

"A SPLENDID OBJECT LESSON"

A Transnational Perspective on the Birth of the Australian Nation

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In June 1902 the passage of the Commonwealth Franchise Act through the Commonwealth Parliament meant that Australia's white women became the first in the world to win both the right to vote and to sit in parliament. Drawing on original empirical research, this article demonstrates that at the turn of the twentieth century, Australia was internationally recognized as a world leader in democratic practice. This little known claim to geo-political fame holds significance for both transnational histories of women's suffrage and for Australian narratives of nationhood, neither of which tend to identify Australian women as critical to the history of modern democracy. Further, re-investigating the origins of women's suffrage helps recall the potency of radical idealism in an era that now privileges militarism—in Australia, embodied most clearly in the ANZAC legend—over maternalism as the primary source of nation building.

In February 1902—just thirteen months after the Australian colonies federated to become the world's newest nation—a tall, slender woman from Portland, Victoria, was standing outside the door to the Oval Office in Washington, D.C. She had been summoned to the White House as somewhat of a curiosity. Intelligent, inquisitive, and quite often irreverent, the young woman waited until she was bidden to enter. When the door opened, she saw the President, Theodore Roosevelt, sitting with his feet up on the desk. He rushed to greet the elegantly attired woman, grabbing her hand and pumping it up and down in his vice-like grip. "I am delighted to meet you," he shouted. "You're from Australia; I'm delighted to hear that."¹

And with that enthusiastic embrace, Vida Goldstein became the first Australian to meet an American President at the White House. Goldstein was in Washington as Australia and New Zealand's sole delegate to the International Woman Suffrage Conference. Goldstein addressed huge American audiences on one of the most controversial global issues of the day: "Votes for Women." Campaigning for women's suffrage was what Goldstein termed "the Policy of Concentration"; the parliamentary vote was, in Goldstein's words, "the right that covered all other rights."² She decreed "the futility of working piecemeal for the emancipation of women, without the vote." Only the vote, Goldstein argued, would ensure "the

protection and prevention of degraded womanhood." Only the vote would unravel the vast web of legal, economic, and social disadvantage that ensnared women and girls the world over. Furthermore, Goldstein ardently believed that women should enter Parliament, as Australian women alone in the world were entitled to do.³ "I have always maintained that wherever there are women's and children's interests to be considered," she argued, "women should be there to consider them."⁴ Such a simple premise; such a revolutionary idea.

Goldstein's six-month lecture tour of the United States was met with a diva's reception. Though prim in fashion and chaste in manner, she was both *enfant terrible* to the established order and darling of the *avant-garde*. Daily newspapers across the country covered her sold-out lectures on the topic of "The Australian Woman in Politics."⁵ Goldstein held no doubt about her subject's international importance and interest, or her country's political superiority.⁶ But why, in that second northern winter of a new century, did the Commander-in-Chief of the United States of America seek an audience with a charismatic activist from the deep planetary south?

The simple answer is that Teddy Roosevelt was a political progressive. Vida Goldstein was the most fully enfranchised woman he could yet hope to meet and he was keen to see what a member of this new breed looked like. While Roosevelt was a steadfast believer in votes for women, the American Congress would not abide it. U.S. Congressmen put up the same arguments as conservative opponents to universal adult suffrage the world over, including numerous anti-suffrage women.⁷ In the words of one Australian politician, if women could vote, what would prevent them from seeking "to assume to themselves the functions of men?"⁸ Yet the woman now taking tea with the President was decidedly feminine despite the fact that she came from the country where women had more political rights than anywhere else in the world.⁹

In 1893, New Zealand had become the first country to give women the right to vote in national elections, but in 1902, the newly federated nation of Australia became the only country where white women could both vote and stand for election on a universal and equal basis with white men. This dual right—the complete electoral franchise *and* eligibility to sit in parliament—was what the political philosopher John Stuart Mill termed "perfect equality, admitting no power of privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other."¹⁰ In the very moment of its creation, Australia had instantly become a world leader. And Roosevelt, as he told Goldstein at their meeting, would be "keeping [his] eye on Australia." He considered the Australian experiment in equality "a great object lesson."¹¹

This article will focus on the roughly two and a half decades in modern Western history—from the 1890s to the start of the Great War—when the

eyes of progressive forces around the globe were trained on a vast desert island continent in the southern hemisphere. The historian Jill Roe has called this era the "New Age," the ethos of which embodied "the hope of spiritual renewal, its optimistic alignment with social reform, and by women as well as men."¹² People across the globe shared this hope as a touch point of mutual concern. It is important to realize that the "desire to hold the record for women's suffrage," as the historians Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan put it, is a post-1970s academic fixation and not a reflection of the first wave feminists' motivations.¹³ There was a genuine spirit of international co-operation and multilateral effort to pursue suffrage as the first step towards wider emancipation. Suffragists of Vida Goldstein's era were not so much concerned with who got there first, but what the pioneering experience of the universal adult franchise had to show for itself. Were the lives of girls and women improved? Were the prophecies of doom realized? Had families splintered? Had women become "man-rish"? Or could elected governments around the world take solace from the results of the Australasian innovation? As the historian Marilyn Lake has recently demonstrated in her exemplary case study of the 1912 Australian Maternity Allowance Act as a piece of "humanitarian legislation of the age," the eyes of the world were trained on Australasia. Parliamentarians across the globe "were conscious of the changed political context resulting from the enfranchisement of women and the heightened competition between political parties to woo the women's vote."¹⁴

Australia as a nation has come to understand itself as floating tentatively on the margins of paradigm-shifting global events, more often watching suspiciously for outsiders trying to get in than considering what models, messages, and values Australians send out.¹⁵ Australians tend either to wince with "cultural cringe" at their second-rate origins and achievements or boast about "punching above weight" in the conjoined arenas of sporting and military prowess.¹⁶ Yet a close reading of the flow of ideas and individuals in the opening years of a new century holds critical significance for both transnational histories of women's suffrage and for Australian narratives of nationhood. Far from exhibiting a colonial mentality of inferiority, by the start of World War I, the new nation of Australia was pleased to the point of self-righteousness with its unique "experiment" in political equality between the sexes. And, as I will demonstrate, reformers from the heart of Empire to the Land of the Free were suitably admiring of Australia's daring example.

Historians have long conceptualized the women's suffrage movement as one with international reach.¹⁷ As the German historian Birgitta Bader-Zaar has recently pointed out, however, stand-alone analyses of American and British developments in suffrage still dominate the field after four

decades of feminist scholarship.¹⁸ Drawing on new research, I will suggest ways in which the relationship between Australian federalism and the international suffrage movement can illuminate the flow of complementary historical forces for progressive change in an era of global concern about the rights of women as citizens.¹⁹ At the same time, I will shed light on a persistently problematic corner of Australian nationalism: the centrality of militarism in historical and popular accounts of nationhood.

Australia's geopolitical claim as one of the oldest, most stable, and most inventive parliamentary and social democracies has been well established by Australian historians.²⁰ The secret ballot, the eight-hour day, and the wage arbitration system are regularly touted as democratic landmarks with Australian origins.²¹ Yet Australia's inimitability with regards to women's political equality has barely entered conventional studies of political history. The women's suffrage movement is more commonly treated as a discrete topic of investigation: a picturesque mainstay of the equally niche field of women's and gender history, as if the achievements and legacy of the suffrage campaigners and their supporters are merely a quaint nook in the colossal edifice of nation-building.

For example, the historian John Hirst, in his essay "The Distinctiveness of Australian Democracy," makes no mention of the international benchmark set by Australia on women's citizenship rights. Nor does his 2009 book *Building a Free Australia: Places of Democracy*, include a single entry devoted to women's suffrage, and only three brief mentions that the movement even existed. Hirst nonetheless claims that his book "deals with protest, elections, law-making and governing."²²

Historians of the Federation movement are similarly inclined to exclude the campaigns of feminist reformers from the grand narrative of nation building.²³ Brian Matthews maintains that while "assorted versions of radical utopianism towards the end of the nineteenth century . . . were important contributors to Australian political and social democracy" such picturesque confections "could not get a secure and acceptable foothold," although they "provided much food for legend."²⁴ Matthews writes the Federation story as a narrative of lament for high-minded women, a lost opportunity because "if the Australia we know today . . . was born radical, it quickly settled into a solid conservatism."²⁵ In Matthews's account, published for a general readership, Australia is built on solid bluestone foundations, never held aloft by dynamic bluestocking visionaries. This version is a far cry from Lake's bold assertion that "Australian feminists were self-conscious nation-builders."²⁶

Compared to other aspects of Australia's reputation as a political innovator, its success in pioneering women's political equality is relatively unknown and unrecorded in national public culture and rhetoric today.²⁷

But at the turn of the twentieth century, Australia's world-leading status as a democratic freedom fighter was no secret. The transnational affiliations—both political and personal—between suffrage campaigners across oceans and hemispheres feature prominently in a first edition copy of the six-volume *History of Woman Suffrage*, held at the State Library of Victoria. The first three volumes were a gift to Vida Goldstein from the co-author, octogenarian Susan B. Anthony. On the dust jacket of the volumes, Anthony inscribed words of respect and affection for the trail-blazing Australian. "From her disenfranchised friend in the city of Rochester, county of Monroe, state of New York, Country of the United States of America—the Land of the *Free*," wrote Anthony with satirical venom, "who has worked, to the best of her ability, for fifty years and more to get the right for women to vote—and will continue to battle for it to the end of her life." In another volume, Anthony presses home the point: "Rejoicing that you have gained the national franchise . . . while we of the United States of America struggle on—no one can tell how long—to get the right to vote." Anthony signed off "with the love and esteem of her friend."²⁸ American activists were clearly looking to Australia for inspiration and leadership.

In her opening address to the Washington Conference in 1902, President of the American Suffrage League, Carrie Chapman Catt, was unequivocal, if somewhat bemused, in locating Australia at the apex of women's political liberation. "The little band of Americans who initiated the modern [suffrage] movement would never have predicted," said Catt, "that . . . the island continent of Australia, then unexplored wilderness, would become a great democracy where self-government would be carried on with such enthusiasm, fervor and wisdom that they would give lessons in methods and principles to all the rest of the world." Catt then specifically referred to Goldstein as the bearer of these unexpected lessons. "Australia," said Catt, was "associated in our memory of childhood's geography as the abode of strange beasts and barbarians." Yet remarkably, this bizarre land now "sends us a full, up-to-date representative woman, widely alive to all the refinements of life, and fully cognizant of all the rights of her sex."²⁹

Goldstein was both the literal messenger and a representative of the feminist ideals that Catt associated with Australia. Goldstein was fully aware of the leadership role she had been asked to play. "Woman suffrage is with us to stay," she told a packed house during her address to the thirty-fourth American National Suffrage Convention in Washington in March 1902, "and that our success may hasten the day when you American women will stand before the world as political equals of your menfolk is the earnest desire of the countries which have sent me here to represent them at this great conference."³⁰ Goldstein was not an innocent abroad, peeking behind the omniscient velvet curtain of the world stage. The Land of Oz was the locus

of women's rights, and by orienting herself as the superior world citizen, Goldstein was psychologically and legally justified in asserting that there was no place like home.

It is clear that Americans recognized the Australasian accomplishment regarding women's rights, as we can see from the travel diary that Goldstein kept throughout her 1902 journey. In it she collected the autographs and well wishes of admirers like journalist Elizabeth Hauser who scribbled a poetic tribute in Goldstein's book: "To Australasia all the world gives ear/ Youthful, audacious, unrestrained and free."³¹ William Lloyd Garrison Jr., a social reformer and son of famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison Sr., wrote in a similar vein: "Australia gave us safer ballots, wiser laws. Armed with the record of your land's great deeds. Welcome light-bringer from the Southern Cross."³² Mary Garrett Hay joined in the chorus. "We are glad," she wrote, that "'Little Australia' crossed the waters to see us, and now we will look for great things from across the sea. We love Australia more because we have known you."³³ Goldstein was not a silent witness to all this hero worship. She was acutely aware of her role as an ambassador and representative, and, on her return to Australia, gave public lectures about her American tour, noting the positive attention that the Australasian experiment received abroad.

But it was not always a relationship of mutual admiration. Goldstein was critical of her host country. "Most of us regard America as the most democratic and advanced country politically in the world," she told Australian audiences. "Instead it's as conservative as a country can well be. A democratic form of government does not necessarily mean that the people rule." Goldstein offered an analysis of the root cause of the hypocrisy: "[America's] written and hidebound constitution [has] played directly into the hands of moneyed and unscrupulous politicians." What's more, she argued, "an abnormal material individual prosperity has contributed towards keeping [Americans] in that hypnotic state under the political machine." In general, Goldstein was a fan of President Roosevelt, but she was not a sycophant. Never one to be patronized, she cheekily parroted Teddy Roosevelt's own words to her. "The [Australian] Federal Franchise Bill," she wrote, "is the greatest step in the direction of political equality that we have yet seen, and must be a *splendid object lesson* [her emphasis] to every civilized country in the world." With this line, Goldstein managed both to cock a snoot at the President of the United States and highlight her own country's political superiority.³⁴

Such larrikin humor, however, was stowed away until Goldstein's return to Australia. While in America, she charmed audiences with her combination of grace and humility. In fact, Goldstein was such a glittering

star in the suffrage firmament that she even had a song written for her, sung in full throttle by the amassed conference delegates at Georgetown Presbyterian Church.

Amid this bright progressive band
Of women chos'n from every land,
We have a youthful delegate
To represent a youthful State,

And the anthem made clear exactly who was the leader and who the follower:

Australia fair has lead [*sic*] the way;
Our land will flow some glad day
And when that comes, soon or late,
Come back and let us celebrate³⁵

It would, of course, be another eighteen years before America ratified the Nineteenth Amendment and no such happy reunion occurred. By 1920, the internationalist efforts of progressive women had turned to ensuring a lasting peace emerged from the ashes of the Great War.³⁶

If America was slow to take the Australasian lead, by 1908, Finland and Norway had joined Australia and New Zealand in enfranchising women. But imperialism connected British suffragists more closely to the Australian electoral experiment, providing inspiration and example. In 1911, Emmeline Pankhurst, on behalf of the Women's Social and Political Party, recruited Vida Goldstein to address the legions of women who were engaging in mass demonstrations and participating in targeted acts of property destruction. Thousands filled lecture halls and theatres to hear Goldstein's speeches in support of the militant British suffrage campaign. By this time, unconvinced that gentle persuasion would make a jot of difference, the suffragists were bombing politicians' residences, setting hedge fires, breaking windows, staging mass street protests, going on hunger strikes, and being force fed through nasal tubes by prison guards. The British experience of suffrage advocacy could not have been more different from Australasia's peaceful struggle for women's rights.

While in England, Goldstein formed the Australian and New Zealand Women Voters Association (London) "with the hope that women of enfranchised dominions would help the women of England in their fight for political freedom."³⁷ She also compiled a pamphlet, "The Political Woman in Australia," widely circulated in the United Kingdom, Europe, and America for propaganda purposes. Goldstein was always at pains to point out that—to the sky had not fallen and women had not been unsexed by their new political identity as equal citizens.³⁸

Popular entertainers of the day were putting their own spin on Australian women's unparalleled suffrage rights. Like Goldstein, the Australian music hall and pantomime legend Billy Williams was playing to devoted London audiences in 1911. In 1910, he added a new song to his repertoire of topical ditties. "The Land Where the Women Wear the Trousers" brought the house down with lyrics that lampooned the gendered role reversals in a country where women had unparalleled political power:

I've been reading in the papers of a very funny land
It's the land where the women wear the trousers
Where woman is the boss and poor old man is second hand
In the land where the women wear the trousers . . .
The fellows all go out on Sundays dressed in petticoats
They're not allowed in parliament
The girls have all the votes³⁹

There was plenty of room for vaudeville, but the results of the women's vote were gaining global recognition as part of a wider suite of serious social reforms emanating from the southern hemisphere. By 1910, Australia had become known around the world as a "social laboratory" celebrated for its pioneering welfare legislation. Some commentators attributed Australia's capacity for experimentation to "a new land like ours, with a restless go ahead population."⁴⁰ Suffragists, however, were keen to stress the gendered nature of Australian progressivism, and were quick to note how crucial votes for women had been in igniting the flame of social change. It was the "woman citizen," claimed first-wave feminists, who mobilized trade union support for equal pay and other measures of social equity.⁴¹

There were other concrete markers of the impact of female citizenship rights on women's living conditions. Prior to winning the franchise, the infant mortality rate in Australia was 111 deaths per 1000 babies. A decade later, the rate had dropped to 77 per 1000.⁴² Goldstein attributed decline in infant mortality to the introduction of Pure Food Laws and raising the age of consent. South Australia, the first Australian colony to enfranchise women in 1894, was also the first legislature in the world to require an "illegitimate father" to recognize his financial obligation to the mother of his child through a law called the Affiliation Act, passed in 1898 after lobbying from women's groups.⁴³ Further examples of progressive and protective actions initiated by women were pensions for invalids, pure milk laws, early closing hours for pubs, and technical education for girls. Goldstein called these and other measures the "social reform legislation for which Australia is noted," directly attributing the success of reformist legislation to the mobilization of female voters, many of whom would sit in the galleries of the parliament when any bill affecting women and children was

debated and then interview members of parliament to urge alterations and amendments.⁴⁴

In Australia, the suffrage dream was closely aligned with other utopian visions of social and political transformation.⁴⁵ Sparked by the gold rushes of the 1850s, a potent amalgam of socialists, spiritualists, dissenters, eclectics, theosophists, pacifists, feminists, unionists, Unitarians, vegetarians, and garden-variety liberal democrats all converged on Australia in a remarkably non-volatile brew of ideas and optimism. By the late nineteenth century, Australia's utopian dreamers were not fringe-dwellers; they were bona fide members of Melbourne legal, political, religious, and social Establishment. Like the future Prime Minister Alfred Deakin, most of this clique—sometimes referred to as "the honest doubters"—were civic leaders.⁴⁶ As many women's rights activists realized, Federation was the ultimate test tube in which the experimental social and spiritual optimism of the honest doubters would be crystallized. Amidst the "competing cacophony of voices," as the historian Audrey Oldfield characterizes the Federation era, women's rights advocates found a unique opportunity to join forces with some of the most influential thinkers and speakers of the day.⁴⁷

The birth of the Australian Commonwealth was channeled through a series of Constitutional Conventions held in Melbourne, Sydney, and Adelaide from 1890 to 1897. The issue was never really *whether* the six Australian colonies would federate, but *how*. This would require diminishing the power of the colonies or expanding some of their laws to benefit all citizens across the new Commonwealth. This jurisprudential reality meant that, just as the mobilization of the international women's movement was reaching its apex, there was suddenly a high profile public platform on which activists could argue the case. With spitfire efficiency, women's suffrage organizations around the country lobbied delegates to the federal conventions.⁴⁸ At these conferences, delegates were deciding the future shape of the nation.

The Womanhood Suffrage League of New South Wales (WSL), an association founded by Australian poet, spiritualist, and newspaper editor and proprietor Louisa Lawson, submitted a petition to the Australasian Federal Convention in 1897. It was one among the hundreds sent by women's groups to convention delegates, lobbying for women's voting rights to be enshrined in the new Australian Constitution. Leveraging the precedent of South Australia, which had already given women the right to vote and to stand for parliament, the WSL's petition urged delegates to "consider whether or not such franchise shall be uniform throughout all the colonies."⁴⁹ It was this question of uniformity—whether all women would now achieve federally that which South Australian women had won locally in 1894—that set Australia on its course to democratic distinction.

The rampart was raised for a showdown between colonists' rights versus federal rights, with woman suffrage as the battering ram.

Frederick Holder, a keen federalist and Treasurer of South Australia when women won their historic victory in 1894, insisted that any agreement honor the existing rights of individual colonists. At the 1897 Convention in Adelaide, Holder and Charles Kingston, South Australia's Premier, proposed that full voting rights for all white adults should be written into the constitution. Holder moved to add a clause that read "no elector now possessing the right to vote shall be deprived of that right." Other delegates were horrified. Edmund Barton, who would become Australia's first Prime Minister, saw the writing on the wall. "As I understand the suggestion," he railed, "it means that if the federal parliament chooses to legislate in respect of a uniform suffrage in the Commonwealth it cannot do so unless it makes it include female suffrage." If South Australian women could not be stripped of their hard-won electoral rights, then the rest of Australia's women must perforce gain them. Barton's conclusion was inexorable: "It ties the hands of the federal parliament entirely."⁵⁰

If the clause were not approved, Holder and Kingston threatened that South Australia would vote against joining the Commonwealth. Despite Barton's protests, a poll was taken and the ayes won by three votes. Two men from South Australia, backed by every progressive woman's organization on the continent, had effectively made *white* women's suffrage the precondition of a federated Australia. The racial qualifier is key. The earlier legislation that entrenched the White Australia Policy—the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901—was also the crucial prerequisite that made Vida Goldstein the freest of the free when she visited America in 1902. Further, in preserving the existing rights of colonists and extending them to all white adults, the Franchise Act of 1902 had stripped indigenous Australians of voting rights; Aborigines could not vote again for another sixty years. As the historian Susan Magarey has argued, "Citizenship, as defined by the right to vote, could be sexually inclusive, because it had just been made racially and ethnically exclusive."⁵¹ Whiteness, not maleness, defined the new Australian citizen. Some historians, like Magarey, have further concluded that being constitutionally embraced by the new nation came at a price, as women were now constituted as "citizen mothers," more than ever defined by their sex. The historian Marilyn Lake has dismissed this account more recently, averring that, viewed in an international context, the federal female franchise ushered in an era of unprecedented political power for women.⁵² But what did people at the time make of the opportunistic alignment of feminism and federalism?

The majority of political pundits reckoned that the social laboratory had not spawned a monster. "Votes for Women: Australia Satisfied—Letting

the Empire Know," trumpeted a newspaper headline in 1910, following the federal Senate's decision to communicate to the British Prime Minister that Australia had "found [the] experiment a success."⁵³ "The result," wrote another journalist, "has not produced either a heaven or a hell." The Australian suffrage campaigners were correct to see federalism as their meal ticket to public influence on the grandest scale, and leaders like Vida Goldstein readily adopted the role of international ambassador for the enlightened dawn of a new century. On 12 April 1907, Goldstein wrote a letter to members of the Commonwealth and State Parliaments of Australia in her capacity as President of the Women's Political Association. "Dear Sir," her letter began (for there were as yet no female parliamentarians, despite Goldstein's own efforts to become a Senator in 1903), "We Australian women who have had our right to political liberty granted by the National Parliaments and by every State Parliament save one [Victoria], have been appealed to by the International Woman Suffrage Alliance to help our less fortunate fellow women in other lands." The appeal was most forthcoming from nations "where it is urged by those in authority that the enfranchisement of women means social and political disaster."⁵⁴ Goldstein pressed the statesmen to write testimonies to the successful workings of complete adult suffrage in Australian political life. She was obliged with an avalanche of letters, including responses from then Prime Minister, Alfred Deakin, as well as testimonies from the federal Attorney General, Postmaster General, and state Premiers. Even former opponents to women's suffrage, like T. Waddell, the Colonial Secretary of NSW, testified that women "exercise the franchise wisely and I feel sure that their influence in public life will be all for good." Goldstein was able to forward a thick stack of letters of endorsement from respectable and influential men to the campaign leaders of her "less fortunate fellow women" abroad.⁵⁵

On 17 November 1910, the federal Senate went one step better in touting Australia's democratic credentials when it passed unanimously the Votes for Women Resolution—more of a declaration than a decree—a confidence motion in its own first decade of nationhood. "Because [universal suffrage] has brought nothing but good, though disaster was freely prophesized [sic]," the motion read, "we respectfully urge that all nations enjoying representative government would be well advised in granting votes to women." If this sounds fresh, there was more hubris to come. "Our young Australian nation is bound to achieve greatness." Why such a glorious destiny? Because Australia was, in the words of the Senators, "the first nation to make justice the foundation of its Constitution." And it was not just women who thought as much. "Woman suffrage has done for Australia all and more than its leaders claimed for it," concluded the motion. "No self-governing country can prosper without the political aid of women. It is a necessary

factor in securing the moral and spiritual progress of the individual and of the nation."⁵⁶ The Senators were highly aware of the inherent role reversal in the colonies giving political tuition to the Empire. One Senator claimed that Australia—though the child—had every right to give advice to Britain—the mother. His rationale? "We are, in politics, the pacemakers of the world."⁵⁷ Copies of the Senate's bumptious Resolution were circulated and published as far as New York, Denmark, and Holland.⁵⁸

A century later, the Votes for Women Resolution is striking for several reasons. First, given the hegemony of economic rationalism as today's *lingua franca* for Western governance, it seems almost quaint for a national parliament to consider the moral and spiritual health of its people. Second, at a time when influential sections of the Australian public and intelligentsia have criticized their post-WWII governments for being too beholden to the domestic and foreign policy agendas of more powerful nations, particularly the United States, the Senate's bipartisan vision of its sovereignty seems remarkably forward-looking, rooted in a sense of independence and integrity.⁵⁹ The Australian parliament was not looking over its shoulder to see what other nations were doing; it was prepared to present itself as a political and moral yardstick. It also felt a sense of international obligation to pass the baton of reform to the next frontrunner.

Finally, the Senate's resolution prompts a reconsideration of the common notion—promulgated by John Hirst, among others—that Australia's confidence as a nation can be attributed to its performance in the Great War. Ignoring the fact that Australia was profoundly gratified by its role in setting the political pace with regards to democratic best practice, many historians have pointed to the primacy of the World War I military campaign at Gallipoli in Australia's cultural and political history. Hirst nominates this bloody event as "the occasion when by common consent Australians threw off their colonial self-doubt and believed themselves to be a nation."⁶⁰ On 25 April 1915, four battalions of Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) were among the British troops to land on the narrow Gallipoli Peninsula in the Turkish-occupied Dardanelles. The long, strategically doomed battle of largely hand-to-hand combat ended in a colossal loss of life for the young ANZACs. It also began an Australian tradition of veneration for the Australian Imperial Forces (AIF, or "diggers") as uncommonly courageous and distinctively manly in their commitment to defeating the enemy.⁶¹ As the historian Bill Gammage has proposed, "In the twentieth century, no Australian, for or against Anzac, has ever discerned or proposed a stronger national tradition."⁶² Coming so soon after Federation, the argument goes, the Gallipoli campaign provided a "blood sacrifice" in which nationhood, grit, and grief were inextricably intertwined. As Gammage explains, here was the moment in which anxiety about whether Australians "could help

Britain in war as much as they expected Britain to help them," was finally cast aside, for Australia had excelled "on the stage of the world."⁶³ Gammage exemplifies a trend in historical scholarship to explain *why* Australians were (and are) so powerfully drawn to the ANZAC legend as a primary foundation story, but Hirst justifies why it instinctively should be so. "People," asserts Hirst, "are stirred into hero worship by daring, recklessness, self-sacrifice, grace, a master player or a master spirit." And just who, according to Hirst, are these natural nation-builders? "For obvious reasons it has been mostly men who have been able to achieve heroic status."⁶⁴

Neither objective academic interpreters like Gammage nor ideologically driven apologists like Hirst concede that there may have been other pivotal moments in the post-Federation era that contributed to the assertion and shaping of Australia's national identity. Judging by the 1910 Senate's vote of self-confidence in its own destiny, the auspicious occasion (if there must be just one) when Australia overcame its self-doubt and believed it to be a nation, in fact occurred prior to any military battle on foreign soil. Five years before Gallipoli, the Commonwealth of Australia asserted that it was "bound to achieve greatness" because of its democratic agility and proficiency, its sociopolitical courage and grace. It might even be that the establishment of the ANZAC legend *and* the trumpeting of a distinctive, world-leading constitutional equity were two sides of the same coin: "both the feminist/reformist/federation story and the masculinist/digger/Gallipoli story" assumed that Australia could create a new Imperial nation that would simultaneously embody British racial superiority while rejecting the political inequalities and hierarchies of the old world.⁶⁵ Though not all first-wave feminists agreed, militarism and maternalism were not necessarily mutually exclusive.⁶⁶

The belief that Australia had something valuable to contribute to the world—apart from virile young cannon fodder—continued beyond the disastrous landing at Gallipoli on 25 April 1915. In 1917, six years after Goldstein's sold-out lecture tour of Britain and at the height of the Great War, the Australian Commonwealth once again agreed to send a message to the world. While ostensibly a message of hope to King George V, it was not a felicitation for his newly named House of Windsor, nor a pledge of solidarity for the war effort. It was, instead, an appeal for political reform, bordering on a taunt to keep up with the precocious Australians. "Appreciating the blessings of self-government in Australia through adult suffrage," began the parliamentary missive, "we are deeply interested in the welfare of the women of the Empire and we again humbly petition Your Majesty to endow them with that right of self-government for which they have petitioned for nearly three-quarters of a century."⁶⁷ Perhaps this can be read as the trademark tactic of an adolescent, knocking an arrogant parent down to size

with evidence of her own incompetence. But more likely, Australians were deeply aware of the unique contribution they had made to the advancement of democratic principles and institutions; a profound sense of commitment to the international cause of political equality, spurred on by confidence in their own social experiment of change and reform. Maturity was not simply tested by readiness for war. And "growth" was not measured in imperial pencil marks on a military doorframe, but by more psychosocial notions of human development.⁶⁸ Australia was justly proud that its first success had been the peaceful negotiation of the transnational need for women's political emancipation. "Australia was reaping the reward," as Bishop J.E. Mercer argued in his contribution to Vida Goldstein's cache of support letters, "of having responded to the unanswerable appeal to justice."⁶⁹ Its political coming of age seemed all the more exemplary in light of the violent clashes between suffragists and police in the streets of London. Though Vida Goldstein publicly declared her support for the militant actions of the WSPU (and was accused of hypocrisy given her outspoken criticism of the war), Australia's democratic victories had clearly been won without bloodshed.

Intensely aware of its leading edge where democratic standards were concerned, the Australian press was alive with prominent reports of suffragists being arrested in London, something that had never occurred in the local struggle for electoral rights. The media attention was especially fierce when those arrested were Australian women. When, in 1907, a Mrs. McDougall, wearing a tartan cape with a badge reading "Votes for Women," stepped into the dock at Westminster Court on the charge of making a disturbance in the precincts of the House of Commons, she began her self-defense with the statement that "she was an Australian and . . . considered herself an enfranchised woman." McDougall was convicted and elected to go to Holloway Gaol rather than pay her twenty-shilling fine.⁷⁰ Some would say she got off lightly. The *Brisbane Courier* reported an investigation of the London police, after hundreds of suffrage campaigners were found to have been "struck in the face, beaten and suffered every species of violence, including indignities of a very gross kind."⁷¹ British suffragists required a place of refuge and respite from harassment, a haven that Colonel Linley Blathway duly provided at Eagle House, Bathurst, between 1908 and 1912. Vida Goldstein spent time at the Bath sanctuary in 1911. In light of the persecution of suffragists by authorities in England, the historian Barbara Caine has argued that the Australian women's involvement in the British suffrage campaign was a "chance to turn the imperial tables."⁷² Britain's long-standing claim to moral superiority over its former dominion of convict castaways was subtly but studiously undermined by media reports about the ill-treatment of female political activists and the threat to Australian women who went "home" to help the cause.

In the decade that followed the Washington International Suffrage Convention, the Australian press was also keen to herald Australia's landmark status on the American political landscape. "American Suffragettes. Praise for Australia," screamed one newspaper headline, when a deputation of American women's rights activists appeared before the Home Rules Committee of the House of Representatives in December 1913.⁷³ The Australian experience of women's suffrage was "quoted in favor of the proposal" by the deputation.⁷⁴ The Melbourne *Argus* similarly reported American suffragists' disappointment and disgust when Woodrow Wilson failed to mention the American women's suffrage campaign in his Congressional Christmas address in December 1913.⁷⁵ Why would a Melbourne newspaper consider this seemingly immaterial aspect of American domestic policy relevant to its readers, other than as a tacit nod to Australia's continued primacy in progressive legislation? Pride in Australia's democratic superiority endured; Australian newspapers consistently reported Wilson's inability to get a universal suffrage bill through Congress throughout the war years.⁷⁶

As the historian Hilary Golder has argued, though many Australian feminists in the Federation era were strong nationalists (as well as pacifists), they leapt at the opportunity to become involved in international suffrage campaigns, lending guidance and advice, as well as participating in "performative activism."⁷⁷ It was possible to be both proud Australians and loyal "Women of the Empire."⁷⁸ In June 1911, Australians Alice Henry, Dora Montefiore, Nellie Martel, and Muriel Matters joined with Goldstein and Margaret Fisher, wife of Australia's then Prime Minister Andrew Fisher, to march in the Great Suffrage Petition in London. Goldstein and Fisher carried a banner on behalf of Australia and New Zealand imploring England to "Trust the women, Mother, As I Have Done." The banner, painted by the Australian expatriate artist Dora Meeson Coates, dripped with symbolism. It depicted a young woman bearing a shield of the Southern Cross, humbly petitioning a maternal Britannia to listen to her cause. Maiden Australia's hand is upturned in supplication; Mother England stares diffidently into the distance. The image is not one of cross-gender antagonism, but of intergenerational conflict and negotiation. In the Mother-Daughter dyad, the psychic health of the daughter requires that she go her own way, but not antagonize or hurt the resentful mother, who needs her to remain a beloved friend and comrade.⁷⁹ The antipodean suffrage banner can be read as a symbolic cutting of apron strings. Mother England gives her colonial daughter the cold shoulder; the nubile offspring must stand her ground. This feminized coming-of-age story, implicit in Australia's critical role in the British suffrage campaigns, provides an alternative to the androcentric underpinnings of Gallipoli's enduring "birth of a nation" mystique.⁸⁰

If the philosophical and practical leadership of women in stewarding Britain through a time of political upheaval focused on *women's* transnational relationships, as Vida Goldstein herself noted, "one feature in the Suffrage Campaign in Australia makes it radically different from that in any country—the readiness of our men to admit that our cause was a just one, and entitled to immediate recognition."⁸¹ Goldstein may be overstating her case, given that the Australian suffrage campaign began as early as 1869 and thus lasted thirty-three years.⁸² Moreover, other suffragists described Australian men as behaving like pompous benefactors or as surrendering reluctantly to the inevitable. In April 1902, Jessie Ackerman bemoaned the number of politicians who put themselves on a pedestal "halo in hand, to anoint himself high priest, and claim the glory touch of shepherding the women into the kingdom of Federal citizenship." Ackerman was quick to point out that the Commonwealth Parliament enfranchised its women because it had no constitutional choice. "There is, therefore, little credit due to an 'unbounded generosity' on the part of men," Ackerman concluded. "There was no alternative."⁸³

Australian suffrage campaigners generally agreed that, given the support of the various colonies' lower houses from the late 1880s, Australian women would have enjoyed state suffrage much earlier had it not been for the intransigent vested interests of the propertied upper houses.⁸⁴ Some historians have attributed the camaraderie between Australia's progressive men and women to the so-called "frontier theory," according to which the necessity of family economies on the colonial frontier inspired a pioneering mentality of collectivism that meant that just as men and women labored together in the home, so women should be entitled to work publicly beside men in serving the nation.⁸⁵ In gold rush Victoria, many men and women did work collaboratively to improve their new society. The lawyer and politician George Higinbotham, who immigrated from Ireland to Victoria in 1853, was dubbed "the friend of women" by his friend and ally, the pioneer suffragist Henrietta Dugdale, who arrived in Victoria in the same year as Higinbotham.⁸⁶ Alfred Deakin in Victoria and Frederick Holder in South Australia, among others, made the parliamentary moves necessary to leverage legislative reform. Australia's democratic project was to an extent gender blind, a distinction later exhibited when, in 1916, industrial socialists and feminist pacifists joined forces to campaign against military conscription. As historian Bertha Walker argues, the successful defeat of the Conscription Referendum was "the first and only time any country in the world would be permitted to vote on whether it would conscript its young men for war."⁸⁷

Goldstein believed that in Australia, the political fault line lay not between men and women, but between conservatives and progressives. She

also criticized Australia's self-styled "new" women for their own failure to fulfill the promise of their early electoral equality. Returning to Australia after the intense fellowship and purpose of London's mass demonstrations and overflowing lecture theatres, Goldstein began to despair that after a decade of voting rights but no elected female representation, Australian women seemed to have lapsed into an apathetic status quo. "Enfranchised women of Australia," she beseeched her sisters from street corners, copies of her *Woman Voter* journal in hand, "rise to your responsibilities, to your potentialities." Though the absolute numbers of female voters almost doubled between 1903 and 1910, Goldstein was not convinced that women were doing enough to prove that female political power was a force for good.⁸⁸ Goldstein had an evangelical vision of Australia's global mission, which was not dissimilar to the male advocates of the federalist movement, who viewed Australia as a salve to old world ills, "From the first to the last keynote of Australian provincial progress has been Democracy," the *Brisbane Worker* had declared in January 1901, "this is Australia's manifest destiny if she is to fulfill any nobler destiny than the nations decayed and decaying."⁸⁹ Australian suffragists benefited from a timely alignment between the ideals of international feminism and the historical coincidence of federalism—a sense of providence about the role that a new country could play in the worn-out routines of global political housekeeping.⁹⁰

This convergence of local and global—national and transnational—events culminated in 1903, when Australia held the first ballot in the world that allowed (white) women to stand for election to the national parliament. "The radical implications" of this novelty, argues Lake, "were the subject of intense discussion internationally."⁹¹ So what happened since then to shift the national conversation from Australia's youthful, maverick mission as a global innovator to a country of politically timorous conformists?⁹² One cultural trend stands out. Australia's collective memory of the international achievements of its homegrown suffrage movement has faded in inverse proportion to the popularity of the ANZAC legend. Corralled by recent conservative governments to support their own militarist agendas, the wartime narrative of youthful virility has displaced the peacetime parable of social innovation. First might have shaded the truth when he identified Gallipoli as the event through which Australia first overcame its colonial anxiety and claimed status as an independent and legitimate nation, but he has certainly not been alone in making the claim. Militarism has won the public relations campaign for the "birth of a nation" mantle.⁹³ As then Prime Minister John Howard said from the shores of Gallipoli on ANZAC Day 2005, "The original Anzacs could not have known at the time that their service would leave all Australians with another enduring legacy: our sense of self. . . Anzac Day is a chance to reflect with pride on what it means to be

Australian and the values we hold dear: determination, courage, compassion and resourcefulness."⁹⁴ Military heroes such as Weary Dunlop, Alex Campbell, and Simpson and his donkey are household names in Australia, but few Australians would be able to identify any of the Australian women whose determination, courage, and resourcefulness broke through the global glass ceiling of political discrimination.

I am not suggesting here that those Australians who served in World War I did not genuinely believe in the ANZAC narrative, the sense of the distinctive character and spirit that Australian soldiers brought to the world's battlefields.⁹⁵ But in existential terms, we can rightly view the Gallipoli campaign not as a birth, but a kind of death—the death of the utopian ideal of a better, more peaceful, more just world based on progressive values, a universalist maternalism, and a spiritual transcendence. Most Australian feminists believed as fervently in disarmament as suffrage. It was indeed the latter that should, in theory, have produced the former.

Yet Gallipoli also represented the heady, irresistible triumvirate of militarism, empire, and race. Despite cultural warrior J.F. Archibald's *Balmain* school manifesto that "Australian and republican are synonymous," political nationalism and imperialism had danced a congruent if sometimes ungainly two-step during the Federation era.⁹⁶ But in the wake of a world war, any idea of Australian isolationism seemed increasingly untenable given, as the historian Audrey Oldfield has put it, "the historical imperatives of Australia's geographical position."⁹⁷ Furthermore, most Australian suffragists, including Vida Goldstein, believed wholeheartedly in the wisdom of a White Australia.⁹⁸ As the British Empire crumbled under the weight of its own racial pecking orders, American global dominance took hold under Franklin D. Roosevelt. Underpinned by the same imperialist subservience that ultimately fuelled the ANZAC legend, with its heroically active men and patriotically domestic women, the transnational potential for feminists to take a leading role on the world stage was impaired.⁹⁹ Australia's relevance as a youthful ambassador for change diminished as its acquiescent ties to Mother England remained stubbornly tangled.

In October 2011, the former conservative Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser expressed his anxiety at Australia's lack of political pluck when he addressed an open letter from prominent Australians to current Labor Prime Minister Julia Gillard on the issue of the humane processing of refugees. "Seize the opportunity to exhibit leadership," Fraser exhorted the Gillard government, "not just at home, but also on the world stage." He gave a concrete example of the form such moral courage might take: why not implement measures that would "serve as an incentive and an example for members of the UNHCR Working Group on Resettlement, which Australia currently chairs."¹⁰⁰ As if channeling the ghost of Teddy Roosevelt, Fraser

concluded, "Make no mistake, the world is watching. Australia has a chance to not only salvage our reputation but set an example for our friends and allies around the world." Thus, a century on from Goldstein's historic visit to the Oval Office, a hint of antipodean evangelism has recently re-entered the sphere of international politics.

Perhaps with the global challenges of the twenty-first century—particularly climate change and our human rights obligations to the world's dispersed and dispossessed—Australia can re-assert its erstwhile youthful exuberance and once again be proud to call itself a trail-blazing leader, a nation where justice serves as the foundation of its moral constitution.

NOTES

¹For Roosevelt "gripping my hand in a vice" see Vida Goldstein, *Papers*, State Library of Victoria, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 7865. The emphasis is Goldstein's.

²Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia" (1912), *Papers*.

³New Zealand women won the right to vote in national elections in 1893, but not to sit in parliament. Finland was the second country to legislate for both in 1906.

⁴Vida Goldstein, "Should Women Enter Parliament?" in *Review of Reviews*, 20 August 1908, 135–136, quotation on 136.

⁵See for example, *The Washington Post*, 16 February 1902; *New York Times* 2 March 1902. For Goldstein's own sardonic view of her American tour, see Jill Roe (prepared for publication by) *To America and Back: January–June 1902: A Lecture by Vida Goldstein* (Sydney: Australian History Museum, 2002).

⁶Vida Goldstein, "Should Women Enter Parliament," quotation on 136.

⁷See Margaret Fitzherbert, *Liberal Women: Federation to 1949* (Annandale, N.S.W.: Federation Press, 2004) preface.

⁸Hon James Purves M.L.A., *ibid.*, 658–659.

⁹Vida's good looks and charm were often commented upon in the press. *Table Talk*, 27 October 1899.

¹⁰John Stuart Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (London: Penguin, 2006) 134.

¹¹Vida Goldstein, *Papers*

¹²Jill Roe, "Dayspring: Australia and New Zealand as a Setting for the 'New Age' From the 1890s to Nimbin", *Australian Cultural History* no. 16 (1997/98): 170–187, quotation on 171.

¹³Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, "Introduction," in Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan (eds), *Suffrage and Beyond: International Feminist Perspectives* (Annandale: Pluto Press, 1994) quotation on 4.

¹⁴Marilyn Lake, "State Socialism for Australian Mothers: Andrew Fisher's Radical Maternalism in its International and Local Contexts," *Labour History* 102 (2012): 55–70, quotations on 59.

¹⁵Macgregor Duncan et al, *Imagining Australia: Ideas for our Future*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2004) 43.

¹⁶For the classic cultural history of "cultural cringe," see A.A. Phillips, *The Australian Tradition: Studies in a Colonial Culture* (Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1980).

¹⁷See for example, Ellen DuBois, "Woman Suffrage Around the World: Three Phases of Suffragist Internationalism," in *Suffrage and Beyond*, eds. Caroline Daley and Melanie Nolan, 256–274, quotation on 254. See also, Barbara Caine, "Vida Goldstein and the English Militant Campaign," *Women's History Review* 2, no. 3 (1993): 363–376.

¹⁸Pirgitta Bader-Zaar, "Gender and Suffrage Politics: New Approaches to the History of Women's Political Emancipation," *Journal of Women's History* 23, no. 2 (2011): 208–218, quotation on 209.

¹⁹Lake, "State Socialism," 58–61. For the transnationalism as a theoretical framework for exploring complementary historical forces "usually thought of as distinct and separate," see Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, "Introduction" in *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective*, eds. Curthoys and Lake (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2005), 5–21, quotation on 7.

²⁰Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 127; Graeme Davison, John Hirst, and Stuart Macintyre, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Australian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 179.

²¹John Hirst, "The Distinctiveness of Australian Democracy," in *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2006), 292–313, quotation on 298. Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 107.

²²Hirst, *Building a Free Australia: Places of Democracy* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Council, 2009) quotation on 1.

²³A notable exception is Marilyn Lake. See for example "Mission Impossible: How Men Gave Birth to the Australian Nation—Nationalism, Gender and Other Seminal Acts," *Gender and History* 4, no. 3 (1992): 305–322.

²⁴Brian Matthews, *Federation* (Melbourne: Text, 1999), quotation on 80.

²⁵Matthews, *Federation*, quotation on 80.

²⁶Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999) quotation on 50.

²⁷Louise Baxter, "Lost Feminist History Recalled," *The Western Australian*, 12 June 2012.

²⁸Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joselyn Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1887-1922). Incriptions appear in volumes 1, 2 and 3. State Library of Victoria Rare Books Collection.

²⁹*Woman's Journal*, 15 February 1902.

³⁰*Woman's Journal*, 1 March 1902.

³¹Vida Goldstein, *Papers*.

³²*Ibid.*

³³*Ibid.*

³⁴*Ibid.*

³⁵*Ibid.*

³⁶Goldstein never did return to America for that happy reunion, instead touring Europe as part of the Australian delegation to the Women's Peace Conference in Zurich.

³⁷Vida Goldstein, *Papers*.

³⁸Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia," pamphlet first published by the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, 1908; re-published by the Victorian Women's Trust, March 2008.

³⁹Transcribed by author from original recording. "The Land Where The Women Wear The Trousers by Billy Williams (1910)," 78 RPMs, <http://www.archive.org/details/TheLandWhereTheWomenWearTheTrousersByBillyWilliams1910>, Accessed 9 December 2011.

⁴⁰The earliest newspaper report to use the phrase "social laboratory" to describe Australia's sociological and legislative experimentation was *The Argus*, 6 August 1910, 18. See also John Rickard, "The Anti-Sweating Movement In Britain And Victoria: The Politics Of Empire And Social Reform," *Historical Studies* 18, no. 73 (1979): 582-597, quotation on 583.

⁴¹Mark Hearn, "Making Liberal Citizens: Justice Higgins and His Witnesses," *Labour History* 93 (November 2007): 57-72, quotation on 4.

⁴²Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia."

⁴³*The Adelaide Advertiser*, 15 April 1899, 11.

⁴⁴Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia"; Vida Goldstein Memorial Committee, "Vida Goldstein Pioneer of Freedom and Justice for Women," no date, State Library of Victoria, Australian Manuscripts Collection, MS 6665.

⁴⁵See for example, Susan Priestley, *Henrietta Augusta Dugdale: An Activist 1827-1918*, (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2011) 8.

⁴⁶Bongiorno, Frank, "Fryer, Jane (1832-1917)," *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed 21 December 2011, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/fryer-jane-12931/text23365>.

⁴⁷Audrey Oldfield, *The Great Republic of the Southern Seas: Republicans in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1999), quotation on 220.

⁴⁸See for example, Adelaide, Petition No 1. In favor of equal voting rights for both sexes in election for Federal Parliaments. From Executive of Women's Christian Temperance Union of Australasia, 1897, National Archives of Australia, R216.

⁴⁹New South Wales Womanhood Suffrage League petition to the Australasian Federal Convention 1897, National Archives of Australia, R216, 2.

⁵⁰Edmund Barton, *Australasian Federation Conference Debates*, First Session, Adelaide, 15 April 1897, quotation on 765.

⁵¹Susan Magarey, *Passions of the First Wave Feminists* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2001) quotation on 155.

⁵²Marilyn Lake, "State Socialism for Mothers," 56.

⁵³"Votes for Women: Australia Satisfied—Letting the Empire Know," *The Advertiser* 18 November 1910, quotation on 9.

⁵⁴Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia".

⁵⁵*The Mercury*, 15 June 1907, quotation on 11.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Senator Hugh de Largie, *Commonwealth of Australia Parliamentary Debates*, 59, no. 17 November 1910, 6305.

⁵⁸Myra Scott, "How Australia Lead the Way: Dora Meeson Coates and British Suffrage," Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women, Canberra, 2003, 23.

⁵⁹For American pulling Australia's chain, see for example, Robert Manne, "Little America: How John Howard has Changed Australia," *The Monthly*, March 2006; Pierre Mars, "Let Us Be a Carbon Tax Leader, Not a Follower," *The Age*, 19 May 2011.

⁶⁰John Hirst, "Women and History," in John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History*, 38-56, quotation on 47. Hirst's essay is a direct response to the publication of Patricia Grimshaw et al's *Creating a Nation*, in which the authors delineate the myriad ways in which Australian women contributed to the birth of a nation.

⁶¹Bruce Scates argues that the "memory work" of sanctifying Gallipoli began on the day of the Landing. Bruce Scates, "Remembering Gallipoli: From The First Anzac Day Service To Today's Backpacker Pilgrimage" in *Making Australian History*:

Perspectives on the Past Since 1788, eds. Deborah Gare and David Ritter (Melbourne: Thomson, 2008): 302–311, quotation on 303.

⁶²Bill Gammage, "Anzac" in *Intruders in the Bush: The Australian Quest for Identity*, ed. John Carroll (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1982), quotation on 115.

⁶³Gammage, "Anzac."

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, quotation on 48.

⁶⁵Ray Cassin, feedback on an earlier draft of this article, email correspondence with author 3 January 2012.

⁶⁶Tanja Luckins: *The Gates of Memory: Australian People's Experiences and Memories of Loss and the Great War* (Perth: Curtin University Books, 2004), 16.

⁶⁷Ida Husted Harper ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6, quotation on 753.

⁶⁸Erik Erikson, "Identity and the Life Cycle," (New York: Norton, 1980).

⁶⁹Vida Goldstein, *Woman Suffrage in Australia*.

⁷⁰*West Gippisland Gazette*, 19 Feb 1907, 5. For other reports of arrested Australian women in London see *The Hobart Mercury*, 26 October 1906; for "outrages by suffragettes" being unknown in Australia see *The Argus*, 18 May 1914.

⁷¹*Brisbane Courier*, 25 March 1911.

⁷²*Australian Feminism and the British Militant Suffragettes* (Canberra: Department of the Senate publications, 2003), 1.

⁷³"American Suffragettes. Praise for Australia," *Barrier Miner*, 6 December 1913.

⁷⁴*Ibid.* See also "Movement in America," *Leicester Examiner*, 6 December 1913.

⁷⁵*The Argus*, 4 December 1913.

⁷⁶See for example, *Barrier Miner*, 3 November 1915; *Barrier Miner*, 9 June 1916.

⁷⁷Hilary Golder, "Australian Feminism and the British Militant Suffragettes," Canberra, Department of the Senate, 2003, quotation on 5.

⁷⁸The collective identity of "Women of the Empire" became even more salient a feature of Australian public life during the war years. See for example, the letters to the Editor under the heading "the Women of the Empire" in *Southern Argus*, 17 May 1917, 3.

⁷⁹Nina Herman, *Too Long a Child: The Mother-Daughter Dyad* (London: Whurr, 1999) 6.

⁸⁰"Anzac Day—the Birth of a Nation," *Freeman's Journal*, Sydney, 27 April 1916. Denis Shanahan, "It was the birth of our nation, PM says," *The Australian*, 25 April 2012.

⁸¹Vida Goldstein, "Woman Suffrage in Australia."

⁸²Clare Wright, "Golden Opportunities: The Early Origins of Women's Suffrage in Victoria" in *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 2 (2008) 210–224.

⁸³Jessie Ackerman, *Australia from a Woman's Point of View* (London: Cassell, 1913), quotation on 215.

⁸⁴Goldstein's summation of this situation was reported in the *Woman's Journal*, 1 March 1902, 66.

⁸⁵Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 214. The "frontier theory" has been bolstered by the fact that women in Wyoming and Utah achieved territorial suffrage in 1869 and 1870 respectively, prior to becoming states of the union in the 1890s. See for example, Glenda Riley, *Frontierswoman: The Iowa Experience* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1981), vii–xii.

⁸⁶Dugdale dedicated her feminist utopian novella, *A Few Hours in a Far Off Age*, to Higginbotham.

⁸⁷Bertha Walker, *Solidarity Forever* (Melbourne: National Press, 1972), quotation on 106.

⁸⁸For voting rates, see Lake, "State Socialism," 64.

⁸⁹*The Worker*, 5 January 1901. *The Argus* (Melbourne) and the *Sydney Morning Herald* also wrote lead articles on the theme of Australia's destiny. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 January 1901; *Argus*, 9 May 1901.

⁹⁰For women as 'political housekeepers', see Clare Wright, "New Brooms They Say Sweep Clean": Women's Political Activism on the Ballarat Goldfields," *Australian Historical Studies* 39 (2008): 305–321. For the politics of motherliness, see Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Mother Worlds" in *Mothers of a New World: Material Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, eds. Koven and Michel (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1–10.

⁹¹Lake, "State Socialism," quoted on 62.

⁹²Internal critics accuse Australia of following more powerful industrialized nations into wars, agreements and policies. See for example, Steve Hatfield-Dodds, E.K. Jackson, P.D. Adams, W. Gerardi, "Leader, follower or free rider? The economic impacts of different Australian emission targets," *The Climate Institute*, permanent URL <http://apo.org.au/node/3505#sthash.YjYPhv17.dpuf>, Accessed 3 December 2007.

⁹³Recent historical scholarship has begun to question the primacy of militarism as the primary touch point for Australian patriotism. See for example Liz Reed, *Bigger Than Gallipoli: War, History and Memory in Australia* (Crawley, W.A.: UWA Press, 2004), 5; Henry Reynolds, "Colonial Cassandra: Why Weren't the Warrings Heeded?" in *What's Wrong With Anzac?: The Militarisation of Australian History*, eds. Marilyn Lake and Henry Reynolds with Mark McKenna and Joy Damousis (Sydney: New South, 2010) 70.

⁹⁴Mark Forbes, "Day to Reflect with Pride," *The Age*, 25 April 2005. Australia entered the war in Afghanistan in 2001 and the war in Iraq in 2003 under John Howard's Prime Ministership.

⁹⁵Janet Butler, "Journey into War: A Woman's Diary," *Australian Historical Studies* 127 (2006): 203–217, see 212.

⁹⁶Audrey Oldfield, *The Great Republic of the Southern Seas: Republicans in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Alexandria, NSW: Hale and Iremonger, 1999), quotation on 221.

⁹⁷Oldfield, *The Great Republic of the Southern Seas*, quotation on 254.

⁹⁸For Goldstein's support of the White Australia Policy, see her diary entry after leaving Colombo in 1919. Bessie Rischbieth Collection, National Library of Australia, MS 2004/4/232 (a).

⁹⁹Janette Bomford, *That Dangerous and Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1993), 207.

¹⁰⁰Malcolm Fraser, open letter to the Australian government, 8 October 2011. See full transcript at <http://www.getup.org.au/campaigns/refugees/sensible-solution/its-time-for-a-sensible-solution>, Accessed 16 October 2011.

ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN AUSTRALIA'S TRAVELING SHOWS, 1930S–1950S

Shadows and Suggestions

Kathryn Hunter

Only a small amount of evidence survives about the performances of Aboriginal women in "leg shows," or strip-tease shows, in the first half of the twentieth century. These women are doubly invisible in the historical record because of their indigenity and as performers in traveling (and hence transitory and ephemeral) sideshows. The performances of Aboriginal women, however, add to current debates and interrogations of the connections between mobility and modernity for Indigenous women. This article argues that Aboriginal women's performances in leg shows, while complicated by disguise and theatricality, as well as by a colonial history of sexual exploitation, must be considered as engagements with modernity.

In the 1940s, three Aboriginal sisters, Iris, Inez, and Phemia Lovett, traveled with touring sideshows throughout eastern Australia. Inez and Phemia worked as ticket-sellers on the fairy floss stall and they performed on the "line-up" boards attracting customers to shows staged in tents. As she described in her autobiography, Iris was a performer: "I worked the spike box which was a box with spikes that come through the front of the door when it was wound by an Indian in a caftan and turban . . . The people thought it was real especially when the tomato juice that looked like blood would run down the spikes."¹ Iris's brief recounting of her time, and that of her sisters, as "showies" is in stark contrast to both the remainder of her life, which was dedicated to civil rights activism on the part of her people, and to autobiographies of other Aboriginal women whose youth was spent confined in domestic service or rural labor in miserable conditions.² As such, Iris mentions the seven years she spent on the show circuit only briefly in her story and focused most of her attention in the chapter on the other Aboriginal performers she met who were mainly boxers and roughriders.

Iris's marginalization of her participation in the shows mirrors the position of sideshows generally. In eastern Australia, touring sideshows traveled according to the calendar of Agricultural Society annual shows (what in the American tradition are called "fairs"). Agricultural shows were well established in Australia by the early twentieth century. They represented progress, colonial success, and rural modernity, providing displays of farming life and skills ranging from horse events and livestock competitions to