Making Numbers Count on the Racial Frontier: An Historical Sociology of the Birth of the Census, Victoria (Australia), 1835–1840

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Enumeration of the new settlement at Port Phillip, Australia, which was to become the Colony of Victoria in 1851, began as early as 1836 with the first census of the settlement. Such early exercises in census-taking between 1835 and 1840 were to play a key role in establishing the foundations of a racialized society in Australia. Census-making was central to establishing white sovereignty over the land, parallelling the processes of surveying the land, drawing boundaries for local government, and marking out roads. The Census Acts explicitly excluded Aborigines from being counted as residents, and Aborigines thus did not comprise any part of the "population" measured by the census. Their previous occupation of the land was overwritten by the measurement of expanding white settlement. Aboriginal peoples did not escape scrutiny, however: separate attempts were made to count them and to establish their whereabouts in the interests of establishing security and protecting them from the processes of occupation.

Dès 1836, on commença à dénombrer le nouveau peuplement de Port Phillip, en Australie, endroit qui allait devenir la colonie de Victoria en 1851, en y tenant un premier recensement. De tels exercices précoces de dénombrement entre 1835 et 1840 allaient jouer un rôle fondamental dans la mise en place des fondements d'une société à clivage racial. Les recensements ont joué un rôle capital dans la création d'une souveraineté blanche sur le territoire, ce qui s'est fait en parallèle aux processus de l'arpentage des terres, de l'établissement des limites pour les gouvernements locaux et du traçage des routes. Les lois sur le recensement excluaient explicitement le dénombrement des aborigènes parmi les résidents, si bien que les aborigènes ne faisaient pas partie de la « population » recensée. Leur occupation antérieure du territoire fut occultée par la mesure de la colonisation blanche en expansion. Les peuples aborigènes n'en ont pas moins fait l'objet d'un examen minutieux : on a tenté à différentes reprises de les compter et d'établir leurs allées et venues dans l'intérêt de leur sécurité et pour les protéger contre les processus d'occupation.

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IN 1904 the banker-turned-historian Henry Giles Turner published his narrative *History of the Colony of Victoria*.[1] Turner's account of the "founding of Melbourne" drew on the American *Mayflower* narrative complete with "Plymouth Rock" metaphors. Centring on the heroic figure of John Batman and the claim by Batman and the Port Phillip Association to have purchased land from local Aborigines in May 1835, Turner's book offered an exemplary and still widely emulated account of a successful colonizing "settlement" story beginning with initial failure and ending in ultimate triumph.[2]

Turner's exuberantly Whiggish story of "progress" drew frequently on the authoritative measures of progress and "settlement", represented in official statistics documenting population growth, economic development, and the spread of schooling and public health. This exercise of counting began early and persistently in the new settlement at Port Phillip, which in 1851 became the Colony of Victoria. In fact, the enumeration of "the population" of the embryonic colony began in June 1836, barely two months after Batman and his family settled at the place he had declared "a good place for a village". The first "census" of the settlement reported that there were "34 males, 12 females and 31 children" residing at Port Phillip. The trickle of white settlers soon became a stream. A "population" of 224 people at the end of 1836 had within five years swelled to 11,738, as reported in the 1841 New South Wales Census. By 1861 Melbourne had become the biggest city in Australia, already three times larger than the foundational city, Sydney, and well on its way to becoming "Marvellous Melbourne".[3] Within 50 years of the original settlement, Victoria, according to the census, had a "population" of 1,139,840 people.[4]

How should we think about these exercises in counting? Should we even think about them? Does not an interest in social statistics belong to that marginal kind of history justified only by its capacity to add a little "hard data" to the familiar story of "settlement"? To the contrary, I argue that the exercises in census-making between 1835 and 1840 were to play a key role in establishing the foundations of a racialized society. Census-making was central to establishing white sovereignty over the land and was a core element of "racial

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1 H. G. Turner, *A History of the Colony of Victoria (Vol. 1) 1797–1854* (London: Longmans Green & Co., 1904).

2 James Bonwick, another colonial writer, cast Batman as an Antipodean "William Penn". See J. Bonwick, *John Batman: The Founder of Victoria*, ed. C. E. Sayers (Melbourne: Wren, 1973), p. 17. See also J. Bonwick, *Discovery and Settlement of Port Phillip*, ed. H. Anderson (Melbourne: Red Rooster Press, 1997); M.. Sullivan, *Men & Women of Port Phillip* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1985); A. G. L. Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District: Victoria Before Separation* (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press at Melbourne University Press, 1996).

3 V. H. Arnold, *Victorian Year Book 1973: Centenary Edition* (Melbourne: Commonwealth Bureau of Census and Statistics, Victorian Office/ Victorian Government Printer, 1973), pp. 11–13.

4 J. Caldwell, "Population", in W. Vamplew, ed., *Australians: Historical Statistics* (Sydney: Fairfax Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987), p. 35.

government". It is fair to say that, to date, the overwhelming bulk of the Australian historiography addressing the originating moments of colonization in Port Phillip has yet to frame its narratives of settlement unequivocally in terms that would encourage any interest in the evolution of techniques of colonial governmentalities.[5] This is not to deny the value of the more recent historical work of Barwick, Fels, and Broome, who demonstrate quite complex patterns of interaction within diverse patterns of economic or administrative rationalities and modes of government being constructed on the "frontier".[6] Likewise Lattas and Morris offer a Foucauldian account of frontier culture-as-terror, but government/governmentality is unaccountably absent from this work.[7] As for the very small historiography of Australian statistics, this has for the most part adopted either an instrumental-empiricist view of statistics as a source of empirical data, or else an empiricist-triumphalist framework which emphasizes how Australia's colonial statisticians were at the cutting edge of the discipline.[8] Here I sketch, in preliminary fashion, some of the considerations to which an inquiry into the origins of governmentality and the role played by "state-istics" in a colony like Port Phillip might pay attention.[9]

Colonial censuses became a central part of the governmentality used to mark the "progress" of colonial "settlement" and to trace the unsettling of the Aboriginal peoples. Thus the simple yet central category, "the population",

5 I think here of such canonical texts as Turner, *A History of the Colony of Victoria*; G. Serle, *The Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria 1851–1861* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1963); M. Cannon, *Who's master? Who's man? Australia in the Victorian Age* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1971), pp. 93–101, and "The Historical Setting" in Historical Records of Victoria [hereafter HRV], vol. 1, *Beginnings of Permanent Government Foundation Series* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Service, 1981); S. Priestley, *The Victorians: Making their Mark* (Sydney: Fairfax Syme & Weldon Associates, 1984); Shaw, *A History of the Port Phillip District*.

6 D. Barwick, "Changes in the Aboriginal Population of Victoria, 1863–1966", in D. Mulvaney and J. Golson, eds., *Aboriginal Man and Environment in Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 1971), and "This Most Resolute Lady: A Biographical Puzzle", in D. Barwick, J. Beckett, and M. Reay, eds., *Metaphors of Interpretation* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1985); M. Fels, *Good Men and True: The Aboriginal Police of the Port Phillip District, 1837–1853* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988); R. Broome, "Aboriginal Workers on South Eastern Frontiers", *Australian Historical Studies*, no. 103 (October 1994), pp. 38–58.

7 A. Lattas, "Savagery and Civilization: Towards a Genealogy of Racism", *Social Analysis* no. 21 (1987), pp. 28–47; B. Morris, "Frontier Colonialism as a Culture of Terror", in B. Attwood and J. Arnola, eds., *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines, Special Edition of Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 35 (1992), pp. 72–87.

8 C. D. Goodwin, *Economic Inquiry in Australia* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1963); Arnold, *Victorian Year Book 1973*, pp. 3–11; J. Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses of Australia, Historical Statistics Monograph No. 8* (Bundoora: Australian Reference Publications, 1988); C. Forster and C. Hazlehurst, "Australian Statisticians and the Development of Official Statistics", in *Commonwealth of Australia Year Book 1988* (Canberra: ABS, ABS Cat. no.1300.0, 1988).

9 Among the things I am not able to do here is to explore the politics of the counting exercise, as it reflects either concerns on the part of white colonists or the reactions of the Aborigines.

apparently both neutral and objective, was available to be used complacently by later empiricist historians to track the development of colonial society and its economy. It could only be used in this way if one forgets that these numbers referred only to those people who counted, and were produced by those people who did the counting. By paying close attention to the first five years of white "settlement" and using Michel Foucault's idea of "government", I situate the practice of census-making in an experiment in "Aboriginal Protection" or what I call "racial government".[10] I offer in effect an account of the role of census-making in making population before the invention of the large-scale census and its construction of "population" by abstractifying and statistical technologies. In what is a prehistory of the large-scale census, we nonetheless see the way the primitive census-making of 1835 to 1840 "configured social relations in keeping with particular political and cultural realities in order that such relations may be known and governed".[11]

State-istics and Government

As Curtis has observed, "the production of official statistics in general and the operations of census making in particular are perceived as tedious and vaguely scientistic".[12] It is possible still to treat the history of social statistics and particular techniques of census-making as a conventional story of ever-developing technical refinement and "scientific progress" that characterized the "scientific revolution" and the "making of modern society".[13] Curtis has observed of Canada that "[h]undreds of studies have used census data as evidence ... the topic of census making as an administrative practice of state and as an object of political struggle is almost completely absent from Canadian social history".[14] This is even more true of Australian social history. While Australian social historians have persistently used census numbers as data, Australian historians have yet to recognize the central role of census-making in the constitution of Australian "society", to say nothing of the political practices central to the formation of the state. The imbrication of statistical techniques with modes of social regulation informed by social interests has proven to be interesting to scholars everywhere, it seems — except in Australia.

While this discussion is situated in the large and ever-expanding field of

10 Michel Foucault, "Governmentality", in J. Faubion, ed., *Michel Foucault: Power — The Essential Foucault* (New York: The New Press, 2000), vol. 3, pp. 201–221.

11 B. Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics and the Census of Canada, 1840–1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), p. 33.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

13 S. Stigler, *The History of Statistics: The Measurement of Uncertainty before 1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press at Harvard University, 1986).

14 Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, p. 16.

15 M. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Victorian Britain* (New York: Harvester, 1975); I. Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), and "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?" in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault*

the history of statistics, it necessarily intervenes in a particular way.[15] Goldstein notes that Foucault is to be credited with advancing the claim that a new kind of "knowledge-power" link emerged in the nineteenth century which Foucault called "biopolitics".[16] While Foucault focused on the "disciplining of the body", encompassed in the invention of the modern prison, the psychiatric "clinic", and an evolving science of sexuality, he also recognized in the evolution of social statistics "an entire micro-power concerned with the body". This micro-power was associated with "comprehensive measures, statistical assessments and interventions which are aimed at the entire body politic". As Ian Hacking has observed of Foucault's intervention, "one need not subscribe fully to this model to see that statistics of populations and of deviancy form an integral part of the industrial state".[17] As Hacking argues, while statisticians may think of themselves as only providing "information", they and statistics are an integral part of the technology of power in a modern state. In particular, as numerous writers have argued, the "discovery of population" marks the origins of modern government. Making a census involves the application of what Foucault called "normalising judgements" to social relations. "Censuses in effect discipline elements of the social in order to assign them to their proper places and propriety is inescapably political."[18]

Foucault argued that governmentality was a new form of "mentality" characterized by rational forms of calculation allied to the practices of regulation — or "government".[19] "Government" and its "mentality", which refers to the practices of knowledge-making applied to the task of social regulation, can refer to the actions of state agencies. But it can and usually does

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Effect (London: Harvester, 1981); D. Mackenzie, *Statistics in Britain, 1865–1930* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1981); P. Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); M. Anderson, *The American Census: A Social History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); W. Alonso and P. Starr, eds., *The Politics of Numbers* (New York: Russell Sage, 1987); I. Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); A. Desrosieres, "How to Make Things Which Hold Together: Social Science, Statistics and the State", in P. Wagner, B. Wittrock, and R. Whitely, eds., *Discourses on Society: The Shaping of the Social Science Disciplines* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1991); T. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830–1864* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); S. Patriarca, *Numbers and Nationhood: Writing Statistics in Nineteenth Century Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

16 J. Goldstein, ed., *Foucault and the Writing of History* (Oxford : Blackwell, 1994), p. 3; M. Foucault, "On Governmentality", *Ideology & Consciousness*, vol. 6 (1979), pp. 5–22. It is a moot point how much Foucault's work is all that different from Max Weber's arguments about the modes of rationality associated with the rise of the capitalist ethos. See M. Weber, *General Economic History*, trans. F. Knight (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1930), pp. 275–278, 352–370.

17 Hacking, "How Should We Do the History of Statistics?", p. 183.

18 Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, p. 4.

19 Foucault, "On Governmentality", pp. 5–7. See also B. Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 109.

refer to a far wider locus of regulatory action informed by beliefs about governing both self and others, based on rational knowledges.[20] Foucault's concept of governmentality has sponsored a plethora of quite detailed and specific studies of everything from the social sciences to the constitution of social problems like crime, poverty, and unemployment, social and economic policy, and professional interventions like mass schooling, counselling, or social work.[21]

In this flurry of activity the role played by social statistics has begun to receive particular attention. Interestingly, Foucault, while observing the role played by statistics in "the will to govern", did not explore this theme in any extended way, while his somewhat ambiguous, perhaps even deeply confused approach is open to serious criticism.[22] At the least, conventional and Foucauldian historiography has led to a better appreciation of the role of statistics in the evolution of modern capitalist economies and nation-states in regard especially to the constitution of social problems and the evolution of state policy responses.

How have historians dealt with the emergence of the problem of governmentality or the more specific role of social statistics as a new technology of power? Internationally, the evolution of the technologies of social statistics and of sophisticated statistical capacities housed in state bureaus has been increasingly and extensively investigated both by "conventional" historians and by those sensitized by the work of scholars like Foucault or Latour, to develop less conventional narratives.[23] As Alonso and Starr argue, "Official statistics do not merely hold a mirror to reality. They reflect presuppositions and theories about the nature of society. They are products of social, political and economic interests that are often in conflict with each other."[24]

Yet, as Curtis has noticed, much of the historiography of social statistics and censuses has not always paid detailed empirical attention to the making of censuses.[25] Hacking, for example, has been more interested in developing a general account of the evolution of statistics and its effect on traditional ideas of causality in the second half of the nineteenth century. Accordingly, he made no attempt to demonstrate how these technologies were used by states or professions with the glint of government in their eye. Much of the recent theoretically informed scholarship has traced the processes of political administrative and scientific development that propelled statistical knowledge from a concern with making general inventories of the resources of a state towards quantification, and then towards mathematicization. Desro-

20 M. Dean and B. Hindess, eds., *Governing Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1–5.

21 See M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage, 1999), p. 3.

22 See, for example, Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, pp. 38–43

23 B. Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987); S. Ward, *Reconfiguring Truth: Postmodernism, Science Studies and the Search for a New Model of Knowledge* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996).

24 Alonso and Starr, eds., *The Politics of Numbers*, p. 1.

25 Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, pp. 4–7.

sieres's brilliant account of the linkage between the "institutional" and the "cognitive" aspects of social statistical techniques in the nineteenth century provides a comprehensive analytic framework focused on understanding the history of statistical techniques and their epistemology, which recognizes the interplay between the internationalization of statistics sponsored, for example, by Quetelet and the needs and practices of specific local administrative elites.[26] Other scholars like Rose and Miller have focused more on the way in which the science of large numbers (that is, statistics) contributed to the modern "mentalities of government" than on any account of what these mentalities looked like in detail or how these practices were actually put together.[27] However, their role in newly colonized spaces like the colonies of New Holland, where the "imagined community" of "nationhood" was still being constituted by such administrative practices as census-making, is less well understood.[28] In the strange, almost laboratory-like circumstances found in the originating moments of the various British colonies of Australia, we have an opportunity to see in an especially lucid way what was at stake in the historical project of state-building and the special role played by social statistics in the project conventionally referred to as "settlement".[29]

This discussion in particular addresses a "pre-statistical" period, when census-making was more like the policing of peoples that had been familiar since the practices of Roman Imperial census-making that operated in colonies like Judaea. Curtis has elegantly deconstructed the "naïve realist" assumptions which helped to constitute the modern category "population", conventionally understood as "an empirically existing entity susceptible to scientific discovery". Curtis rightly argues that "population" is "a theoretical not an empirical entity" because "it is a way of organizing social relations".[30]

26 Desrosieres, "How to Make Things Which Hold Together", pp. 195–218.

27 N. Rose, "Calculable Minds and Manageable Individuals", *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 2 (1988), pp. 179–200; *Governing the Soul* (London: Routledge, 1989); "Governing by Numbers: Figuring out Democracy", *Accounting Organisations and Society*, vol. 16, no. 7 (1991), pp. 673–692; and *Powers of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); N. Rose and P. Miller, "Political Power Beyond the State: Problematics of Government", *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 2 (1992), pp. 172–215, and "Governing Economic Life", in M. Gane, ed., *Foucault's New Domains* (London: Routledge, 1993).

28 B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1997).

29 There are still too few Australian historians prepared to follow Day in his critique of the discourse of "settlement". As Day puts it, "One factor that has tended to be overlooked, but needs to be considered in any history of Australia, is the ongoing attempt by European society to establish proprietorship over the continent.... Traditionally Australia has been referred to as a settler society.... A more appropriate term is that of a supplanting society which carries connotations of occupation *and* of dispossession. Australia already had inhabitants when the so-called first settlers appeared in 1788 ... they were not occupying a wilderness.... All things considered, it is more appropriate to describe non-Aboriginal Australians as a supplanting society...." See D. Day, "Aliens in a Hostile Land: A Reappraisal of Australian History", *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 23 (1988), pp. 3–15.

30 Curtis, *The Politics of Population*, pp. 24–29.

> When social relations are invested in the statistical form known as "popula-
> tion", equivalences are established among at least three conceptual elements:
> human bodies, virtual spaces within territories and virtual time.... The equiva-
> lence of the bodies comprising population is to be found in the concept of an
> authoritative community.... Where population is made up through a census, the
> authoritative community is typically a political institution. In the case of the
> large scale census it is the state.[31]

It is true that the Canadian census-making activities in which Curtis is inter-
ested, the large-scale census of population in the second half of the nineteenth
century, could not be based on direct physical observations of "equivalent
bodies in time and space". However, the census-making I explore here did
construct population in a particular, racialized way and was based on face-to-
face observations. In the place (Port Phillip) and time (1835–1840) the "pop-
ulation of the new colony was constituted by the census identifying political
subjects by grouping 'subjects' together to form a 'population' whose ele-
ments may then be disaggregated and made the object of social policy and
projects".[32]

In the case of Port Phillip after 1835, I trace the evolution of a form of
"racial government". In speaking of "racial government" I distinguish
between the processes of racial government and the creation of a fully devel-
oped "racial state" such as occurred in Australia after 1901 and in Germany
after 1933.[33] Racial government and the "mentalities" upon which it relies
depend on what Foucault calls "dividing practices". By "racial government"
I refer to the processes whereby a population in a given political space is
separated into allegedly distinct groups using "racial criteria" and those
groups are then subjected to different modes of administration. Racial gov-
ernment can lead, though not inevitably, to the creation of a racial state: a
state formation dedicated to the building of a racialized "national commu-
nity" which works either by excluding racially defined "aliens" or by regu-
lating those peoples within the borders of the nation state deemed "outside"
the dominant "racial community". The evolution of "White Australia" after
1901 marks out something of Australia's historical significance in a century
which saw racial states emerge in Nazi Germany, South Africa under apart-
heidt, and American states such as Alabama or Georgia. There are many
ways of engaging in racial government, which begin with constructing a
basis for defining a population using racial criteria as a prelude to differen-

31 *Ibid.*, p. 25.
32 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
33 M. Burleigh and F. Wupperman, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge
    University Press, 1991).

tial regulation and the provision of health, welfare, or educational services. (Racial states tend to rely on more draconian methods of rule including everything from terror through to genocide).

A focus on racial government avoids the simplicities of "triumphalist" accounts of colonial settlement, or the "revisionist" histories of the 1960s, 1970s, and later which counterposed "white killers" and "black victims" and envisioned "the Frontier" as a genocidal space.[34] Broome, for example, emphasizes the complexity of interactions occurring within racialized spaces in which governmental intentions were clearly registered and in which white power was overwhelming but could be resisted.[35] To emphasize a governmental frame, as Morris has argued, is to emphasize both the fact of dominant discourses and the presence of resistant or alternative governmentalities competing with them.[36]

A Crisis of Government

In late May and early June 1835, John Batman, acting on behalf of certain gentlemen, including several lawyers in Launceston, who had formed the Port Phillip Association, sailed across Bass Strait and laid claim to some 600,000 acres at the top end of Port Phillip Bay. He did so on the basis of a treaty of enfeoffment and allegedly "signed" by "local aboriginal chiefs", who were elders of the Wuundjeri-willam clan of the Woiworung people.[37] On June 25, 1835, Batman reported enthusiastically to Governor Arthur in Hobart, clearly laying out the basis of his claim.

Concerned that the sovereignty of the Crown not be nullified by Batman's land claim, the Lieutenant-Governor of Van Diemen's Land, Sir George Arthur, declared the treaty a "pretence". Arthur, in a letter of July 4, 1835, reminded the Sydney administration in no uncertain terms that the real problem was not Batman's purchase *per se*. Rather it was the "fiction" upon which such a purchase rested, namely, that a small number of perhaps 30 or 40 individuals comprising the "savage tribes" could ever be said to have land rights to begin with.[38] Arthur pulled out all stops in his argument, designed to undermine the very idea that a purchase of land had taken place,

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34 R. Reece, "The Aborigines in Australian Historiography", in J. Moses, ed., *Historical Disciplines and Culture in Australia* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1979); H. Reynolds, *The Law of the Land* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1987), and *Fate of Free People: A Radical Re-examination of the Tasmanian Wars* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1995).

35 See R. Broome, "Aboriginal Victims and Voyagers: Confronting Frontier Myths", *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 42 (1994), p. 71.

36 Morris, "Frontier Colonialism as a Culture of Terror".

37 For the text of treaty, see C. M. H. Clark, *Select Documents in Australian History, 1788–1850* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1977), pp. 90–92. See also D. Barwick, "Mapping the Past: An Atlas of Victorian Clans, 1835–1904", *Aboriginal History*, vol. 8, no. 2 (1984), pp. 100–131; I. Ellender and P. Christiansen, *People of the Merri Merri: The Wurundjeri in Colonial Days* (Melbourne: Merri Creek Management Committee, 2001), pp. 17–21.

38 HRV, vol. 1, pp. 11–12.

and numbers played their part in this exercise in government:

> ... the land was taken possession of by Col. Collins for the Crown previous to the settlement of Van Diemen's Land and subsequently by Captain Wright in 1826 ... [while] Messrs Hovell and Hume ... explored the country in 1824 and 1825 ... from a comparison of the descriptions given by Messrs Hovell and Hume and Mr Batman they had met with several tribes in the same district who distinguished it by different names, a circumstance which would render the original ownership doubtful, even if it were true on contemplation of law, that a migratory savage tribe, consisting of perhaps 30 to 40 individuals roaming over an almost unlimited extent of country could acquire such a property in the soil so as to be able to convey it so effectually, as to confer upon the purchasers any right of possession which would be recognized in our courts of law.

Apart from the attempt to bolster the claim of Crown sovereignty by referring to Collin's claim of possession in 1803, Arthur, with his reference to the "migratory savage tribe", was drawing on the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*. The actual presence of inhabitants constituted no obstacle to the declaration that the land was "unoccupied". As Sir Joseph Banks had put it in his evidence in 1785 to the Beauchamp committee in support of his belief that New South Wales was *terra nullius*, "the Aborigines had wandering habits and would speedily abandon whatever territory was needed".

The Birth of the Census in Port Phillip

On August 26, 1835, even as small numbers of settlers simply decamped at the head of Port Phillip Bay with flocks of sheep and squatted on any land that took their fancy, Sir Richard Bourke, Governor of New South Wales, declared that the settlement was illegal and all land claims were null and void. Bourke reiterated that Batman's treaty had no standing, given that the lands he had "acquired" were simply "Vacant Lands of the Crown". (He allowed, however, that a monetary consideration could be paid to the Port Phillip Association).[39]

From London on April 13, 1836, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg, fully confirmed the correctness of Bourke's refusal to countenance any right on the part of the Aborigines to sell land. As his Lordship pointed out, this would "subvert the foundation on which all proprietary rights in New South Wales at present rest".[40] Simultaneously Glenelg accepted that no law could or should retard or repress the "spirit of adventure and speculation" driving the settlement at Port Phillip and accordingly allowed that the private settle-

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39 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 24–50.

41 Glenelg in fact allowed "that the sanguine ardour of private speculation should quicken and anticipate the more cautious movements of the Government" (HRV, vol. 1, p. 22).

ment should proceed "under official guidance and direction".[41] Bourke was in effect required by Glenelg to acknowledge the *de facto* occupation of Port Phillip and the British government's view that private settlement might now occur under official guidance.[42]

Bourke now found himself needing to put in place the authority to secure the peaceful displacement of the original landholders who could never be acknowledged as such. Having initially refused (in January 1836) to appoint any officials to Port Phillip, Bourke came under pressure from Glenelg to rethink that position. The number of people in Port Phillip craving government, who counted, so to speak, in ways that the "savage" and "nomadic natives" could never be allowed to do, also forced Bourke's hand.[43] Bourke decided to despatch — urgently — one of his Police Magistrates (George Stewart) to report on the settlement. Stewart arrived in the new settlement on May 25, 1836.

Stewart's report addressed the problem of black-white relations and the progress of settlement based on his eight-day sojourn. He had "conferences" with the natives, whose number around the settlement he "estimated" at 800. He also met with the settlers, whom he counted ("142 males and 35 females").[44] On June 1, 1836, while Stewart was still at Port Phillip, some 16 men at Port Phillip met in a public meeting and by a series of constitutive motions created a transitional form of local government. The meeting "appointed" arbitrators (who were to be exempted from common law actions) to adjudicate between competing land claims as well as to deal with outrages committed on, or by, the "Aborigines". This meeting also petitioned Bourke to establish the rule of law, observing, "having lately arrived here with flocks of sheep and other stock [we] find ourselves exposed to serious inconvenience from the want of a constituted authority, we therefore humbly beg to solicit Your Excellency to appoint a resident Magistrate with a competent police."[45]

Some 31 male residents signed the petition, as they signed a set of minutes of that meeting. We know, too, that at the bottom of those minutes is appended the very first "muster" or "census" of the Port Philip settlement, which declared that "77 persons" ("34 males, 12 females and 31 children") were now resident. The authority of numbers was already being deployed to conceal as much as to reveal. The point of this "muster" was almost certainly designed to indicate that all of the people who counted in the settlement

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42 The British House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines in June 1837, HRV, vol. 2a, M. Cannon, ed., *The Aborigines of Port Phillip, 1835–1839* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Service, 1982), decisively backed the official view declaring that "so far as the lands of the Aborigines are within any territories over which the dominion of the Crown extends, the acquisition of them by her Majesty's subjects upon any title or purchase, grant or otherwise ... should be declared illegal and void" (p. 64).

43 HRV, vol. 1, p. 22.

44 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–43.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

were requesting intervention from Sydney. In ways that mattered, the deployment of the secular authority, which some already enjoyed, was to play a crucial role in securing the technologies of government in a supplanting society.

Having read the report compiled by Stewart on June 10 and the petition from the settlers, Bourke agreed to send the first personnel of a state apparatus to Port Phillip District. The instauration of that state apparatus in Port Phillip began formally with the assertion of the sovereignty of the Crown over what was defined as vacant crown land via a proclamation that "His Majesty's Government [had] authorized the location of settlers on the vacant Crown Lands adjacent to the shores of Port Phillip under the same regulations as are now in force for the alienation of Crown Lands in other parts of New South Wales".[46] Bourke then proceeded to the appointment of the first permanent official apparatus for Port Phillip.[47] What Bourke saw fit to create as a civil service list for the colony says much about the priorities of government. Primary authority was to be vested in a Police Magistrate, William Lonsdale, who was given sufficient powers "needed to secure the necessary superintendence of all such matters as require the immediate exercise of the authority of Government".[48] In particular he was instructed not to interfere needlessly with the settlers already there, but to treat all the land as "vacant Crown land" and to resolve the matter of the Port Phillip Association's land claim speedily. That first "civil list" of early September 1836 also provided for three police constables, one "scourger", and five surveyors, a total of ten men. To this list was soon added a native translator (William Buckley) and an Officer of Customs.

Two of Bourke's instructions stand out in this instauration of colonial government. Putting in place a cornerstone of the technology of government was identified as one of Lonsdale's first tasks when he was instructed to take an accurate census. Secondly, the beginnings of racial government were signified in Port Phillip when Lonsdale was instructed to "protect and to civilise" the Aboriginal people:

> [O]ne of your most important duties [is] to protect the aboriginal natives of the district from any manner of wrong, and to endeavour to conciliate them by kind treatment and presents, assuring them that this Government is most anxious to maintain their moral and social condition. With a view to this improvement, you will endeavour to establish them in a village and to induce them to

46 *Ibid.*, p. 55.

47 *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45.

48 *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53. With the appointment of Superintendant Charles LaTrobe, who exercised the role and powers of a Governor from July 1839, the permanent Civil Service had expanded to some 48 men with an obvious increase in the staff of personnel with the task of "protecting" the Aborigines under the Chief Protector of Aborigines (G. A. Robinson) and his four Assistant Protectors (HRV, vol. 1, pp. 136–137).

offer their labour in return for food and clothing.... Should the conduct of the natives be violent or dishonest, you will endeavour to restrain them by the gentlest means, informing them that they must consider themselves subject to the Laws of England, which being put in force for their protection, must operate equally for their restraint or punishment if they offend the whites.

Rose and Miller argue that one of the central technologies of government draws on the constitutive power of statistics, which has special political and epistemological capabilities. They argue that, in any study of governmentality, we need to identify such things as the establishment and role of agencies that collect statistics, the way information is gathered and used to facilitate government, and the way knowledge works in concert with governmentality.[49] On this point, Rose argues:

Statistics do not merely inscribe a pre-existing reality, rather they constitute it. Techniques of inscription and accumulation of facts about the "population" ... or "poverty" render visible a domain with certain internal homogeneity or external boundaries. Numbers here delineate fictive spaces for the operation of government, and establish a plane of reality marked out by grids of norms, on which government can operate.[50]

Rose has subsequently suggested that numbers do several things. First, numbers

... make modern government ... possible ... because they help make up the object domains upon which government is required to operate. They map the boundaries and the internal characteristics of the spaces of the population, economy and society. And other locales — the organization, the hospital, the university, the factory and so on — are made intelligible, calculable and practicable through representations that are at least in part numerical.

Numbers are also crucial technologies of government:

They have become indispensable to the complex technologies through which government is exercised. Tax returns enable an administration over individuals and private enterprises in the light of a knowledge of their financial affairs. Counts of population, of birth, death and morbidity have become intrinsic to the formulation and justification of governmental programs.[51]

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49 Rose and Miller, "Governing Economic Life", p. 23.

50 Rose, "Governing by Numbers", p. 676. Whether statistics are merely "reflective of reality" or enter constitutively into "reality-making" is a much larger question, as Hacking has argued, and one still to be fully teased out. See Ian Hacking, "Three Parables", in R. Goodman, ed., *Pragmatism: A Contemporary Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 237–249.

51 Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 198.

As Rose and Miller indicate, these technologies involve for the most part quite mundane, simple, and routine activities like the daily recording of attendance of children in a schoolroom. Finally, says Rose, "numbers are integral to the 'problematizations' that shape what is to be governed, to the programs that seek to give effect to government".[52] In short, producing and using statistics is one of the important forms of intellectual and administrative practice by which means the world can be understood, calculated, and operated on so as to produce certain governmental effects.

There can be little doubt that census-taking was an early and significant part of the processes of constructing a state and government. It was under the aegis of these instructions that the first "official" census was carried out in Port Phillip on May 25, 1836, a second on September 29, 1836, a third in September 1838, and two more in 1841 and 1846. As Camm has suggested, "Census taking soon became part of the Australian way of life. Before ... 1911, fifty five censuses had been held by the six colonies. Australians in the nineteenth century were among the most counted people in the world: rarely have so few been counted so often."[53] Indeed, but in this erstwhile *bon mot* lurks two dark questions: who was to count as "Australian" in a land defined as "vacant" but actually host to a significant number of indigenous peoples, and how were they to be counted — and governed?

Census-taking in Port Phillip began with a good deal of experience in answering these questions. It is clear, first, that as early as 1828 colonial administrators in New South Wales were concerned to go beyond the practice of "musters" begun in the first weeks of settlement at Sydney Cove and followed on at least 17 occasions up to 1825.[54] Organized and systematic censuses were already common in Great Britain, and in 1828 the Governor and Council of N.S.W. passed the *Census Act* of 1828 (9 Geo IV No.4), which was followed in November 1828 by the first census of N.S.W. The act required that local justices appoint competent census collectors and made answering questions incorrectly punishable by a fine. That first census attempted to count the entire white population of the colony including the settlement at Moreton Bay (later Brisbane).

In one sense we can treat the administration of a census as a defining moment in the constitution of government by the state apparatus. As Table 1 suggests, in each case white settlement was followed typically within two to three decades by a census. Camm notes that any census has to specify a number of key components that in effect constitute its core elements as a

52 *Ibid.*, p. 199.
53 Camm , *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses of Australia*, p. 1.
54 As Forster and Hazlehurst point out, those musters were "natural expressions of a gaol culture" and involved people literally turning out to be counted ("Australian Statisticians and the Development of Official Statistics", pp. 2–3).
55 Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses*, p. 22.

Table 1   Patterns of Settlement and Colonial Censuses, 1788–1861

Colony	First permanent white settlement	Separate sovereignty	First census
N.S.W.	1788	1786	1828
Tasmania	1803	1825	1841
W. Australia	1829	1829	1848
S. Australia	1836	1834	1844
Victoria	1835	1851	1854
Queensland	1824	1859	1861

Source: Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses of Australia*, p. 12.

mode of government.[55] These include the use of legal authority for carrying it out and a precise delimitation of the territory within which the population to be counted can be identified. In this case, what is required is that the state mobilize its powers of coercion and authority as well as its apparatus of administration.

In September 1836 Lonsdale carried out the first official enumeration of the settlement in his own hand.[56] Struggling to establish a state apparatus, Lonsdale decided that the first census enumerators would be the newly appointed police constabulary. Lonsdale instructed Constable James Dwyer to carry out the first proper census, which took Dwyer from October 27 to November 9 to complete.[57] (No imputation about its value need be drawn from the fact that Dwyer was sacked a month later for chronic drunkenness.) In March 1838 Lonsdale completed another larger census relying on his own efforts supported by his constabulary. The six-page document is in his hand and names each head of household and the numbers of males and females in each resident family, revealing a total of 600 residents in the settlement. (By 1857 in the new Colony of Victoria some 1,005 enumerators would be needed to carry out the second statutory census.) In September 1838 another census was taken, again identifying each individual resident family by name.[58]

Secondly and crucially, any effective census requires the specification of the population to be surveyed, which in turn requires the constitution of the categories to be counted. From the vantage point of a history of statistics which is naively empiricist, Camm's blank statement that "[t]he counting of people was a common event in New South Wales before the establishment of census taking" is exemplary.[59] To the contrary, colonial censuses did not "count people": rather, they first constituted and then "counted" certain cate-

56 HRV, vol. 3 [M. Cannon, ed.], *The Early Development of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Service, 1984), p. 419.

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 432–441.

59 Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses*, p. 1.

gories of people. As Hacking has indicated, this entails that in turn people begin to conform to these categories, an example of the complex interplay of constitutive categories, social interaction, and identity, or what Giddens has called the "double hermeneutic".[60]

The empiricism that assumes that statistics exist as an objective source of data or as a "mirror of society", able to offer a factual account of the phenomena they are representing, becomes highly problematic. This point is made vividly in the1829 abstract from the first N.S.W. Census of 1828, which clearly distinguished between different categories identifying some nine classes of person, including "Persons who came free", persons who were "Born in Colony", those who were "Free by Servitude", and those who were still "Convicts".[61] This constitutive role was central to the earliest exercises in census-taking which evolved commensurate with the establishment of racial government in Port Phillip. Here the canonical principle of "universality" in the Australian colonies was plainly subject to explicit or implicit specification of racial criteria for inclusion, a point of no little significance given that the N.S.W. census of 1828 specifically excluded the Aboriginal population.[62]

These observations all lead to the question: who was to count? Who did not count had already been made clear in that very first census. In ways that became the norm until 1971, this primal count of the residents of Port Phillip omitted entirely the population of Aborigines residing in the area.[63] Who was to count in the first official census of May 1836 was likewise clearly spelled out. Lonsdale was instructed "Immediately after landing in Port Phillip" to count:

> every person then residing in the District, specially noting those who have occupied any portion of the land by erecting a hut or grazing cattle or sheep and distinguishing those who have done either or both. It will be convenient to take this census as nearly as possible in the form set forth in the late Act. You may employ for this purpose such of the constables or other persons as you find necessary.

In this way the census-as-governmentality was merged seamlessly with the

60 Hacking, "Three Parables", pp. 241–244; A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), pp. 78–113.

61 Forster and Hazlehurst, "Australian Statisticians and the Development of Official Statistics", p. 10.

62 For the most part, the Aboriginal populations of all the colonies tended to be either not counted or at all or at best merely estimated in censuses after 1856. Likewise, the racial character of what was to become the "White Australia" regime meant that the 1871 Queensland census, while specifically including "Chinamen, Malays, Polynesians and other foreigners", equally specifically excluded "native blacks". In Victoria the 1854 census-takers merely noted that "the erratic mode of life obviously renders it difficult to obtain any accurate account of their numbers".

63 HRV, vol. 1, p. 37. It was not until 1967 that a constitutional referendum directed the Commonwealth government to include Aboriginal people in the census conducted by the Commonwealth Statistician, the precursor to the present Australian Bureau of Statistics.

instauration of racial government, given that Lonsdale was also instructed to "protect and to civilise" the Aboriginal people.

That instruction was to intervene in a situation of considerable complexity. Behind it lay the particular dispositions of the Colonial Secretary, Lord Glenelg (1835–1839) and his Under Secretary, James Stephen. Both had been raised in the "Clapham sect" and were committed Evangelicals, opponents of the slave trade, and supporters of the Church Mission Society, who believed in protecting, converting, and civilizing "the natives" of Britain's growing Empire. Glenelg's letter to Governor Gipps in N.S.W., announcing his appointment of Charles La Trobe as first Superintendent of Port Phillip in 1839, indicated that "[o]ne of the most important subjects to which [La Trobe's] attention should be directed to the state of the Aborigines, and the relations between them and the settlers".[64] Informing it, too, were the findings of the House of Commons Select Committee on Aborigines (British Settlements), chaired by Sir Thomas Foxwell, another Evangelical Anglican. In June 1837 that committee had argued that "the natives could not be safely entrusted to the protection of the settlers and that they must therefore be kept so far as possible under the control of the executive government".[65] The committee had waxed indignantly, if belatedly, about the effects of white settlement:

> The inhabitants of New Holland in their original condition, have been described by travellers as the most degraded of the human race; but it is to be feared that the intercourse with Europeans has cast over their original debasement, a yet deeper shade of wretchedness. These people, unoffending as they were towards us, have, as might have been expected, suffered in an aggravated degree from the planting among them of our penal settlements. In the formation of these settlements it does not appear that the territorial rights of the natives were considered. The effects have been dreadful beyond example, both in the diminution of their numbers and in their demoralisation.

The committee agreed with Bishop Broughton that "within a very limited period, a few years, those who are most in contact with Europeans will be utterly extinct — I do not say exterminated — but they will be extinct".[66] Yet, as Milliss shows, in New South Wales Governor Gipps was less inclined to practise "conciliation and protection. The sword and the musket were now

64 Glenelg to Gipps, Despatch No. 21, January 29, 1839, *Historical Records of Australia* [hereafter *HRA*], series I, vol.19 (Sydney), pp. 785–786. La Trobe himself shared many of the humanitarian and improving dispositions of Glenelg and had produced three reports for him on the enducation of former slaves in the West Indies in 1837–1838. A. G. L. Shaw, *The Gipps – La Trobe Correspondence* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press 1989), p. xii.

65 *Cambridge History of the British Empire,* vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), p. 354.

66 HRV, vol. 3, p. 62.

67 R. Milliss, *Waterloo Creek: The Australia Day Massacre of 1838, George Gipps and the British Conquest of New South Wales* (Melbourne: McPhee Gribble, 1992), p. 691.

the order of the day, and obviously as far as Gipps was concerned the less said about it the better."[67]

Officially committed to work with the Aboriginal Protectors in Port Phillip, La Trobe, too, would find it difficult to reconcile the divergent interests of the white settlers and the Aborigines. Behind everything lay the primal assumption that Port Phillip was *terra nullius*. Locke's famous and influential account of the "state of nature" had argued that primal rights to land tenure only obtained when people laboured on the land and so transformed it.[68] Since the Woiworung, Bunurong, Taungorong, Ngurai-illam-wurring, and Wathurung peoples appeared not to do this, the land they occupied met the conditions for which the state of *terra nullius* was assumed to exist in the mind of the colonizers. Likewise, this doctrine gave aid and comfort to the settlers, who saw themselves as possessing a moral right to dispossess. Peace and progress in Port Phillip would only be possible when that dispossession was accomplished.

The decision taken not to include the Aboriginal populations in the census was the simplest way of ensuring the "blanking out" of the Aborigines. However, we need to be attentive to what was happening. It is too simple to say, as Camm does, that, by their exclusion from the censuses of the 1830s through the 1850s, "the Aborigines were largely a forgotten people and were ignored in colonial population counts".[69] Far from being "forgotten" and "uncounted", the Aborigines were the objects of two practices simultaneously operating in the Port Phillip census exercises after 1836.

The census of the population of Port Phillip District was defined so as to refer only to the white settlers: at the same time, the Woiworung and other peoples were subjected to intense and persistent surveillance through a racially divided practice of census-taking by the new government. Racial government works first by dividing and excluding certain groups from the "normal", but it cannot afford to forget what it wishes to govern. Counting the Aborigines was part of a far wider process of racial governmentality.[70]

The political administration struggled to give effect to London's official

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68 In his liberal Dreamtime story, Locke makes a distinction between those who work hard and those who are "lazy and quarrelsome": "[God] gave the world to the use of the industrious and the rational ... not to the fancy of covetousness of the quarrelsome and the contentious." J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning the True Original Extent and End of Civil Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1952), p. 32. The right to property enters the world through the activity called labour: "What a man labours to obtain or produce belongs to that man." What was previously owned in common in the state of nature becomes "private property" once men labour to assuage their hunger (p. 26).

69 Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses*, p. 18.

70 The documentary basis for addressing the problem of racial relations which constitute these early attempts to construct a racial government in Port Phillip between 1835 and 1840 are fully outlined in HRV, vol. 2a [ed. M. Cannon], *The Aborigines of Port Phillip, 1835–1839* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Service, 1982); HRV, vol. 2b [ed. M. Cannon], *Aborigines and Protectors, 1838–1839* (Melbourne: Victorian Government Printing Service, 1983); and J. Rae-Ellis, *Black Robinson* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1993). See also State Library of Victoria, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, Brought Smyth Papers, William Thomas Diary.

commitment to Aboriginal protection, established through the system of "Protectors" under G. A. Robinson, while dealing with the consequences of the *de facto* occupation by white settlers. As Cannon observes, "a whole new racial balance of power had been established [leaving] officialdom — no matter how well armed with theoretical instructions from London — comparatively powerless to prevent many of the murderous clashes between whites and blacks now occurring in areas remote from police posts or even observation".[71]

Much of 1839, the year La Trobe took up his post in Port Phillip, was "peaceful": only four, though possibly as many as fifteen, Aborigines had been killed by settlers. In the first three months following his arrival, another seven deaths were reported to La Trobe. Then, in December 1839, between 35 to 40 Aborigines were slaughtered at Taylor's station in the Western District, and this was followed in March 1840 by another massacre.[72] The administration's interest in counting the Aborigines reflected a need to know where they were, both from the point of view of security and to determine whether they were under threat from the processes of occupation.

In London the Select Committee of 1837 had insisted on the need for Protectors who might secure the Aborigines from "immoral intercourse", encourage them in the development of a labour market and habits of thrift and hard work, and also control the sale of liquor. The Select Committee urged that among the core tasks of these Protectors should be the taking of censuses for at least one reason:

> The collection of accurate statistical information should be one of the principal objects of these periodical reports [furnished by the protectors].... It is probable that the depopulation and decay of many tribes which, in different parts of the world have sunk under European encroachments, would have been arrested in its course, if the progress of the calamity had been, from time to time, brought distinctly under the notice of any authority competent to redress the wrong.[73]

It would have been far more difficult for the members of the Select Committee to reflect on the way colonial state-istics — including the development of the technologies of the census — as a primary technology of government helped constitute the colonial state. Mary Poovey has observed that the use of statistics was hardly a novelty in the 1830s in Europe:

> The link between numerical representation and government — or more specif-

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71 Cannon in HRV, vol. 2a, *The Aborigines of Port Phillip*, p. xvii.

72 J. Critchett, *"A Distant Field of Murder": Western District Frontiers, 1834–1848* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1990), chap. 7. La Trobe complained to Gipps on April 4, 1840, that "I do not see that we possess at present either morally or physically the power of prevention" (Shaw, *The Gipps–La Trobe Correspondence*, Letter 12).

73 HRV, vol. 3, p. 62.

ically centralised government bureaucracy — was forged by the seventeenth century practice of "political arithmetic". By the 1830s numbers had begun to play a prominent role in creating a single "imagined community" where various communities had once competed for loyalty and the government apparatus by which this national community could be governed.[74]

It did so first by virtue of the way statistics itself was understood by its proponents to be a mechanism for describing and measuring "progress", by which was meant the spread of people who exercised all of the features of virtuous civilization and thereby legitimated the initial seizure of land. It mattered that the proponents of statistics in Britain all through the 1830s argued for the value of statistics in assisting the legislators not to "legislate in the dark". As J. R. McCulloch put it in 1835, "the accumulation of minute and detailed information from all parts of the country would at length, enable politicians and legislators to come to a correct conclusion as to many highly interesting practical questions that have hitherto been involved in the greatest doubt and uncertainty."[75]

In this regard the earliest exercises in census-taking played a central role in helping to confirm the sovereignty of the whites over their land in several ways: by not counting the Aborigines as residents, by measuring the spread of white settlement, by identifying where "the blacks" were, and by enumerating and naming the fact of white sovereignty in ways explicitly designed to blank out the previous mode of black occupation and government of the land, complete with its system of boundaries and categories.

White sovereignty was secured not least of all by appealing epistemologically to the statistical metaphors and the authority conferred on the mathematical and natural order represented by the practice of census-taking. British intellectual culture early became a fertile medium for the growth of an exaggerated respect for the rhetorical or persuasive power of numbers and the mathematical reduction of reality. Hume, as early as 1748, had put it thus in outlining his "Golden Fork":

When we run over libraries persuaded of these principles what havoc must we make? If we take in hand any volume of divinity or school metaphysics for instance, let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.[76]

74 M. Poovey, *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation 1830–1864* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 409.

75 J. R. McCulloch (1835), cited in D. McCloskey, *The Rhetoric of Economics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 178.

76 D. Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975 [1748]), p. 157.

A century and a half later, Lord Kelvin put it no less crisply: "when you can measure what you are speaking about, you know something about it; when you cannot measure it ... your knowledge is of a meager and unsatisfactory kind."[77]

In light of the concerns expressed by the Select Committee, Lonsdale moved to establish a Government Mission in September 1837. Then, in December 1837 from London came news that the Colonial-Secretary, Sir George Grey, had sanctioned the appointment in Port Phillip of an Aboriginal Protectorate — as urged by Governor Arthur from Hobart. G. A. Robinson became the Chief Protector, and he was to have four Assistant Protectors. In broad terms they were instructed to "watch over the rights and interests of the natives and to endeavour to gain their respect and confidence ... [and to] protect them from any encroachments on their property and from acts of cruelty, oppression or injustice".[78] In due course, Glenelg spelled out the duties of the Protectors, among which was a census of the Aborigines.[79] By March 1839 at least one of the assistants, Dredge, was undertaking this task, though he reported it to be a "rather perplexing business".[80]

Surveillance of the Aborigines by enumeration had already become normal following the decision by the Wesleyan Mission and missionaries like the Rev J. Orton and the Rev F. Tuckfield to establish a mission among the Port Phillip Aborigines. Many of the key themes on the part of later census-takers were well represented in Orton's report of July 1839, in which he estimated that there were a "thousand aboriginals" in an arc about 60 miles from Melbourne: "It is very difficult to compute the population of a country whose inhabitants are so scattered and whose habits are so migrating a character."[81] The violence and hostility of settlers, especially the "unprincipled men of vicious habits", had further induced a wariness among Aborigines which, Orton reported, made even simple contact with them difficult. For some missionaries, unlike their latter-day proponents, there was a dawning recognition that there was some kind of awful contradiction at work in the "civilizing process". The Rev B. Hurst wrote in May 1840, "It is the Gospel which contains the true elements of civilization, and wherever it exerts its full and legitimate influence, civilization must follow.... But in the midst of all our labours and prospects, we cannot be insensible to the fact that the number of natives in the district is rapidly decreasing...."[82] It seemed to Hurst that heroic measures would be needed to save the natives for civiliza-

77 W. Thompson (Lord Kelvin), "Electrical Units of Measurement", in *Popular Lectures and Addresses*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1889), p. 73.
78 HRV, vol. 2b, p. 378.
79 Glenelg to Gipps, January 31, 1838, in HRV, vol. 2b, pp. 373–375.
80 HRV, vol. 2b, p. 426.
81 HRV, vol. 3, p. 128.
82 *Ibid.*, p. 150.

tion and that "unless prompt and decisive measures are taken ... in a very few years they will be extinct". Decades later a more eugenically inclined generation would be prepared to countenance what Hurst found so difficult to envisage, namely that the "civilising process" was more like a pruning hook that would severely test the "racial fitness" of primitives such as the Aborigines. Confident in their scientific world view, later generations could contemplate with equanimity the prospect that it might be expected that, when put to the test, most would not survive.[83]

By November 1839 the Assistant Protectors, having fanned out from Melbourne, began reporting. William Thomas, for example, reported for his district, which went out along the eastern coast from Melbourne and down to Westernport, the names, ages, and total numbers of the Woiworungs and the Bunurongs — which he estimated at 230. Some indication of how the Wurundjeri-willam and Bunurong people took to this novelty is suggested by his experience when he was working up the Yarra River. Thomas had set up a table and chair and lined up all the people he could find and began taking their names. After several hours and numerous sheets of paper, he looked up to find still a very long line of people. He then realized what was happening: as soon as each person had given Thomas his or her name and family details, that person ran back to the end of the line and repeated the process, necessitating that Thomas start the whole process over again.

The surveillance of the Aboriginal people would continue, but it was never allowed to contaminate the only true record of progress in the settlement, the population of white settlers. Sixteen years later the *Blue Book of Statistics for the Colony of Victoria* for 1851 said it all.[84] Although there were columns reserved for the "Coloured Population", these were white and blank, while the columns for "Whites" were black and busy with handwritten numbers. The *Blue Book* revealed proudly that the "Total Population of the Colony of Victoria [*sic*]" comprised 77,345 persons. (A footnote pointed out that the total population of Aborigines was 2,693, with a degree of exac-

83 Historians like Barwick have used the census material collected by the Aboriginal protectors to estimate the aboriginal death toll after white settlement began in Port Phillip. Most was the product of illness, not massacre. Barwick estimates that by 1863 only 1,907 Aborigines were alive in Victoria, amounting to a decline of 80% from the likely population as it stood in 1835. Barwick, "Changes in the Aboriginal Population of Victoria", pp. 292–293. See also J. White and D. Mulvaney, "How Many People?", in D. Mulvaney and J. White, eds., *Australians to 1788* (Sydney: Fairfax, Syme & Weldon Associates, 1987).

84 Public Records Office, *Blue Book of Statistics for the Colony of Victoria* (1851), 1978, pp. 4–5. This was one of a series of statistical enumerations which had begun in 1822 with the first of the N.S.W. "Blue Books". This first "Blue Book" had been produced at the behest of the Colonial Office in London by the N.S.W. Governor of the day (Brisbane), but was only actually transmitted three years later, testimony to the tyranny of distance. The N.S.W. Blue Books were effectively handwritten and circulated in an edition of two or three copies. Victoria produced its first Blue Book in 1851. By 1854 the new colonial government in Victoria, reeling under the demographic shock triggered by the discovery of great reserves of gold at Ballarat and Bendigo, had begun to carry out regular censuses of its territory.

titude immediately subverted by the observation that there was no way of "precisely counting" the Aborigines.)

Conclusion

The "battle of the numbers" for the Aborigines was for the time being over. Only in the 1980s would demographers return to the question of how many of them there had been before white settlement.[85] Whatever their original population, it had probably been swamped as early as 1841, by the time of the first proper "census". In our own time demographers and historians complacently repeat the original lie that the censuses counted "the people" or "the residents" of Port Phillip.

Observations like these are ignored or not contemplated by empiricist historians. By "empiricist" I mean that kind of historiography which takes for granted an unproblematized correspondence between the categories it "discovers" in the "records of the past" and from which it can then proceed to reconstruct the past. Exemplary in this way is Camm's claim that "Colonial censuses are a key source for the study of nineteenth century Australia".[86] Beginning with an empiricist framework does not encourage an interest in analysing the formation of concepts as central to historical processes, nor does it introduce the possibility that power can shape what concepts are used as part of larger truth practices.

In the years in which a supplanting society was being established at Port Phillip, the census played its part in establishing a legitimacy about and around the act of claiming and demonstrating effective sovereignty over the land and validating the need to establish racial government. In establishing the mechanisms of racial government, the colonial census gave effect to the essential imaginary with which the white population operated, namely that they and only they were to count in the occupation of the land. Colonial censuses became a central part of the governmentality used to mark the co-terminous "progress" of white settlement and the "decline" of the Aboriginal peoples.

It became an article of faith, in both advanced metropolitan societies and the frontier spaces of colonial settlements, that statistical facts gave legislators the capacity to "measure (white) progress". In terms of which H. G. Turner would have strongly approved, the authors of the census of Western Australia in 1848, half a century before, had anticipated the value of such measures: "It is by statistical inquiries alone that the relative well-being of our community can be determined, the effect of our civil institutions be ascertained and the working of moral and physical causes among us observed and distinguished with any degree of accuracy."[87] As Poovey notes:

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85 White and Mulvaney, "How Many People?", pp. 114–119.

86 Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses*, p. 1.

87 Cited in *Ibid.*, p. 1.

> [A]s a discourse that claims a transparent relation to the objects it represents, statistical representation masks the meanings it does produce, at the same time as it puts those meanings into play. Largely though not exclusively an effect of the categories by which statistical representation organizes materials, these meanings are being constructed before the statistics are being compiled; they then radiate from the starkest tables.[88]

By statutory means, the N.S.W. government (in its *Census Acts* of 1833 and 1836) explicitly excluded Aborigines from being counted as residents, a fact that asserted, in the most brutal and authoritative way possible, the colonizer's claim to complete sovereignty. In this way the colonial census worked in parallel with the cartographic processes of surveying the land and drawing boundaries for local government or marking out roads.[89] Mapping the land simultaneously rendered it amenable to capitalist marketing, while confirming the primal fact of white ownership by also conferring naming rights on the sovereign power. In the same way, the division of governmental space into local areas or police districts provided the basic administrative mechanism for administering the census, while also marking the advance of white civilization. As for the Aborigines, subjected to no less actual surveillance and enumeration than the white population, it may be said, to adapt Camm, that Aborigines in the nineteenth century were among the most counted people in the world: rarely have so few been counted so often and counted for so little.[90] These censuses soon enough played their part in reassuring the supplanting society that here, indeed, was a doomed race.[91] As Markus shows, that premise soon enough became part of a no less authoritative scientific anthropological discourse that informed new modes of racial government into the twentieth century.[92]

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88 Poovey, *Making a Social Body*, p. 420.
89 S. Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye: How Explorers Saw Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
90 Camm, *The Early Nineteenth Century Colonial Censuses*, p. 1.
91 R. McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory 1880–1939* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1997).
92 A. Markus, *Governing Savages* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989).