going back to the original sources, Mr. Windschuttle overturned the conventional wisdom. His investigations revealed that “only” about 120 were killed by white settlers. Most damaging of all to the reputation of the historical profession, he demonstrated that the “genocide” story was based on the misrepresentation and outright fabrication of documentary evidence.

Now, hot on the heels of his controversial revision of the “black armband” view of Aboriginal history (everything whites ever did was bad), Mr. Windschuttle has set out to upset yet another academic applecart.

On a formal level, it is easy to absolve the “White Australia Policy” of “racism,” since the policy did not explicitly prohibit non-white immigration. Instead, prospective immigrants were required to pass a dictation test by writing out 50 words in a European language selected by immigration officials. However, both the intent and the practical effect of the dictation test were sharply to limit colored immigration. Mr. Windschuttle maintains that the White Australia Policy, far from being the reactionary spawn of a racist nation, grew out of a longestablished, progressive program intended “to extend both the freedom and the dignity of labour.”

How can this be? Mr. Windschuttle argues that the policy was really a campaign to prevent importation of cheap coolie labor from Asia, and that it grew out of earlier movements to end slavery and the transportation of convicts to Australia. Therefore, opposition to Asian immigration was not grounded in fears of “racial contamination.” Instead, politicians wanted to protect the standard of living of Australian workers and prevent the emergence of “a racially-based political underclass” that would undermine Australia’s egalitarian democracy.

This argument strains credulity. Australians were determined to create a new Britannia. For most, it was self-evident that antipodean Britons, too, were white Europeans, bound by what Alfred Deakin described as the “crimson ties” of kinship to the mother country. Mr. Windschuttle would have us believe that they were proto-Boasian anthropologists, confident that, once liberated from their historically-conditioned culture of servility, Chinese and Indian laborers would be indistinguishable from white Australians of British stock.

Mr. Windschuttle concedes that some “unequivocally racist” elements supported the restriction movement. Indeed, he savors the irony that, in the early 20th century, the most sympathetic audience for racial nationalism were the bohemian writers, artists and intellectuals of the leftist intelligentsia. He notes that this élite, then famously associated with the *Bulletin* magazine,

bears an “uncanny resemblance” to the “chattering classes” now: “[T]hey agree on almost everything, with the conspicuous exception of immigration policy, where their positions are reversed.”

By contrast, Mr. Windschuttle insists, mainstream Australians have never subscribed to biological theories of race. Influenced instead by the universalistic principles of both evangelical Christianity and the Scottish Enlightenment, they have refused to treat white Europeans as superior and other races as inferior.

Mr. Windschuttle also argues that because the White Australia Policy was never based on racial nationalism, it could be — and was — readily jettisoned once the original, legitimate justifications for it lost their potency: “The proof that Australia wore the policy lightly was the ease with which it discarded it.” He emphasizes that dismantling the policy in the 20 years from the mid-1950s onward “required no major cultural upheaval and was accomplished with a minimum of fuss by liberal politicians with values similar to those held by the original sceptics and critics when immigration restrictions were introduced in 1901.”

Faulty Assumptions

Unfortunately, Mr. Windschuttle’s rehabilitation of the White Australia Policy is premised on a familiar, if pernicious, tenet of neoconservatism: Like those who claim that the United States is a “creedal” or “concept” nation, Mr. Windschuttle maintains that the operating premise of Australian society is the proposition that all people are equal in principle and in potential. Accordingly, Australia’s national identity is “based on a civic patriotism,” thereby fostering “loyalty to Australia’s liberal democratic political institutions rather than to race or ethnicity.”

Mr. Windschuttle’s argument with the academic establishment is pitched as a matter of historical fact: Was the White Australia Policy “racist” or not? But on the issue of race itself, there is no difference between the two camps. Both Mr. Windschuttle and his leftist antagonists agree that race “is an unscientific category,” a thoroughly modern, bad idea, and that “races” have no biological or genetic foundation.

Mr. Windschuttle even suggests that to take any other view “is to betray one’s ignorance of the subject.” In fact, to anyone familiar with the rapidly expanding literature on the genetic character of racial differences, Mr. Windschuttle’s dogmatism classes him among what Steve Sailer of UPI calls “race flat-earthers.”

Race matters for a lot of reasons and it is of particular relevance to any analysis of the White Australia Policy. But not for Mr. Windschuttle. He recognizes the seemingly insuperable *cultural* barriers alienating mainstream Australians from other racial groups, particularly the Chinese. Nevertheless he asserts that it is a fundamental error “to slide from the concept of culture to that of race.” Humans, he would have us believe, are infinitely malleable.

But what if racial differences are, in large part, biologically or genetically grounded? What if cultures, too, are not simply social constructs but instead have a substantial biological component? A racial realist looking at the historical facts provided by Mr. Windschuttle could

easily conclude that the decision to abandon the White Australia Policy was a potentially catastrophic error that ought to be reversed as soon as possible.

Mr. Windschuttle does demonstrate that explicitly racist ideologies have had little appeal to opinion leaders in Australia. But that may mean only that Australians, like other ethnic groups tracing their ancestry to Europe, are predisposed to individualism, exogamy and small nuclear families and, as a consequence, show little ethnocentrism.

What Mr. Windschuttle describes as a creedal commitment to racial egalitarianism may be a defining characteristic of a distinctive European racial identity not shared by other peoples. Kevin MacDonald of UC Long Beach explains Western “cultural” traits as an evolutionary adaptation to the rigors of life in cold, difficult climates. Natural selection favored the reproductive success of individuals capable of sustaining “non-kinship based forms of reciprocity,” not just those who were loyal to the tribe. Over time, individualistic social structures encouraged the emergence in England of the common law of property and contract and, later still, the emergence of impersonal corporate forms of business enterprise, all requiring cooperation between strangers rather than tribalism and restricted loyalties. The distinctive culture that emerged from the interaction between the genotype of the English people and their environment can be understood as what Richard Dawkins calls an “extended phenotype,” an extension of biology into behavior and culture. Like the spider’s web or the beaver’s dam, the extended phenotype of Western civilization is part of a biocultural feedback loop linking our genes with our environment over countless generations.

Other races have produced their own distinctive extended phenotypes that can easily conflict with the biocultural interest Western societies have in their own survival. The Chinese, for example, took an evolutionary path favoring centralized, authoritarian regimes, placing a premium on clannish behaviour and downplaying the worth of individual creativity. The result has been a people marked by high average intelligence — but more conformity and hierarchy than in Northwestern European societies — as well as rampant xenophobia and ethnocentrism.

Faced with competition from such highly cohesive ethnic groups, individualistic Australians remain oblivious to the threat to their own genetic interests. Unlike Mr. Windschuttle, fellow Australian Frank Salter has not become a darling of the local media, despite (or, more likely, because of) his work showing the connection between ethnicity and trust. White Australians now find themselves outgunned: Western-style “old boy” networks are notoriously permeable, and no match for the systematic in-group solidarity practiced by other groups that manage to gain access to and work within the extended phenotypes of Western societies.

Westerners ignore this competition at their peril. Mr. Windschuttle, of course, is confident that immigrants will lose their racial identities and take on the individualistic norms of Western culture, and is not worried by the replacement of white Europeans by Chinese or Arab Muslims. Like most fashionable Australians, he has “accepted this with equanimity,” perhaps even “with a sense of self-congratulation.” For him, Racial consciousness is an embarrassing social disease, not an essential ingredient of collective identity.

Racial realists who read his book will discover ample evidence that if all white Australians are as tender-minded as Mr. Windschuttle they certainly will be displaced by immigrant groups much less sensitive to charges of racism. One example: Mr. Windschuttle writes that the most violent race riots in Australian history were led, not by murderous white racists, but by Japanese pearl divers determined to eliminate competition from Timorese rivals. There were three such riots in Broome, Western Australia, in 1907, 1914, and 1920. The last lasted a week, and involved more than half the town's population of 5,000. Seven people were killed and more than 60 seriously injured, dwarfing the casualty figures for the worst of the anti-Chinese goldfield riots of the mid-nineteenth century.

Almost every immigrant group in Mr. Windschuttle's book, not to mention the Aboriginal population, shows just such a strong sense of racial solidarity and an aggressive determination to advance its collective interests. By contrast, "educated" white Australians, leftist "idealists" and even right-wing "ratbags" (a common Australian term of abuse for conservatives) remain strangely indifferent to the survival of their ethno-nation.

Mr. Windschuttle is right to defend the White Australia Policy against leftist attack, but does it for the wrong reasons, claiming that it really was not an expression of white racial interests. It is, of course, precisely on the grounds that it did defend the genetic interests of the founding stock that the White Australia Policy should be rehabilitated. By failing to tackle the mythology of racial egalitarianism, Mr. Windschuttle's book has become part of the problem.

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