

CECIL COOK, SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT AND 'HALF-CASTES' IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY 1927-1939

Tony Austin

Dr Cecil Evelyn Cook was Chief Medical Officer and Chief Protector of Aborigines in the Northern Territory between 1927 and 1939. In the face of a widespread eugenist view that Australian Half-castes¹ were to be counted among the 'unfit' of Australian society, Cook sought to develop a means of dealing with the Half-caste 'problem' in the NT.

A number of coalescing elements of the confusing intellectual ferment known as 'Social Darwinism' are of significance for an interpretation of Cook's work. Much was said about race and about the place of Aborigines in a racial hierarchy. The emergence of the eugenics movement resulted in a good deal of scientific and pseudo-scientific thought about the effects of miscegenation and the place of people of mixed 'blood'. Opinions about how young people of mixed descent were best brought up were influenced by the views of the emerging psychology branch of the medical profession about the nature of the juvenile and juvenile delinquency. Their upbringing was influenced also by the views of social reformers about the role of state and philanthropic institutions in the care of delinquent, neglected and intellectually handicapped youth. A marriage of the emerging, interlocking sciences of anthropology, psychology and eugenics with the evangelical progressivism of urban social reformers, resulted in extreme controls over the lives of many young people, and not least NT Half-castes.

Northern Territory legislation

Formal recognition of the Half-caste 'problem' was provided in the Aborigines Act of 1910, progressively strengthened in the period to 1939. The Ordinance differentiated little in its provisions between Half-castes and other Aborigines and the stultifying controls exercised over people's lives applied to both groups. However, Full-blood people would remain subject to the provisions of the Ordinance for life. Half-caste males, at age eighteen, could aspire to significantly improved rights if raised in an institution, by Half-caste parents considered to be 'civilised', or by parents one of whom was European or Asian. In law, the only qualification to full citizen rights was that adults could not consume alcohol. Adult females remained under guardianship unless legally married to, and living with, someone 'substantially of European origin or descent'. Moreover, the Chief Protector could resume guardianship over any adult if, in his opinion, it became necessary or desirable in the presumed interests of an individual for him to do so.

Two homes were established for Half-caste children. The popular and bureaucratic belief was held that Half-castes deserved, as a consequence of the European part of their ancestry, a

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¹ The term 'half-caste' is perjorative and is used often to differentiate unnecessarily and unhelpfully between Aboriginal people. It is used here, however, since, in law, a distinction was made during the period under consideration which had major implications for the way different groups of Aborigines were treated. It, and other terms such as Full-blood, White and Quadroon, are written as proper nouns.

chance to assimilate to White society. This, it was assumed, could happen only if they were removed from all Aboriginal influences. Attention concentrated particularly on girls - out of some vague respect for women, less than vague disgust at the thought of women with White 'blood' cohabiting with Aboriginal men, and in the knowledge that Half-caste girls were prized as casual sexual partners by White males in a preponderantly male North.

Schooling would equip children taken from their mothers at an early age with skills to enter the workforce, also at an early age - the girls as domestic servants and the boys, in the main, as stock workers. This would enable them eventually to make their way as self-sufficient citizens in a White Australia, and meanwhile would assure White residents of a cheap workforce. The last factor was to stand in the way of every major proposal to improve the upbringing of those in the Darwin home. Suggestions that children's welfare would be better catered for by off-shore missions away from the corrupting influences of urban areas, and recurring proposals for the establishment of industrial settlements - again in remote parts - were not acted on for cost reasons, but also because of the adverse effects on employers.

Living conditions and schooling in the homes were poor. Calls for some form of industrial training to make the boys employable when pushed out of the home at age fourteen were ignored. What passed as training for domestic service for girls involved little more than doing the jobs needed to keep the home and its inmates clean and orderly; occasionally some needlework was taught. Former inmates of the Darwin institution recall harsh discipline, wholly inadequate schooling and meals that were poor both qualitatively and quantitatively.²

At the Bungalow in Alice Springs, conditions were shocking, a cause for much media and parliamentary comment and a string of official and semi-official reports all of which recommended major change. Even by the often primitive standards of 'Centralian' housing, the iron sheds that passed for dormitories, kitchen and dispensary were appalling. Education and training were in many ways poorer than in Darwin. As in Darwin, vocational training was virtually non-existent. However, a considerable number of girls were sent to service in South Australia and a number of boys obtained positions on pastoral properties in the NT and South Australia. Only in 1933, when the children moved to the recently vacated Telegraph Station, could living conditions be described as anything like adequate. And even then, on sanitary and space grounds, there were constant official calls for the erection of a purpose-built institution. Commonwealth parsimony ensured that none was ever constructed.

Anthropology, officialdom and the Half-Caste

Aborigines were still, by World War Two considered to be irremediably child-like and insufficiently intelligent to adapt to the dominant culture. Women were said to be naturally promiscuous and insufficiently caring about their children. There was, however, some heightening of scientific regard between the wars: by the 1920s race scientists were increasingly inclined to compare the capacity of Aborigines with the 'feeble-minded' of White society rather than with Neanderthal humanity.

² Valentine McGinness and Daisy Ruddick, personal communication. Herbie Laughton says much the same thing about the Alice Springs home. See 'Breakfast was one slice of bread: A "Half-caste" boy in the Kahlin Compound, told by Val McGinness to Kathy Mills and Tony Austin', *Northern Perspective* 11 (1), 1988; 'Talking about cruel Things': Girls' life in the Kahlin Compound, by Daisy Ruddick as told to Kathy Mills and Tony Austin', *Hecate*, 15 (1), 1989.

Nineteenth and early twentieth century anthropologists in Australia had little to say about Aborigines of mixed descent until the 1930s and then the pronouncements of men like the eminent Professor A.P. Elkin and a young, not yet eminent W.E.H. Stanner, were marked by some confusion. Administrators would have to make policies for Half-castes primarily on the basis of beliefs born of their own observations about them and about Full-blood people, community reactions and perhaps some knowledge of scientific theories abroad. Those studies were, for the most part, carried out by psychologists with an interest in anthropology at a time when there was relatively little differentiation between the work of anthropologists, medical psychologists and biological scientists.

Few commentators argued with the contention that the European part of Half-castes' ancestry meant that their potentialities under White leadership were superior to those of other Aborigines. As Baldwin Spencer put it, not unambiguously:

The mother is of a very low intellectual grade, while the father most often belongs to the coarser and more unrefined members of higher races. The consequence of this is that the children of such parents are likely to be, in most cases, of much greater intellectual calibre than the more intelligent natives, though, of course, there are exceptions to this.³

But, while they were superior to other Aborigines, they remained well below the level of Whites. Elkin noted, a decade and a half after Spencer's pronouncement, 'those whites who have worked with half-castes and blacks all admit the superiority of the former'.⁴

It was most commonly argued in the NT, both by officials and other Whites - some of them sympathetic to the plight of Half-castes - that they somehow inherited 'the evil tendencies of both black and white intermingled and intensified'.⁵ Visitors to the North took home with them the northern view that even 'the most sophisticated, women especially, will listen to the call of the wild',⁶ that 'Breed and personality will show...in spite of [a favourable] environment',⁷ that 'whatever is done for the half-caste must be done with a full realisation of the primitive emotional instincts, inherited from the black forebears, which are likely to persist for a long time'.⁸

Popular vilification was largely a consequence of shame about the thought of Whites mixing their 'blood' with that of allegedly inferior Blacks. It was a result of guilt about the prospect of people of White ancestry living in degraded circumstances with Aboriginal people. It resulted also from fear that their supposedly superior White ancestry rendered Half-castes more capable of acts of resistance to the settlers and of assuming a leadership role in such action. This demeaning regard received sustenance from the pronouncements of much of the scientific community and particularly the findings of eugenicists abroad.

Eugenics

Eugenicists commonly asserted that 'dysgenic imbalance' in society was the result of the greater incidence of physical, mental and moral degeneracy inherited by members of the lower classes. So it was that this social stratum included many of the criminal, alcoholic, pauper and 'defective' elements that were expanding in such a way as to threaten to

³ Spencer 1913:2. See also SAPP, No. 26 of 1913, Elkin 1929a:28, 1929b:40-44.

⁴ Elkin 1929a:28.

⁵ Elkin Papers, Litchfield to Secretary SPCC, 11 August 1930.

⁶ Terry 1927:201.

⁷ Wilkins 1928:223.

⁸ McCann 1959:79.

overwhelm the 'superior' classes.⁹ The need to prevent 'degenerates' from breeding, while encouraging the propagation of people with 'desirable' traits, warranted 'scientific' state intervention in the lives of both the degenerate and those considered potentially debased.

Leaders in the movement, like Francis Galton, Karl Pearson and Madison Grant, were among those arguing also for the replacement of 'inferior' races by the 'superior', with Aborigines ranked among the 'very lowest species'.¹⁰

In the period to the mid-1920s, there was much scientific adherence to notions of reversion and racial inferiority in people of mixed descent. It was argued that 'miscegenation commonly spells disharmony - disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities ... A hybridised people are a badly put together people and a dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people'.¹¹

Disharmonic procreation was said to result in physical abnormality¹² and a greater incidence of disease in children, delinquency, alcoholism, prostitution and feeble-mindedness.¹³ The more unlike one another the races, the more undesirable was miscegenation.¹⁴ Even those who took issue with this position, were inclined to assert that the reason for feebleness in the off-spring of mixed mating was not racial mix, but the fact that the parents were 'diseased, licentious, or feeble-minded'.¹⁵ This kind of conclusion played into the hands of those who regarded Aboriginal parents as suffering from all these disabilities.

American IQ studies showing the superiority of Anglo-Saxon immigrants over Negroes,¹⁶ also showed Mulattoes - by virtue of their Western European heredity - to be intellectually superior to Negroes, but inferior to Whites.¹⁷ This was corroborated by studies elsewhere, some of which indicated that intelligence in children was commensurate with the amount of White 'blood' they possessed.¹⁸ Nevertheless, the disharmonies evident in racially mixed people were apparent also in the mental realm: a greater number than among either Blacks or Whites were 'muddled and wuzzle-headed'.¹⁹ These conclusions appeared to be supported in Australia by limited testing during the mid 1920s and 1930s by Fry and Pulleine at Hermannsburg. They compared the intelligence of a small number of Full-blood and Half-caste children 'in groups of sexes of equivalent age and length of time at school' and cautiously concluded:

The most definite result of this grouping was to show a superiority of scholastic attainment by the senior boys with white blood over that of their full-blooded

⁹ McCallum 1982:20.

¹⁰ Madison 1916:28; cf. Boaz 1938:144, 157.

¹¹ Davenport 1917:56; see also Stoddard 1925:120.

¹² Jennings 1930:280-3.

¹³ Mjoen 1921:50-2.

¹⁴ Gates 1929:335; see also Bailey 1924:17.

¹⁵ Castle 1903:234.

¹⁶ For example Brigham in Haller 1963:151; see also summary of research findings in East 1923:134-7, Viteles:1928; for an example of the spread of this information in Australia, see Elkin 1929b.

¹⁷ For example, Castle 1926:153. For Hawaiian evidence showing similar intermediate results, see Gulick 1937:43-5.

¹⁸ For example, Eells 1933, Hunter and Sommermier 1922, Garth 1922, 1927.

¹⁹ Davenport and Steggerda 1929, Jennings 1930:284-6.

companions. It is tempting to draw a conclusion that the full-blooded children are retarded in mental growth with increasing age to a greater degree than children with some degree of European ancestry. The numbers are too few to warrant this deduction however.²⁰

An even more limited, though perhaps no less influential, study by Taylor and Jardine, corroborated the findings.²¹

The most extreme wing of the eugenics movement - that which, among other things, advocated sterilising the 'unfit' in society - found little support in Australia. Australian eugenists appear generally to have acknowledged some environmental influences on individuals' make-up. Moreover, eugenics in Australia was in decline by the late 1920s and through the 1930s as professional opinion increasingly conceded the influence of environment. Eugenic assumptions about the adverse biological effects of race mixture were seen by a growing number of scientists and others to be backed by inadequate evidence.²² But conclusions denying the inferiority of racially mixed groups were rejected by many White Australians, especially those with large numbers of Half-castes in their midst, who clung to the earlier scientific justification they had found for their prejudices. In the NT, Half-castes comprised 13.6% of the non-Aboriginal population in 1938-39, and in Darwin and Alice Springs the Homes brought the proportion of Half-castes to Europeans to 16.4% and 57% respectively.²³

Progressivism, psychology and institutionalisation

Eugenics was an extreme element of the broad, complex movement of progressivism which took root in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Australia. Increased state intervention was justified in the interests of improving national strength through various means of social engineering aimed at making society more 'efficient'.²⁴ Progressivists, who did not hold with eugenic views, nonetheless shared a concern about rates of juvenile crime and the alleged spread of immorality among the young, which was thought to endanger middle class power. The implications of this for the treatment of young Half-castes was profound.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the types of behaviour said to suggest delinquent proclivities proliferated and became causes for legislative palliatives.²⁵ Alleged juvenile moral decay was sheeted home largely to working class parents said to be careless about, neglectful of, and to have less concern for, family.²⁶ Medical judgements were sought increasingly by officials looking into the condition of the Australian working class. As those judgements failed to give working class mothers much credit for desirable child-rearing practices, it was concluded that parents would be happy enough to abandon children declared 'neglected' or otherwise destined to delinquency, to state care designed to manufacture some semblance of the ideology of 'family' critical to progressivist notions of the moral society. The implications for Aboriginal parenthood are clear.

20 Fry and Pulleine 1931:155-6.

21 Taylor and Jardine 1924:277-8.

22 Haller 1963:181; Elkin 1929b:42-4.

23 Donovan 1981:1.

24 Roe 1984.

25 Barbalet 1983:193ff.

26 Barbalet 1983:195, Kociumbas 1983:chs 1, 5, 6; May 1973:23-4; Reiger 1985:ch.2.

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From the 1890s, psychiatrists were prominent among doctors publishing works on eugenics and ways of reducing the number of hereditarily unfit in the population.²⁷ However, an insistence on treatment - frequently in institutions - through re-education of what were seen as maladjusted personalities,²⁸ implied that it was a combination of hereditary and environmental factors that resulted in mental deficiency and disease. During the 1920s and 1930s behaviourism caused psychologists to wrestle with the problem of assigning weight to heredity and environment as determinants of delinquent behaviour.

But lingering notions of instinct psychology added weight to the practice of consigning children to homes. The proposal that the habits of their remote ancestors had become, in delinquents, driving 'instincts', 'tendencies' or 'inner forces'²⁹ and that instinct existed in its purest form in the most 'primitive' societies,³⁰ was entirely in keeping with prevailing views about the nature of the Half-caste. There was considerable biomedical acceptance of the Lamarckian recapitulation theory that the various stages in the mental development of the child retraced in its major outlines the mental history of the race from 'primitive' times.³¹ As G. Stanley Hall explained, 'hard conditions like homelessness, imperfect food and health, and...sexual precocity' in adolescence were likely to result in reversion to or arrest at the 'savage' state of childhood.³² Cyril Burt explained the 'anthropological conception of moral degeneracy' which showed some link between defects in intelligence and arrest in moral development, suggesting 'that the moral defective is a biological throw-back or reversion - a return by some freak of inheritance, to a primitive or even pre-human type'. The tell-tale facial features that typified these 'degenerates' were those of the 'savage'.³³ Segregation was recommended. The theory remained acceptable among Australian anthropologists well into the 1920s.³⁴

Medical opinion was inclined to see education as a palliative for mental defectiveness and the threat it posed for social order.³⁵ Medically defined levels of mental ability became important in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and children who failed to conform to the standards currently defined as normal for specific age and gender groups were classified as physical and mental 'defectives'; they were a menace to the 'healthy' children; their sexual instincts were likely to be precociously developed and many were of a criminal type; their proclivities were detrimental to the well-being of the nation.³⁶ Special institutions for the sub-normal - a label that encompassed an astonishing number of school children - providing the low-level general education and training that would typify Half-caste homes in the NT to the mid-30s, were urged as a means of helping children and so reducing crime and immorality.³⁷

27 Garton 1986:25.

28 Cashen 1980:73ff; McCallum 1982:30.

29 Cashen 1980:76; Stocking 1962:246.

30 Jones 1980:127.

31 Stocking 1962:244.

32 Hall 1915:45, 47.

33 Burt 1969:39, 302.

34 Gower 1902; Rudd 1909:765-6; Pitt-Rivers 1923:499.

35 McCallum 1982:18; see also 'Report of the Committee on the Feeble-minded', *Australasian Medical Congress Transactions*, 1914.

36 Kociumbas 1986:27.

37 See, for example, McCreery 1908, Sutton 1911, Smith 1912:3-7.

The link of Half-castes with delinquents appeared to be demonstrated with the publication in 1917 of an account by S.D. Porteus of intelligence testing he conducted with delinquent boys and Aboriginal children. The latter, most of them of mixed descent, compared more than favourably with delinquent group, but were shown to be markedly inferior to 'normal' White children; it followed, by implication, that they were predisposed to delinquent behaviour.³⁸

Homes for children.

As astonishing number of children were considered to be in need of institutional care. Evangelical Christians were at the forefront of efforts to remove children from their kin and confine them where they could be educated and trained out of their alleged delinquent proclivities.

Institutions for orphan or destitute children assumed complete guardianship of inmates until age eighteen³⁹ They were poorly staffed and conditions were harsh, both by today's standards and those of the time. Contact with parents, when known, was infrequent and strictly controlled in the supposed interests of children's moral welfare. As well as inculcating middle class morality, the schools in institutions aimed to develop useful members of the labour force, literate and skilled in a trade or other occupation. Apprenticeship for the boys and domestic service for girls - under exploitative conditions - were the norm.

While the actual range and number of institutions grew during the early twentieth century, the pretexts for removing children from their families proliferated and many more children were committed to state care, a smaller percentage of them was being consigned to institutions. A growing belief in the importance of the environment in children's upbringing had brought large, impersonal, barracks-like institutions into disrepute by the time the Half-caste homes were established in the NT Boarding-out schemes were introduced, under which destitute or neglected children were placed in selected families as foster children to be brought up in what were considered 'natural' conditions. There was an increased tendency for institutionalisation to be seen as a last resort. Further, those institutions that remained - in fact which proliferated - became somewhat more humane and a cottage system began to emerge. There was a growing official recognition of the need to provide as much of a normal home environment as possible as well as education, social, moral and religious training - not just the bare necessities of life.⁴⁰

Cook and the Half-castes

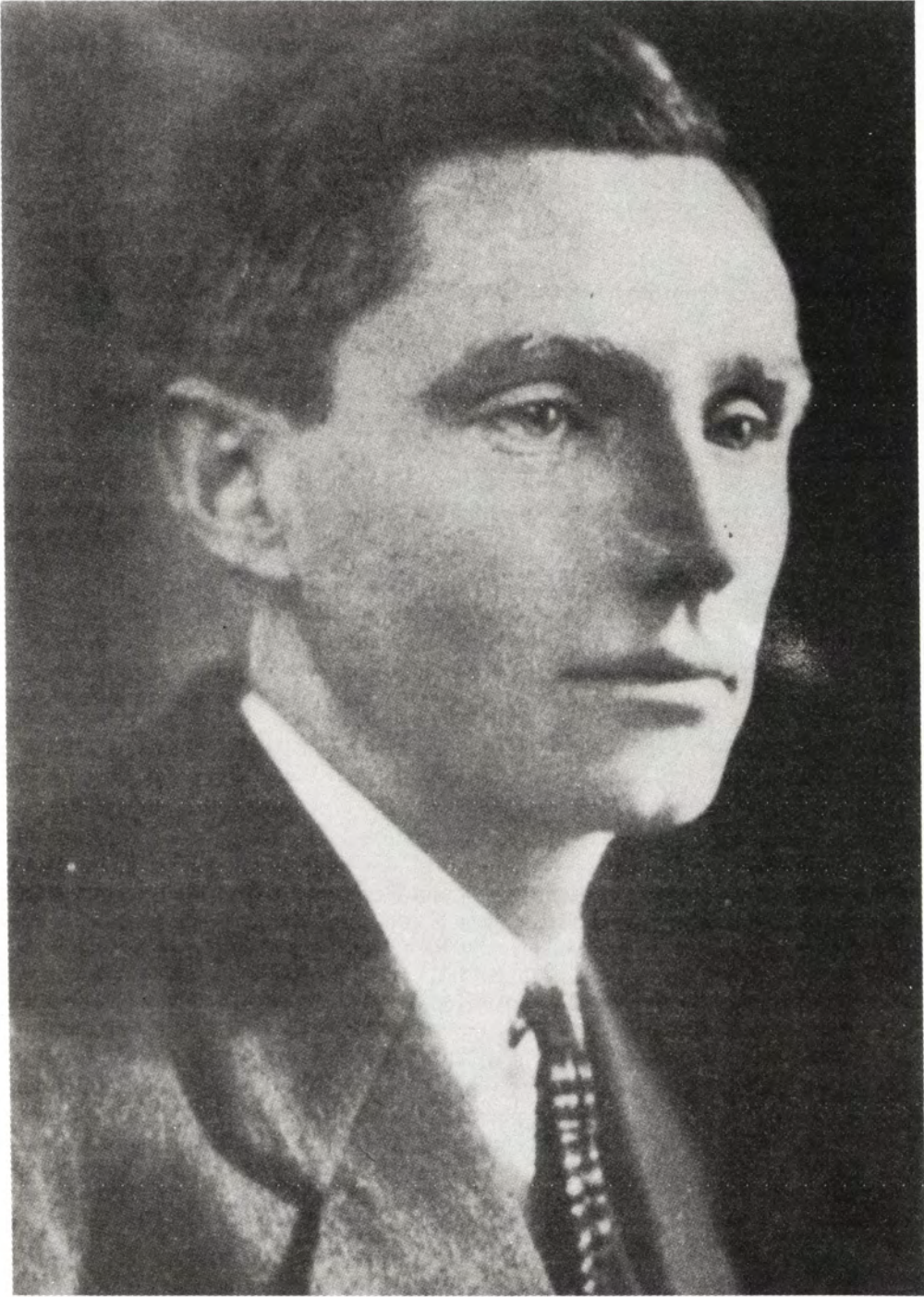
Cecil Cook commenced as Chief Protector in February 1927, at the age of twenty-nine His family had migrated from England when he was an infant and he grew up in central west Queensland where his father worked as a general practitioner in Barcaldine.

After studying Medicine at the University of Sydney, some of his earliest professional experience was as Medical Officer in the Hughenden and Longreach hospitals. He later took a post-graduate Diploma in Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and spent three years as Wandsworth Research Fellow at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. As part of the work of the fellowship, he was appointed in 1925 to conduct an investigation

³⁸ Patens 1917.

³⁹ Much work has been done on the development of Australian institutions by, for instance, Brian Dickey, John Ramsland, Noeline Williamson and Elizabeth Windschuttle.

⁴⁰ Dickey 1977:177ff., Davey 1956:41.



Dr C.E. Cook, 1923. Courtesy Ms Robyn McIntyre.



The Bungalow' (original building in Alice Springs), H. Basedow, 1921, Australian Archives ACT.

into the epidemiology of leprosy in the NT and Western Australia. The following year he conducted an investigation into hookworm in North Queensland.

Cook's work in the NT was noticed by John McLaren, Secretary for Home and Territories - the Commonwealth Department responsible for the Territory. McLaren was impressed by the young man's work and played a hand in his appointment.⁴¹

Cecil Cook trained and matured during the period of progressivist intellectual ferment dubbed by Michael Roe 'the onslaught of vitalism'.⁴² It is clear that he was heavily influenced by that ferment and carried with him to Darwin a progressivist selection of the views of psychologists, anthropologists, geneticists and eugenists about the racial hygienic fate of Australian society. But he appears to have kept abreast of recent research in the area of race mixing. His work in the North coincided with a period of growing scientific attack

⁴¹ McLaren to Pearce, 19 June 1925, AA CRS A1 28/8706. For details of earlier appointments, see AANT A659 39/1/643, Park to McLaren, 9 September 1924, McLaren to Park, 14 October 1924; A1 37/15140, Kragen's notes of interview with Cook, 15 June 1927.

⁴² Roe.:1984:1.

on eugenic assumptions about the adverse biological effects of race mixture. This is evident in the policies he pursued.

On the other hand, the crusade-like paternalism of the progressives⁴³ is nowhere more apparent than in Cook's policies. The nationalist concern for racial well-being, translated into Australia's White Australia Policy, was perhaps the most vital driving force in Cook's policy making. This is apparent in his preoccupation with the welfare of women rather than men. But that, in any case, was a hallmark of the progressives - a reverence for women as mothers, a concern for their welfare and their children's and a major concern with venereal diseases so potentially inimical to White racial welfare.⁴⁴ In addition, Cook was concerned that a predominantly Coloured northern population would comprise a left-wing revolutionary element in Australia. That was entirely the kind of thinking that helped motivate the proponents of institutionalisation and the progressivist upholders of efficient state control of those parts of the population in need of welfare assistance. Notions of *laissez-faire* in the nation's affairs, long since on the wane, suffered further with the onset of the Depression. That disaster began only two years after Cook commenced work in Darwin.

Cook's 1931 view of the fact of a growing number of people of mixed descent never really changed and his policy of 'breeding out the colour' by inducing Half-caste women to marry European men is the best-known element of his welfare policies: it represents an ultimate eugenicist solution.

The women could not, he believed, be expected to have any interest in marriage to Half-caste males their own age because of the difference in their education and upbringing as a consequence of a policy, before his time, of bringing in to the Homes mainly girls. By marrying Whites, the women would themselves stop bearing illegitimate mixed-descent babies, and the children they did have would be fair-skinned and possess genetic attributes conducive to good health in the tropics. Moreover, marriage would prevent White males from cohabiting with Aboriginal women. Cook put it this way:

The excess white male population living in rural districts, deprived at present of the company of women of its own race, is denied any opportunity of making homes. These men live, therefore, for the most part in camps many of which are a very low order and closely approximate to those favoured by the aboriginal. It is only a matter of time under these conditions before cohabitation with the aboriginal female follows. This cohabitation is attended by moral, economic and physical deterioration of the individual which react unfavourably upon the development of the Territory generally. Many such men would be prepared to marry half-caste females and make decent homes. Provided the girl has been reared to a moderately high standard there can be no objection to such a mating resulting as it does in the white man rearing a white family in good circumstances instead of a half-caste family under degrading conditions. Experience shows that the half-caste girl can, if properly brought up, easily be elevated to a standard where the fact of her marriage to a white will not contribute to his deterioration. On the contrary under conditions in the Territory where such marriages are socially accepted among a certain section of the population, the results are more beneficial than otherwise since the deterioration of the white is thereby arrested and the local population is stabilised by the building of homes. It is not to be supposed that such marriages are likely to produce an inferior generation. On the contrary a large proportion of the half-caste female population is derived from

43 Ibid.:9-10.

44 Ibid.:13ff.



Sleeping quarters, 'The Bungalow' (Jay Creek), 1928. Photograph by Dr W.D. Walker.



Institutionalised children at 'The Bungalow' (former Overland Telegraph Station), Alice Springs, 1934. Courtesy National Library of Australia.

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the best white stock in the country whilst the aboriginal inheritance brings to the hybrid definite qualities of value - intelligence, stamina, resource, high resistance to the influences of tropical environment and the character of pigmentation which even in high dilution will serve to reduce the at present high incidence of Skin Cancer in the blonde European.⁴⁵

Another dimension to the problem was the need to eliminate the breeding of Asian-Half-caste offspring which created 'a position of incalculable future menace to purity of race in tropical Australia'.⁴⁶

Cook's increasing concern during the 1930s is demonstrated by the almost comic fretting about the nature of the racial mix of school children. In annual reports to 1928, it was sufficient to record the number of Half-caste and Quadroon children and to differentiate those with Malay ancestry. Between 1933 and 1937 however, the school population was shown to include Octoroon, Quadroon, European-Aboriginal, Afghan-Aboriginal, Afghan-Half-caste-Afghan, Chinese-Aboriginal, Half-caste-Half-caste, Half-caste-Chinese-Half-caste, Half-caste-Chinese-Aboriginal, Malay-Half-caste, Aboriginal-Half-caste and Cingalese-Half-caste.

The government, said Cook, had to decide whether it wanted in the North a predominant and virile Coloured population living at White standards and competing with Whites on equal terms, a predominantly Coloured population regarded as an inferior section of the community competing with Whites on the basis of low wages and thereby eliminating White labour or an 'ever increasing coloured population of revolutionary frame of mind excluded by statute from industry and maintained on Government relief'.⁴⁷ His argument was decidedly shaky to the extent that he all but ignored the presence of Half-caste males in the marriage stakes. But he had a sure political instinct designed to make Canberra sit up and take notice.

The matter was sensitive politically, and Cook had to withstand criticism in the southern press, the House of Representatives and by southern welfare bodies and academics.⁴⁸ In the face of much contrary opinion⁴⁹ he insisted that there would be no atavism.

45 Cook to Weddell, 27 June 1933, AA CRS A659 40/1/408.

46 Cook to Morley, 28 April 1931 AA CRS A1 96/6595.

47 Cook to Weddell, 27 June 1933. AA CRS A659, 30/1/408.

48 See, for example, *Herald*, 8 June 1933 in AA CRS A659/40/1/408; A1 35/3951, Helen Baillie in 'Notes of Deputation Representing Aboriginals and Various Associations Interested in Aboriginal Welfare Work, which Waited upon the Minister for the Interior at Commonwealth Offices Melbourne, on Wednesday, 23rd January 1935 at 2.30 p.m.'; E.J. Holloway article in *Herald*, 12 June 1934; Patrol Boat Captain Waterson quoted in *Daily Telegraph*, 26 May 1939; A1 34/6710, Marriage of Half-Caste Women, nd, with copy of cable Giles to Brown, nd; A1 38/23077, Litchfield to Perkins, 21 December 1933; PD 28 June 1934, 1 August 1934.

49 Stanner and Elkin were two of a number of people who considered that the incidence of regression - about which little was known in Australia - might offset attempts to eliminate colour: Elkin Papers, Box 68, File 145, newspaper cutting, nd, giving Elkin's view; AA CRS A659 40/1/408 cutting, *Sydney Sun*, 11 June 1933, 18 June 1933 for Stanner's opinion. Queensland's Chief Protector J.W. Bleakley was another: see AA CRS A1928 4/5, cutting *Daily Mail*, 7 June 1933, 8 June 1933, *Brisbane Courier*, 7 June 1933, *Telegraph*, 7 June 1933.

In 1938 Cook felt able to claim that, with few exceptions, marriages approved in the six years since the policy was implemented, had proved 'eminently successful'.⁵⁰ In fact though, Cook revealed that on the whole he was not fussy about whom the girls married when he informed the Administrator that 'general consent' was given to such marriages, but that formal approval could not be given to officiating clergymen in two cases where the proposed bridegrooms had not yet chosen their brides.⁵¹ There is evidence of girls jumping at the opportunity to marry a White man in order to get out of the Home; the success rate of such unions is said to have been low.⁵²

Cook's concern about 'revolutionary' elements in the population developed further as unemployment worsened during the Depression. Here was a difficulty he had early tried bravely and ambitiously to come to grips with. Without reference to Canberra, he induced the Government Resident in 1930 to promulgate the Apprentices (Half-castes) Regulations. Under its provisions, as amended following intense lobbying by pastoralists, the North Australian holder of an employment licence lost the entitlement to employ Half-caste youths under that licence. Instead, Half-castes between the ages of 16 and 21 could, with the approval of a protector, be apprenticed for up to two years to work in the cattle industry. Wages and other working conditions were improved considerably. The Chief Protector was given the power to order that for every ten, twelve or eighteen Aborigines employed on a station, one, two or three Half-caste apprentices respectively should be engaged. He had the power, however, to waive the requirement should the employment of Whites be adversely affected.

Few matters concerning Aborigines and Half-castes generated so much heat and voluminous correspondence. In three years of tortuous negotiations subsequently forced on him by Canberra, Cook argued that some kind of employment scheme was critical to the future of Australia's North.⁵³ He painted a picture of a Territory with a majority fast-breeding Coloured population in as few as fifteen or twenty years' time. They would be indolent, destitute unemployed providing 'a profitable field for revolutionary agitators and be numerically sufficiently strong to threaten the peace, order and good Government of the Territory'. Or they would compete as cheap labour displacing Whites from jobs. Either way, a dangerous situation would come about. Industrial and social unrest leading to racial conflict were inevitable, he said, in a small community like the NT, should the proportionately large Coloured population maintain different standards from Whites.

In spite of trenchant opposition from pastoralists, aghast at the principle involved and mindless of the small numbers, Cook, with the support of the North Australia Workers' Union and the churches, won the day.

There was never any real change in the kinds of employment considered appropriate for Half-caste people. In the case of the girls this can be explained in terms of society's view of

50 Chief Protector, Annual Report 1937-8:24.

51 Cook to Weddell, 31 May 1932, A1 32/3578.

52 Barbara Bartells, NARU Seminar, 8 October 1987; Daisy Ruddick, pers. comm.; National Library of Australia, Manuscripts Collection, MSS 5574, Australian Inland Mission, (AIM) Box 187, Folder 3, North Australia Patrol (Darwin), Report on the Darwin situation from the point of view of the AIM, 26 June 1937 by Rev. C.T.F. Goy.

53 The essence of the debate is contained in AA CRS A1 33/479, 'Extract from Notes of a Deputation from the Central Australian Graziers' Association to the Minister for the Interior at Stuart' 11 July 1932, 'Extract from Notes of a Deputation from Pastoral Representatives to the Minister for the Interior at Darwin' 24 July 1932, Allen to Parkhill, 24 June 1932. See also Austin in Stockley *ed* 1989:128-141.

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their capacity and their place in life, on established practice and on Cook's desire to see them not make a career but rather play their part in breeding out colour. This, in turn, was in keeping with the progressivist view that the place of women was in the home raising healthy, well-adjusted children. There was, though, increased diligence in attempts to find Half-castes work with acceptable employers.⁵⁴ To Cook's credit, a nurse training scheme was implemented on a small scale and he won the right to negotiate a higher wage for young employees he considered worthy. On the other hand, the considerable control that had long been exercised over workers' earnings was strengthened further.

Cook also began - for the first time in the NT - to give serious thought to the employment needs of adult Half-castes. He was particularly concerned about women formerly living as destitutes and prostitutes in town and, in recent years, detained in the Kahlin Compound. But he was concerned also for men who had grown up in Darwin to compete in the unskilled market with a superfluity of White labour and most of whom were 'perennially destitute, a prey to agitators'.⁵⁵ There is insufficient space to provide detail; it suffices that while some of Cook's ideas were unrealistic, a sometimes successful effort was made to provide work.

Less enlightened is the tight control he sought always to exercise over the lives of adults. Cook argued strenuously against agitation by Half-caste people, supported by the North Australian Workers' Union, for exemption from the Ordinance.

At age twenty-one, unless the Chief Protector had concluded they were incapable of managing their own affairs, Half-castes obtained full citizenship rights with the one important proviso that they could not legally consume alcohol. It took eight years of pressure to have the Ordinance amended in 1936 to allow the Chief Protector to declare somebody to be no longer deemed a Half-caste. The northern Administration's opposition to exemption provides perhaps the clearest indication of its stultifying paternalism.

A vigorous advocate of Half-caste drinking rights, Cook pointed out, was the Communist Party. He and police chief Stretton, in a familiar refrain, saw the movement for full citizenship rights as a revolutionary plot whereby Half-castes would be 'enlisted by the Communists in their projected campaign of violence' in exchange for a campaign winning their rights⁵⁶ and any concession was 'liable to be hailed by that Party as a victory on behalf of the Half-caste and a service which should win the Party some prestige'. Moreover, by granting the 'privilege' to one section of the Half-caste community, it would worsen the already difficult task of controlling alcohol sales to those denied drinking privileges. The ensuing resentment in those remaining under the Chief Protector's control would obviate their having 'full confidence in that Officer as...guide, philosopher and friend'; this alienation of the Half-castes' imagined confidence in the Chief Protector was undesirable. But more to the point, Half-castes were 'improvident, careless and for the most part perennially destitute. Liberty to indulge legally in alcohol is calculated to aggravate their present distress'.⁵⁷ Indulgence risked 'social degradation for himself and actual bodily harm

54 Chief Protector, Annual Report 1929-30:5, 1930-31:8.

55 Cook to Weddell, 18 February 1933, AA CRS A1 33/4332.

56 Comment by Dr Cook, CMO, North Australia, nd, Stretton to Weddell, 21 July 1931, Cook to Weddell, 20 July 1931; F1 39/408, Carrodus to Weddell, 10 August 1936, Stretton to Weddell, 18 August 1936, Kirkland to Weddell, 18 August 1936. A452 52/539.

57 Comment by Dr Cook, CMO, North Australia, nd, Cook to Weddell, 20 July 1931. A452 52/539.

to the rest of the community'.⁵⁸ The same, of course, might have been said of many Whites. In fact it is likely that, given the opportunity, Cook would also have denied them drinking rights. Nevertheless, after a lengthy battle by a small group of determined Half-caste men, a concession was granted by Canberra. The new rule was administered cautiously and it was not uncommon for exemptions to be revoked. In practice, the change required people to make a conscious decision to foresake part of their heritage - to cease to associate with Aborigines or with Half-castes of whom authorities did not approve.

Cook remained a firm advocate of institutionalisation of children - and also of single, adult women. Early in his time in the NT the Chief Protector dismissed a suggestion that a cottage system of care be contemplated. While appearing to accept the principle, he argued that the morals of the senior girls precluded them from exercising a supervisory role in a cottage.⁵⁹ In later years, when he claimed to have solved the problem of immorality among inmates, he still failed to contemplate this more enlightened system of care. He was also unmoved by calls for the boarding out of Half-caste girls.⁶⁰

The only serious consideration given to boarding out related to Quadroons and Octoroons. Minister John Perkins appealed to families and institutions down south to take children in.⁶¹ But this Cook actively opposed, since it involved sending them interstate. Significant numbers of Quadroon females, married to Whites, would be a means of breeding out discernible colour in their offspring.⁶² In what amounted to a criticism of the efforts of the Half-caste Homes, and because they were considered to 'have more intelligence than cross-breeds with a preponderance of aboriginal blood',⁶³ school-age girls were sent to board at the Darwin Convent. There, authorities agreed, they would be provided with a better opportunity in life than if they stayed at the home.⁶⁴ In Alice Springs, where there was no convent, they remained at the Bungalow. Some of fairest looking children had been sent south in the past, though South Australian authorities looked askance at the practice. Now Cook argued for their retention in the Territory 'with a view to limiting factors of depopulation'.⁶⁵ For this reason, presumably, he also ended a long-standing practice of sending Alice Springs girls to work in Adelaide. In later years, Cook maintained that the Ordinance was not usually applied to Quadroons and Octoroons. However, he vehemently opposed suggestions that they not be covered by the legislation. As it happened, a Supreme Court ruling in 1937 deemed them not to be covered. Cook failed in an energetic attempt to have the Ordinance changed.⁶⁶

It is not possible here to detail Cook's attempt to induce Canberra to improve the quality of the Homes, which remained poor - worsened by overcrowding resulting from the

⁵⁸ Cook to Weddell, 12 August 1932, A452 52/540 file 2.

⁵⁹ Cook to Weddell, 3 October 1927 A659 39/1/15880.

⁶⁰ 'Memorandum by Members of the Board of Anthropological Research of the University of Adelaide as to the Protection and Care of Aborigines', October 1931; Perkins to Cleland, 12 December 1932, EP Box 61, Item 73.

⁶¹ Details on A1 34/6800.

⁶² Cook to Weddell, 1 March 1929, 11 June 1929, A431 46/3026.

⁶³ Secretary Prime Minister's Department to Brown, 16 August 1930. A431 48/961.

⁶⁴ Weddell to Deane, 20 March 1931, Cook to Giles, 30 April 1934, Carrodus to Brown, 9 May 1934, Brown to Hensche, 11 September 1935, Weddell to Brown, 29 October 1935, A1 34/5541.

⁶⁵ Cook to Giles, 30 April 1934, A1 34/5541.

⁶⁶ Details on AANT F1 37/734; F1 39/408; NTAS F68, C25.

much more earnest effort Cook made to bring in children from rural areas. The attempt he did make is evidence of some faith in manipulation of the environment as a means of improving the minds and morals of Half-castes, even if he lacked sufficient faith to give more modern forms of care a try.

This faith is further shown by his perhaps belated efforts to improve schooling. Throughout the period to World War Two there was general agreement about the type of schooling that was most appropriate for the children. Education should embody a strong vocational element, though no real attempt was made to provide it. It was agreed equally that a modified curriculum should be taught in light of the children's presumed inherited intellectual defects and the environmental disadvantages of their past: moreover, there had long been deep suspicion among northerners about educated Aborigines and Half-castes, who were regarded as potential ring-leaders in crime and defiant behaviour. No doubt schooling also threatened the superior image Whites had of themselves.

The more Cook thought about it, however, the more he criticised both the notions of vocational training and a modified curriculum during the primary years. More - and more efficient - schooling was part of the progressives' platform:⁶⁷ the children, Cook insisted, were entitled to the same period of elementary education, based on the same curriculum, as Whites. This left room for only minimal vocational training which in any case, he believed, was most appropriately carried out on the job. He disagreed with the NSW Director of Education who considered Half-castes incapable either of education beyond Year 3 or of aspiring to full citizenship. Cook retorted that they could and would do better. They had the ability and, moreover, 'It is patently unreasonable to expect any person, especially a coloured one, whose education has stopped in the vicinity of the Third Grade standard, successfully to compete for employment in a white community where the average standard of Education is Sixth Grade'. Half-caste children were capable of handling the full curriculum: 'the backwardness of a certain number of coloured individuals should not preclude others, more nearly approaching the white norm, from the opportunities of full education available to white children'.⁶⁸ With the reluctant support of education authorities, Cook saw to it that facilities and staffing of schools in the homes was improved considerably - especially in Alice Springs. It seems no coincidence that within two years of Cook's departure from the Territory, inmates began winning highly competitive scholarships to secondary school in open competition with non-Aboriginal children. In fact, by the time Cook left the Territory, a foundation had been laid for real subsequent improvements in northern attitudes towards, and employment prospects of, Half-caste people.

Cook was clearly influenced by the growing body of international evidence showing people of mixed descent to have academic ability and other desirable human qualities. Virtually alone among northern officials he was sufficiently abreast of the latest anthropological and psychological evidence to question the pessimistic determinism of eugenicists. His policy for Half-castes, it is true, was premised on an extreme biological solution. While that was taking place however, the domestic, social and economic environments of Half-castes were to be manipulated in the interests of greater social acceptability and mental and moral improvement. In these respects Cook was remarkably progressive. This was not understood in the southern states and was resented in the North.

On the other hand, the controls he continued to exercise over the lives of adults - while in keeping with the views of most Australians - and his attempt to engineer a biological

⁶⁷ McCallum 1985:58.

⁶⁸ Cook to Abbott, 16 December 1937, F1 38/521.

solution to the Half-caste 'problem', makes him an extremist among progressivists. His biological engineering was persisted with at a time when race scientists were beginning to turn against eugenist solutions finding favour in Fascist Europe.

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