

“Australian Afterlives of Atlantic Slavery: Belatedness and Transpacific American Studies”

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This paper takes up the concept of the “afterlife” in order to reflect upon the logics of exclusion, belatedness, and succession that have characterised key interventions in transpacific American Studies. That transpacific American Studies might be thought of as “belated” is less to do with the actual chronology of the field than with the way that even early, ground-breaking scholars situated themselves in the field on the one hand and the way that others have engaged and, at times, celebrated the fantasised atemporality of the region itself on the other.² For Rob Wilson in 2000, the American Pacific was excluded from the “Eurocentric and/or ‘exceptionalist’” models that governed American Studies.³ Paul Lyons (2006) identified ignore-ance “as a constitutive component of American studies work in Oceania,” a concept that resurfaces in Mari Yoshihara’s Editor’s Note to Lyons’ and Ty P. Kawika Tengan’s 2015 special issue of *American Quarterly* on “Pacific Currents” in which Yoshihara proposes that the absence implied by the notion of a Pacific “Rim” is perpetuated by the neglect of the region in Americanist scholarship.⁴ Yunte Huang (2008) (after James Clifford) returned to the imagined Pacific’s premodernity in order to celebrate “aprogressive narratives” as a form of poetic resistance to imperialist and nationalist discourses of the transpacific, even as Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Sacarano’s *Colonial Crucible*

¹ We acknowledge gratefully the comments and suggestions of the following people as we wrote this essay: Warwick Anderson, Michelle Coghlan, Kate Fullagar, Sarah Gleeson-White, Marilyn Lake, Christina Twomey, and members of the “Place, Nation, and Environment” research group at the University of East Anglia. Clare Corbould is also grateful to the Australian Research Council for its generous support of her research.

² Foundational studies of the transatlantic such as Robert Weisbuch’s *Atlantic Double-Cross* (1986), Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Malcolm Bradbury’s *Dangerous Pilgrimages* (1996), Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (1998) pre-date early works in Pacific and Oceanic American Studies such as Rob Wilson’s *Reimagining the American Pacific* (2000), whereas the majority of transpacific American Studies publications coincided with the boom in transnational American Studies that occurred in the first decade of this century.

³ Rob Wilson, *Reimagining the Pacific: From South Pacific to Bamboo Ridge and Beyond* (Duke UP, 2000), ix.

⁴ Paul Lyons, *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination* (Routledge: New York and London, 2006), 8-10; Mari Yoshihara, “Editor’s Note” in Paul Lyons and Ty P. Kawika Tengan “Pacific Currents” Special Issue of *American Quarterly* 67.3 (2015): vii.

(2009), among others, made a strong case for U.S. imperial sites in the Pacific as laboratories for new forms of social and political experimentation.⁵ In his introduction to “Pacific Triangles,” the 2014 special issue of the *Australasian Journal of American Studies*, Paul Giles remarked on the propensity of Australasian Americanists to see “all the really serious action...[as] happening elsewhere.” Most recently, Donald Pease and Yuan Shu have framed *Turning toward the Transpacific* with an account of the Obama administration’s response to the “shift in the globe’s strategic and economic epicenter from the North Atlantic to the Western Pacific.” They thus situate the essays in the volume within a narrative in which the transpacific succeeds the transatlantic. The “Atlantic world,” they argue, “has occupied a privileged but settled space in constructing US history and narratives from the country’s founding to the end of the so-called American century.”⁶

Concurrently with these explorations of the transpacific, influential works of American Studies scholarship have also coalesced around the question of “afterlife.” Saidiya Hartman, for instance, declares “This is the afterlife of slavery – skewed life chances...premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment.”⁷ Lisa Lowe’s *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (2015) enters this conversation by exploring the emergence of racialized indentured labour in the Caribbean and the United States as a remainder of enslavement. Lowe argues that coerced labour endured beyond emancipation not in spite of dominant liberal narratives that freedom has overcome slavery, but precisely because of the necessary “intimacy” between genocide, enslavement, and indenture, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, liberal, individual, conceptions of freedom. What is missing from these recent scholarly and popular conceptions of Atlantic slavery and its aftermath/legacies in American Studies is, we suggest, Australia and the Pacific world. The history, experience, and afterlife of convict transportation, the coerced indenture of Pacific labourers, and the long history of unfree conditions under which Indigenous Australians laboured and lived, is often no more than a footnote—an *afterthought*—as in Lowe’s book. Indigenous labour in Australia appears only as a footnote

⁵ Yunte Huang, *Transpacific Imaginations: History, Literature, Counterpoetics* (Harvard UP, Cambridge and London, 2008), 8-9. Alfred W. McCoy and Francisco A. Scarano (eds), *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of a Modern American State* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2009).

⁶ Donald E. Pease and Yuan Shu (eds), *American Studies as Transnational Practice: Turning toward the Transpacific* (Dartmouth: Dartmouth College Press, 2015), 6, 8.

⁷ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007), 6.

in *The Intimacy of Four Continents* in Lowe's claim that "settler colonialism was premised on displacing the native indigenous populations to appropriate their lands, rather than extracting surplus value from their labor."⁸ Here, Lowe follows Patrick Wolfe's well-known dictum that the settler-colonial state aimed to expropriate the labour of African slaves, while aiming to expropriate the land of native peoples.⁹ But Lowe has assumed, as have some of Wolfe's critics, that the state was successful and that the labour of Australian and Pacific Indigenous and Islander people is irrelevant—or unrelated—to American Studies.¹⁰ This omission is not unique to the scholarship described above, as Damon Salesa has pointed out in his elegant summary of the ways Antipodean scholars do – and must – engage with Atlantic scholarship while Atlanticists can all but ignore the work of native histories and histories of colonialism.¹¹ With some still quite new, notable exceptions, American Studies scholars have not yet engaged with this aspect of Pacific history much, if at all.¹²

⁸ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), p203n88.

⁹ Patrick Wolfe, "Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race," *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 866-905.

¹⁰ For critique of Wolfe's formulation as totalizing, see Tim Rowse, "Indigenous Heterogeneity," *Australian Historical Studies* 45 (2014): 297-310. For responses to Rowse see Lorenzo Veracini, "Defending Settler Colonial Studies," and Miranda Johnson, "Writing Indigenous Histories Now," both in the same issue, pp. 311-316 and 317-330, respectively. For examples of the ways native peoples in America and Australasia were able to negotiate the legal and juridical structures of the settler state, see the introduction and chapters in Lisa Ford and Tim Rowse, eds., *Between Indigenous and Settler Governance* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

¹¹ Damon Ieremia Salesa, "Opposite Footers," in *The Atlantic World in the Antipodes: Effects and Transformations since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Kate Fullagar (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 283-300. Mae M. Ngai's recent work demonstrates that placing the two arenas within one temporal frame can radically alter how we understand both; see "Chinese Gold Miners and the 'Chinese Question' in Nineteenth-Century California and Victoria," *Journal of American History* 101 (2015): 1082-1105.

¹² All this is not to say that there have been no transnational considerations of labour in Australia and the Pacific; rather that this history does not seem to have been taken up within American Studies. We perceive a gap between those American and Americanist scholars who have considered the afterlife of slavery in the U.S. on the one hand and those based in Oceania who have taken up the history of labour in that region on the other. The list of scholars in each group is long, but exemplary recent examples of Pacific and Australian research in the latter field include: Clare Anderson, "After Emancipation: Empires and Imperial Formations," in *Emancipation and the Remaking of the British Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall, Nicholas Draper, and Keith McClelland (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 113-127; Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Tracey Banivanua-Mar, *Violence and Colonial Dialogue: The Australia-Pacific Indentured Labor Trade* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007); Laurence Brown, "'A Most

What does it mean, then, to pay attention to the Pacific as a space in which events (both historical and scholarly) purportedly happen later—follow after—without reproducing the

Irregular Traffic’: The Oceanic Passages of the Melanesian Labor Trade,” in *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, ed. Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Marcus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 184-203; Emma Christopher, *A Merciless Place: The Lost Story of Britain’s Convict Disaster in Africa and How It Led to the Settlement of Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2010); Gerald Horne, *The White Pacific: U.S. Imperialism and Black Slavery in the South Seas after the Civil War* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2007); Jane Lydon, “The Bloody Skirt of Settlement: Arthur Vogan and Anti-Slavery in 1890s Australia,” *Australian Historical Studies* 45 (2014): 46-70; Julia Martínez and Adrian Vickers, *The Pearl Frontier: Indonesian Labor and Indigenous Encounters in Australia’s Northern Trading Network* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2015); Cassandra Pybus, *Black Founders: The Unknown Story of Australia’s First Black Settlers* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006); Fiona Paisley, “An Echo of Black Slavery: Emancipation, Forced Labour and Australia in 1933,” *Australian Historical Studies* 45 (2014): 103-125. Clare Anderson has made a parallel critique of “the conceptual myopia that separates the Australian colonies from the Indian Ocean”: “Transnational Histories of Penal Transportation: Punishment, Labour and Governance in the British Imperial World, 1788-1939,” *Australian Historical Studies* 47 (2016): 381-397.

Transnational American Studies scholarship is worth focusing on here given its influence in shaping the trajectories of the discipline; for example, Lowe’s recent book has had over a dozen academic reviews in a (relatively) short time, many of which are review essays. The book was also the opening featured review in *American Historical Review*, and the editor of *American Quarterly* noted it as “much discussed”: Betty Joseph, review of Lowe, *American Historical Review* 121 (2016): 903-904; Mari Yoshihara, “Editor’s Note,” *American Quarterly* 68 (2016): v-vi. Similarly, Wai Chee Dimock’s 2017 compilation, *American Literature in the World: An Anthology from Anne Bradstreet to Octavia Butler*, engages Asian-American, “Pacific rim” writers extensively but fails to include writers from Hawaii, Guam or Samoa. The Pacific basin is covered by selections from Melville, Twain, and London.

A notable antidote to the persistence of the transatlantic paradigm is Paul Giles’ *Antipodean America: Australasia and the Constitution of U.S. Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) on which we build here. In this substantial study, Giles explores the complex negotiations that enabled both the U.S. and Australia to maintain in an uneasy equilibrium the internal divisions resulting from their shared position as simultaneously colonised and colonising societies (12). Giles is interested, as we are, in the ways in which the resulting “cultural formations overlap and interfere with each other in surprising ways” (18). But where Giles’ comparative method is dominated by spatial metaphors throughout, we seek to add to his cartography the temporal mode of “belatedness” as a lens through which to consider transnational American Studies.

For still others, Australia is not just not belated, but sometimes at the forefront in the history of ideas, or constituted by relations quite distinct from the supposed diffusion of knowledge from the North Atlantic. See, for instance, Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health, and Racial Destiny in Australia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). See also Anderson’s consideration of responses to the model he proposed: “Simply a Hypothesis? Race and Ethnicity in the Global South,” *Humanities Australia* 7 (2016): 55-62.

fetishized backwardness that has characterised so many representations of the region?¹³ We argue that the coerced recruitment and indenture of Pacific Islanders to work on Queensland sugar plantations in the latter half of the nineteenth century as well as unwaged Aboriginal labour in the first half of the twentieth have not yet received sufficient attention in transnational American Studies scholarship. We demonstrate the ways in which progressive white writers and Indigenous and Pacific Islander-descended writers described such practices as extensions of Atlantic slavery. We do not seek to draw direct parallels between indenture and slavery; rather, we are interested in the ways that tropes associated with slavery circulated in late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary and visual cultures.¹⁴ We

¹³ See, for example, Paul Lyon's discussion of the dominance of *Typee* as a signifier for Oceania in foundational works of American Studies and the resultant association of the region with pre- or anti-modernity (*American Pacificism*, 40-45). Sean Brawley and Chris Dixon discuss the promise of the "South Seas" as an escape from "civilisation" in the interwar years: *The South Seas: A Reception History from Daniel Defoe to Dorothy Lamour* (London: Lexington Books, 2015), 115-133.

¹⁴ The question of whether the coerced labour in Australia of Indigenous people and Pacific Islanders was slavery has preoccupied scholars – and indeed those exploited – since the early nineteenth century. See, in addition to many of the studies cited above: Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore, "Working for the White People: An Historiographic Essay on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Labor," *Labour History* 69 (1995): 1-29; Raymond Evans, *Fighting Words: Writing about Race* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999); Stephen Gray, Submission No. 11 to Legal and Constitution Affairs Committee. Parliament of Australia. Inquiry into Stolen Wages, 24 Jul. 2006, https://www.monash.edu/data/assets/pdf_file/0005/137723/stolen-wages-sub.pdf (accessed 9 Feb. 2017); Stephen Gray, "The Elephant in the Drawing Room: Slavery and the 'Stolen wages' Debate," *Australian Indigenous Law Review*, 11 (2007): 30-53; Victoria Haskins, "'& so we are 'Slave Owners'!': Employers and the NSW Aborigines Protection Board Trust Funds," *Labour History* 88 (2005): 147-164; Penelope Hetherington, *Settlers, Servants and Slaves: Aboriginal and European Children in 19th Century Western Australia* (Nedlands: University of Western Australia Press, 2002); Alison Holland, "Feminism, Colonialism and Aboriginal Workers: An Anti-Slavery Crusade," *Labour History* 69 (1995): 52-64; Rosalind Kidd, *The Way We Civilise: Aboriginal Affairs—The Untold Story* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1997); Ann McGrath, "'Modern Stone-Age Slavery': Images of Aboriginal Labour and Sexuality," *Labour History* 69 (1995): 30-51; Shirleene Robinson, *Something like Slavery: Queensland's Aboriginal Child Workers* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2008); Inara Walden, "'That Was Slavery Days': Aboriginal Domestic Servants in New South Wales in the Twentieth Century," *Labour History* 69 (1995): 196-209. For accounts of white settlers' ideas about Aboriginal people's labour, see Deirdre Coleman, *Romantic Colonization and British Anti-Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Angela Woollacott, *Settler Society in the Australian Colonies: Self-Government and Imperial Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 67-97. For early instances of Aboriginal men and women likening their circumstances – or potentially worsening circumstances to slavery – see Penny van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 119-122, 144-145, 178-179, 191-193.

propose that attention to slavery's rhetorical and visual afterlives in Australia and the Pacific also permits a clear view of the emphasis that contemporary critics of coercive labour practices put on the "life after" enslavement. Such critics included, of course, Indigenous peoples of Australia and the Pacific themselves. In doing so we seek to "unsettle" "settled" histories (such as that of Pease and Shu's Atlantic world) in ways that reflect Dana Luciano and Ivy Wilson's call to use temporal unsettlement to "*move* rather than mourn the state of things."¹⁵ We note, too, Vincent Brown's critique of "slavery's afterlife" as one in which "dispossession [is] the basis of black self-definition."¹⁶ Taking heed of such injunctions, we speculate that the logic of belatedness might be veiling what was, for those who laboured in unfree conditions, a tentative logic of hope, or at least one of futurity.

"Afterlife" is itself an invention or fiction of time and place, as Susan Gillman emphasizes. "The history of slavery," she writes, "is of course neither new nor unknown, its afterlives repeatedly rediscovered, and erased, at particular moments in time."¹⁷ Here we seek to "rediscover" the role played by Australia in prolonging the afterlife of enslavement, explore how this role might be illuminated and explicated by American Studies scholarship, and demonstrate why it might acquire particular urgency in our present political and scholarly moment. With the impetus provided by the #BlackLivesMatter movement, there has emerged a much stronger popular sense of the continuities of slavery in modern forms of power, including policing, punishment, and, especially, incarceration. Some of this popular sentiment about historical continuity has drawn on scholarship such as Michelle Alexander's

¹⁵ Dana Luciano and Ivy G. Wilson *Unsettled States: Nineteenth Century American Literary Studies* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2014), 11, emphasis in original.

¹⁶ Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery," *American Historical Review* 114.5 (2009): 1237.

¹⁷ Susan Gillman, "Remembering Slavery, Again," *Caribbean Quarterly*, Volume 61, Number 4 (Dec. 2015), 2. Indeed, from W. E. B. Du Bois in 1935, to the social historians of the late 1960s and 1970s, through to recent accounts of capital, governance and slavery, generations keep discovering the aftermath of American slavery. See, as a selection: W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935; New York: Free Press, 1998); Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Knopf, 1979); and most recently, the essays in Gregory P. Downs and Kate Masur, eds., *The World the Civil War Made* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015). For a critique of "a new kind of consensus history [that] has re-established itself as a popular way of understanding the American past" of slavery, anti-slavery, and the Civil War, see James Oakes, "The New Cult of Consensus," *Nonsite.org*, 25 Jan. 2017 (<http://nonsite.org/feature/the-new-cult-of-consensus>).

The New Jim Crow (2010), and has appeared on screen most recently in Ava DuVernay's documentary, *13th*. It has become urgent once again to understand slavery and its legacies, hence also the upsurge in numbers of feature films and television series on the topics, not least a remake of the iconic popular miniseries of Atlantic slavery and enslavement in the U.S. South, *Roots*.

Using Mark Twain's preoccupation with "clock time" during the Pacific leg of his 1897 travelogue, *Following the Equator: A Journey Around the World*, as a frame for our discussion we lay out a speculative genealogy of temporal and other tropes associated with New World slavery to demonstrate how such images were taken up in the Pacific context to critique coercive labour practices there. We note that ideas about the relationship between labour and time structured American responses to Australian novels such as Katharine Susannah Prichard's 1930 *Coonardoo*, which U.S. readers took to describe latter-day slavery. Finally, we examine how Indigenous and Pacific-island descended Australians took up the discourse of slavery when, in the 1970s and beyond, they seized the opportunity to portray their experiences in novels and memoirs.

Historian Laurence Brown has calculated that "in the second half of the nineteenth century more than 100 000 islanders from the western Pacific were recruited as migrant labourers in these regions, with more than 80% concentrated in Queensland, Fiji and New Caledonia." "The emergence of plantation production," he goes on to argue, was directly fuelled by the collapse of North American cotton production." Colloquially known as 'blackbirding,' this labour trade was regularly denounced by missionaries and abolitionists as a form of enslavement. That 'blackbirding' existed on a continuum with slavery, and indeed, in Twain's opinion was nothing short of a version of it, is the argument made in chapters five and six of *Following the Equator*. As Giles has noted, "Twain draws a clear parallel between Queensland and the American South, as he describes how 'vessels fitted up like old-time slavers come here and carried off the natives to serve as laborers in the great Australian province'" (*Antipodean* 257). In referring to the lands on which sugar was cultivated as "the Queensland plantations," Twain used the designation reserved in the United States for agricultural holdings associated with antebellum, Southern slavery. Twain's choice of designation was not a sign of American solipsism, or at least was not simply such a sign, as within Australia, then and now, the word plantation has been used to refer solely to the sugar industry. In assigning this label to farms on which that specific crop was raised, which was

the agricultural output associated most closely and often solely with the imported labourers from Pacific islands, Australians gave away their uneasiness regarding that which Twain argued was obvious and explicit: that those indentured labourers, or as he sardonically referred to them within quotation marks in his book, “recruits,” were slaves.

Twain layered implicit intertexts between his explicit observations, in order to echo and index narratives of slavery. In a repetition that recalls the abolitionist trope of the anguish demonstrated by enslaved mothers and fathers, he imagines the responses of recruits’ parents to the loss of their children to the labour trade: their violent defence of children at risk of being “carted into exile” and their subsequent sorrow and distress at their loss (82). Similarly, his note on the sharks that lurk in the wake of recruiting vessels—in such prevalence that Queensland law (as quoted by Twain) explicitly states that any unwilling recruit should be set ashore by boat so as to avoid their depredations—recalls both the satirical “PETITION of the SHARKS of Africa” that surfaced in 1792 amidst calls to end the slave trade and the terroristic use of sharks by ships’ captains unearthed by Marcus Rediker’s “human history” of the slave ship.¹⁸

Yet in a crucial respect, that of their relationship to time, indenture was not slavery. Enslavement was a world without end (at least on this earthly plane) and, as an inherited condition, one that was continued endlessly through reproduction. Indenture in theory, if not always in practice, had an end in sight. This relationship to time is signified in Twain via an extended digression on the use that returned labourers made of the trappings of civilization with which they had been vested during their time on plantations, in particular, the Waterbury watch: “The Waterbury, broken and dirty, finds its way to the trader, who gives a trifle for it; or the inside is taken out, the wheels strung on a thread and hung around the neck.” (85) This description is accompanied by two illustrations. The first, by F.M. Senior, appears on the same page, and depicts the returned recruit performing a kind of “cake walk” in his adapted finery, distributing his largesse to the villagers who seem to be either emerging from their huts to witness his return or exclaiming over their spoils.¹⁹ The second, by architectural

¹⁸ Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (Viking: London, 2007): 37-40.

¹⁹ Senior also provided illustrations for *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, a novel with explicit links to *Following the Equator* in that each chapter of the latter begins with an aphorism from *Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar*. As Stephen Railton notes, Senior’s illustrations for *Pudd'nhead* reduce their subjects “to cartoon-size, keeping their antics and anguishes at great distance from the reader’s sympathy,” a strategy that could equally be said of his illustrations

illustrator Francis Berkeley Smith is placed uncaptioned at the conclusion of the chapter directly below a quotation from former missionary, the Rev. William Gray's 1895 pamphlet *The Kanaka or how the Queensland planters get and treat their ———*": "The bedrock of this Traffic is that the life and liberty of a black man are of less value than that of a white man. And a Traffic that has grown out of 'slave-hunting' will certainly remain to the end not unlike its origin." (90) Situated thus, this image at first glance evokes both the abolitionist iconography of the slave as man and brother—the indirect gaze, the chain around his neck reminiscent of the slave collar—and Classical renderings of statesmen in profile as in Roman coinage. There is a nobility to this visage altogether lacking from the Senior image that speaks to the labourer's humanity, and yet the iconography of collar and coin monetises Gray's notion of the Islander's value in relation to that of the white man.²⁰

But closer attention to the neck piece renders this image altogether more emancipatory. The disassembling and rearrangement of the Waterbury watch may signify here both a quite literal rejection of "clock time"—a reclamation of the recruit's own time (and labour)—and the alienation of property—the right to do what he wants with the watch—which enslavers hoped to deny to the slave.²¹ By dismantling time, the returned recruit may imagine for himself a future. Reading Twain thus rounds out Lowe's four intimately linked continents into a global account of coercive labour trades that also allows a glimpse into the processes of future world-making enacted by the subaltern subjects of this traffic.

Well into the twentieth century, the Pacific continued to serve as an echo for Americans, a place where, at its edges at least, labour practices now outlawed in the "New World" of the

of Islanders in *Equator*. <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwillshp.html>. See also Henry B. Wonham's "The Minstrel and the Detective" in *Constructing Mark Twain: New Directions in Scholarship*, ed. Laura E. Skandera Trombley and Michael J. Kiskis (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001): 122-138, p. 132.

²⁰ Clive Moore has shown that Pacific labourers were paid at best one tenth the wages of white workers on Queensland sugar plantations (Lectures, 32-33); as Twain claims, the sum total of these wages was barely more than the sum paid to the "recruiter" for the delivery of new workers (83-84).

²¹ On the way in which the timepiece itself was seen to give permanence to life events see Mark M. Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 51. See also Philip D. Morgan on the "task system" and the ways in which this structure of labour allowed enslaved peoples to claim time beyond that taken to complete a given task as their own: in Morgan's words, as "sacrosanct." "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Lowcountry Blacks, 1700 to 1880," *William and Mary Quarterly* 39.2 (October, 1984): 563-599.

Western Hemisphere still flourished. In this, they were aided by humanitarians in London and elsewhere whose activism enlarged the category of slavery into “forced” labour, resulting in the 1930 Forced Labour Convention of the United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO). This work took decades, as organizations such as the London-based Anti-Slavery and Aborigines’ Protection Society (ASAPS) brought worldwide attention to forms of labour coercion that gradually became regarded as slavery. Such attention included in the United States, where Australia was especially interesting given the links between the two nations, as settler colonies and co-members of self-proclaimed small band of “white man’s” countries.²² As historian Fiona Paisley has shown, activism such as that of ASAPS served to bring the plight of Aboriginal workers to attention in London, Europe, and even in Australia itself.²³ Horrific reports also made their way into American newspapers, no more so than in very late 1930 and well into 1931, when newspapers in cities and towns as widespread as Fort Myers, Florida and Oakland, California to Port Huron, Michigan and Vernon, Texas picked up an Associated Press item out of far northern Australia. There, they reported, white Australian cattlemen were exploiting Aboriginal stockmen. The story ran under the title “Charges Slavery” and “Australians Accused of Enslaving Negroes.”²⁴ Australia came to serve as a kind of anti-modernity for white Americans; where Americans had supposedly tamed and closed the western frontier, and demolished such retrograde labor relations as slavery, in the remote parts of Australia, time functioned differently and one could still find dark-skinned labourers under the lash.²⁵

²² Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line: White Men’s Countries and the Question of Racial Equality* (Carlton, VIC: Melbourne University Press, 2008).

²³ Fiona Paisley, “An Echo of Black Slavery: Emancipation, Forced Labour and Australia in 1933,” *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 45, Number 1 (2014), 103-125.

²⁴ The short piece appeared under the title “Charges Slavery in Australia,” *News-Press* (Fort Myers, Florida), 23 Dec 1930; *Oakland Tribune*, 28 May 1931; *Vernon Daily Record* (Vernon, Texas), 24 Dec. 1930; *Times Herald* (Port Huron, Michigan), 12 Jan. 1931; and in the African American newspaper, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, 7 Feb. 1931. Another black newspaper used the title “Slavery in Australia, Says Union Worker,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, 18 Apr. 1931. Other titles were: “Australians Accused of Enslaving Negroes,” *News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 1 Jan. 1931; and “Says Australians Enslaving Negroes,” *Akron Beacon Journal* (Akron, Ohio), 29 Dec. 1930.

²⁵ For black Americans’ views of Australian labour relations at this time see Clare Corbould, “Black Internationalism’s Shifting Alliances: African American Newspapers, the White Australia Policy, and Indigenous Australians, 1919–1948,” *History Compass*, forthcoming.

Such ideas underpinned American reviews of Katharine Susannah Prichard's sixth novel, *Coonardoo*. Set in a similarly remote outback location as the places where it was said Aboriginal workers were "enslaved," the controversial book depicted the intertwined lives of the title character, an Aboriginal girl and then woman, and those of the white family on whose station (or "ranch," as Iowa and Michigan reviewers had it) she lived and toiled.²⁶ For several American reviewers, this was a depiction of latter-day slavery, with black subservient to white. A short notice in the *Los Angeles Times* demonstrated the recouping of a classic trope of American slave narratives, in which respectable and virtuous women were forced into sexual servitude.²⁷ "The docile, faithful native girl Coonardoo, whose story is here told," wrote the reviewer, "reveals the sad plight of the West Australian blacks. They are little better than slaves to their white masters, with the women used as hand-maidens in the biblical sense."²⁸ For many of these reviewers, such labour relations were borne of a primitiveness that the United States had overcome or outgrown. As one critic put it, Prichard rendered "The last frontier, the tropic plains of West Australia as her setting for *Coonardoo*. America, England, and even Australia, itself, knows very little about the northwest of Australia." These were "the wild, open To-morrow ranges, with only the cattle and the primitive black to break the spell of loneliness."²⁹ For still others, this backwardness was something for which to feel nostalgic. According to one reviewer's summary, the white Watts family "had a deep regard for the people who served and fought it for them, who claimed their loyalty and their protection. Generous and kindly was their relationship and the blacks recognized and accepted it by working for food and clothing."³⁰

²⁶ "Australian Prize Novel Worth While," *Sioux City Sunday Journal*, 18 May 1930; Grace M. Barber, "Aboriginal Life in Australia," *Detroit Free Press*, 27 Apr. 1930.

²⁷ Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is the ur-text of this genre. For foundational critical analyses of the way representations of the subjected black woman's body circulated and functioned in antebellum texts see Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 20-39; and Saidiya V. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For an analysis of the afterlives of such circulation and their role in constituting post-slavery subjectivities see Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

²⁸ "Fiction Affords Variety," *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1930, part III, p. 16.

²⁹ "Book Reviews," *Edwardsville Intelligencer*, 30 April 1930, 9.

³⁰ Grace M. Barber, "Aboriginal Life in Australia," *Detroit Free Press*, 27 Apr. 1930.

In the circulation back to the United States of accounts of Indigeneity that relied on tropes of antebellum American enslavement, Aboriginal people in Australia became aligned, once again, to African Americans. In terms of Indigenous Australians' resistance to their exploitation and impoverishment, there was some basis for this comparison. The Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association, founded in 1924, for instance, took as its motto, "One God, One Aim, One Destiny," which had served as the slogan for Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association for many years.³¹ When heavyweight boxer Jack Johnson toured Australia, Aboriginal men made friends with him and maintained activist relationships with him for many years. Johnson himself claimed that Jack London's description of his "golden smile" came from the look on Johnson's face that arose from a moment of kinship with an Aboriginal man.³² Such exchange would continue for decades, most obviously in the Freedom Rides in regional NSW, the formation of a Black Panther Party in Brisbane, and all manner of radical links between Black Power activists in the English-speaking islands of the Pacific, the US and Caribbean.³³ But such parallels in political and cultural activities were not the basis for the analogies made by white Americans (and more latterly, white Australians).

Rather, by portraying Aboriginal Australians as enslaved, white Americans distanced themselves from Australia. If Australians could permit slavery still to exist, then this British-descended nation-state was indeed belated, and perhaps even stagnant. Where the Revolution had catapulted the United States towards a post-slavery modernity, Australia remained its backward, slow, settler-colonial cousin. The fact that a great array of labor relations existed in both countries could be overlooked, as could the ongoing dispossession of Native American people. Slavery became America's "original sin," now overcome, and this narrative itself displaced the story of the colonies' founding. Thus not only did the disavowal of any link to Australia serve to make America seem more modern, it also permitted

³¹ John Maynard, "Vision, Voice, and Influence: The Rise of the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association," *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 34, Issue 121 (2003): 91-105.

³² Maynard, "Vision, Voice, and Influence."

³³ Ann Curthoys, *Freedom Ride: A Freedom Rider Remembers* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2002); John Maynard, "Marching to a Different Beat: The Influence of the International Black Diaspora on Aboriginal Australia," in *Indigenous Networks: Mobility, Connections and Exchange*, ed. Jane Carey and Jane Lydon (New York: Routledge, 2014), 262-272; Alyssa L. Trotmetter, "Malcolm X and the Aboriginal Black Power Movement in Australia, 1967-1972," *Journal of African American History*, Volume 100, Number 2 (Spring 2015): 226-249; Tracey Banivanua Mar, *Decolonisation and the Pacific: Indigenous Globalisation and the Ends of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Americans to “forget” the sin that predated African slavery: the invasion and colonization of land that belonged to someone else.

Yet when Indigenous Australians, and those descended from Pacific Island labourers, likened their experiences to those of enslaved African Americans, they did so in part to resist the alternative, which was to be cast alongside Native Americans as a dying race in need of the “protection” of the state.³⁴ If their labour was valuable enough to warrant enslaving them, then they were not the slowly perishing group that the logic of settler colonization required.³⁵ They were, in short, of the future rather than the past; by drawing attention to and critiquing the belated adoption of slavery in the Pacific, they paradoxically insisted upon their own endurance. Faith Bandler’s 1977 *Wacvie*, a biographical novel based on the life of her father, described his experience as a “blackbirded” worker explicitly as one of enslavement, and in its description of Wacvie’s capture, transportation by sea, experiences, and escape, replicated many of the key features of ex-slave narratives, from Olaudah Equiano down to Harriet Jacobs.³⁶ The novel’s cover image by Robert Ingpen, which uncannily echoes Smith’s illustration for Twain’s travelogue, drew on classic iconography of antebellum slavery: a dark-skinned man in half-turned profile with a distant gaze, his neck chained in iron, and secured by a sugar-cane peg.³⁷ Bandler’s narrative also reflects *Following the Equator* in the way that the first half of the novel is structured by the move from natural to “clock time.” The island of Ambrym, from which young men including Wacvie are “stolen,” is a place out of time. Barely even seasonal, days are “an endlessly repeated cycle, only broken by the desire for food” and no “ruins of a past civilization” exist to suggest that life ever operated otherwise.³⁸ In stark contrast, the intimate relationship between the whip and the watch on the

³⁴ For an argument about the distinctions between European colonizers’ ideal scenarios for dispossessed native people versus enslaved people see Patrick Wolfe, “Land, Labor, and Difference: Elementary Structures of Race,” *American Historical Review* 106 (2001): 866-905.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Bandler had been making this argument about the nature of her father’s experience since at least 1950: ASIO file on Faith Bandler: CRS A6119/90, Item 2535, Vol. 1, Folio 9 (National Archives of Australia).

³⁷ Faith Bandler, *Wacvie* (Adelaide: Rigby Limited, 1977). For discussion of such iconography see Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000). In another instance of transpacific circulation of images Ingpen was also the illustrator of the 2010 edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* for the centenary of Twain’s death.

³⁸ Bandler, *Wacvie*, 7.

Southern plantation as explicated by Mark Smith appears in *Wacvie*: the whip regulates the rhythm of the cane knives in a “time [that] was no longer timeless.”³⁹

In telling their life stories, Pacific Islander descendants such as Bandler, and Indigenous Australians such as Sally Morgan, drew on a template provided by Alex Haley’s bestselling book, *Roots* (1976) and the miniseries version, broadcast in 1977 in both the United States and Australia.⁴⁰ Chapters from *Roots* appeared in *Readers’ Digest* long before Haley completed his manuscript, and although there is no direct evidence that Bandler read those chapters, she was part of family history boom that took place in both countries, which *Roots* helped to escalate.⁴¹ Oral histories have charted the impact of black American history-making from the 1960s forward, and Clive Moore noted that many South Sea Islander families owned a copy of *Roots*.⁴² When Aboriginal playwright Robert Merritt’s three-acter, *The Cake Man*, came to a Sydney stage, its interpretation of Aboriginal history, including the Dreamtime, white invasion, and the present day, was a novelty for both black and white audiences.⁴³ During the play’s second run, *Roots* screened in Sydney to record-breaking numbers of television viewers. Immediately, the newspaper advertising for the play quoted a complimentary review that hailed it as “almost a mini-*Roots*...an extraordinary play.”⁴⁴ There was some resemblance, insofar as a family was at the centre of *The Cake Man*, but as Indigenous scholars and activists at the time pointed out in related cases, the more obvious parallel would have been with Native American experiences. When Sally Morgan’s memoir of her discovery as a teenager that her family was Aboriginal, and her quest as an adult to

³⁹ Smith, *Mastered by the Clock*, 16; 137. Bandler, *Wacvie*, 24-25.

⁴⁰ For an account of reception to *Roots* in Australia see Clare Corbould, “The Struggle for Land Rights Will Not Be Televised: Settler Colonialism and *Roots* Down Under,” *Transition: The Magazine of Africa and the Diaspora*, vol. 122 (2017): 79-97.

⁴¹ Graeme Davison, *The Use and Abuse of Australian History* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000), 80-109; Tanya Evans, “Secrets and Lies: The Radical Potential of Family History,” *History Workshop Journal* 71 (2011): 49-73; Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); François Weil, *Family Trees: A History of Genealogy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁴² Clive Moore, “Australian South Sea Islanders’ Narrative of Belonging,” in *Narrative and Identity Construction in the Pacific Islands*, ed. Farzana Gounder (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015), 155-176, p. 168.

⁴³ For details of the play’s production history see Maryrose Casey, *Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre 1967-1997* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2004), 100-106, 117-125.

⁴⁴ For an example of the advertisement see *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 May 1977, p. 41.

learn about that history, was published in the United States, the cover depicted a photograph of Uluru and declared *My Place* was “The Australian *Roots*.” Almost all the reviews in U.S. publications described the book as a “search” or “discovery” of “roots,” while one made the link to Alex Haley’s work explicitly.⁴⁵

Despite the fact that many Indigenous critics rejected a simple alignment of Aboriginal and African American experiences— Aboriginal historian Jackie Huggins notably offered a trenchant critique of the parallel, asking instead “how do the Native Americans deal with *My Place*”— in the very recent past the lexicon of slavery has returned to the way that both Indigenous and Pacific Islanders are choosing to represent their forebears’ experiences.⁴⁶ Both Australian Solomon Islander Amie Batalibasi’s 2015 short film, *Blackbird*, advertised as “Inspired by the history of Australia’s Sugar Slaves”, and Stephen McGregor’s 2016 documentary *Servant or Slave* not only explicitly consider blackbirding and unwaged labour as forms of enslavement but draw on tropes associated with antebellum slavery that open up further possibilities for comparative analyses.⁴⁷ Likewise, as recent legislation in Queensland (similar laws are under discussion in other states) has made it possible for Indigenous workers subject to “stolen wages” to make claims for reparations, there has been an outpouring of public discussion as to whether their labour was slavery.⁴⁸

Over the course of the twentieth century, when Indigenous Australians and indentured Pacific Islanders and their descendants called themselves enslaved, they did so to claim a place in the

⁴⁵ For example, Carolyn Martin, “Outback Reveals a Family Secret,” *Chicago Tribune*, Dec. 20, 1988, Section 5, p. 3; Joan Hinkemeyer, “Morgan, Sally: *My Place*,” *Library Journal*, 1 Oct. 1988, pp. 83-84. The explicit link was in Janette Turner Hospital (an Australian-raised American resident), “‘The Whitefellas Don’t Understand’: *My Place*,” *New York Times*, 19 Feb. 1989, p. BR13.

⁴⁶ Jackie Huggins, “Always Was, Always Will Be,” *Australian Historical Studies* 25 (1993): 459-464, p. 463.

⁴⁷ Without taking a position here, we can cite Clive Moore’s categorical statement that they’re not the same thing, but note that the term is reiterated across a range of recent texts: Steven MacGregor, *Servant or Slave* (aired on NITV 30 Nov 2016) Amie Batalibasi’s short narrative film *Blackbird* (2016); ABC Overnights, *Blackbirding: Slavery on Queensland’s cane fields* (aired 8 Oct 2016; accessed 9 February 2017).

⁴⁸ For example, Alecia Simmonds, “Australia needs to own up to its slave history,” *Daily Life*, 28 Apr. 2015, <http://www.dailylife.com.au/news-and-views/dl-opinion/australia-needs-to-own-up-to-its-slave-history-20150427-1muhg3.html> (accessed 3 May 2016); “10 Things You Should Know About Slavery in Australia,” National Indigenous Television, 2 Dec. 2016, <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2016/12/01/10-things-you-should-know-about-slavery-australia> (accessed 9 Feb. 2017).

future – they were a strong people who were not, contrary to the expectations of early twentieth-century racial science, dying out. Sometimes when they likened themselves to enslaved African Americans and their twentieth-century descendants, they did so because they were inspired by a worldwide movement of oppressed people which, partly because of the prominence of the United States in the world, seemed to be led by African Americans. Our interest in redressing the oversight by American Studies scholarship of the role coercive practices like blackbirding and unwaged labour played in prolonging the life of Atlantic slavery is thus not simply about extending the transnational reach of American Studies scholarship across the Pacific to Australia, nor only about the ways in which recognising the hallmarks of slavery in Oceania enabled American commentators to avoid facing the ongoing remnants of slavery in the post-Reconstruction South. We propose that these literary and cultural tropes may equally serve as touchstones of radical possibilities in futures already and yet to be imagined.