

PATHWAYS TO UNDERSTANDING WHITE POVERTY IN SOUTH AFRICA

1902 to 1948

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Declaration

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Abstract

This thesis examines the social and economic circumstances of descendants of mainly Dutch settlers who became known as the poor whites during the early part of the 20th century. Attention is given to particular aspects of rural pastoral society such as farming methods, education, land usage and demographics. A brief sketch of the South African economy prior to the mineral revolution has been included in order to understand the impact on the poor white of the discovery of diamonds and gold which became a trigger for future industrialisation. The widespread failure of their subsistence pastoral economy led to significant urbanisation mainly on the Witwatersrand. The concerns of the Dutch Reformed Church and later Afrikaner politicians for a solution to the poor white problem led to the establishment of the Carnegie Commission, funded mainly by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. An important aspect of the thesis pertains to the way in which knowledge about the poor whites has been produced. The findings and recommendations of the commission are combined with the opinions of historians, economists and poverty writers and presented as part of this thesis. The manipulation of race theories was initially used to provide a justification for segregation between white and black. Later in the century the poor whites were incorporated into the white middle-class with a combination of preferential employment policies, stricter segregation and inclusion in the Afrikaner Nationalist project. Considerable attention is devoted to the influence of scientific racism and eugenics on the changing nature of race relations during the period under review. The overall conclusion argues that urbanisation and industrialisation provided a suitable environment where the process of inclusion of the poor white into Afrikanerdom could be finally concluded.

Opsomming

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die sosio-ekonomiese omstandighede van die afstammeling van hoofsaaklik Nederlandse setlaars, wat as die arm blankes bekend gestaan het gedurende die vroeë 20ste eeu. Daar word in die besonder aandag geskenk aan aspekte van die landelike pastorale samelewings, ook demografie, die gebruik van grond, boerderymetodes, asook opvoeding. Om die impak van die ontdekking van diamante en goud (wat toekomstig industrialisering aangevoer het) op die arm blankes beter te begryp, word daar kortliks verwys na die Suid Afrikaanse ekonomie voor die minerale revolusie. Die wydverspreide mislukking van hul bestaans pastorale ekonomie, het gelei tot beduidende verstedeliking - hoofsaaklik op die Witwatersrand. Die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk en later die Afrikaner politici se bekommernisse oor die arm blanke probleem, asook hulsoektog na 'n oplossing, het gelei tot die stigting van die Carnegie-kommissie wat hoofsaaklik deur die Carnegie Corporation van New York befonds was. 'n Belangrike aspek van die tesis is die wyse waarop kennis oor die armblankes gegenereer is. Die bevindinge asook aanbevelings van die kommissie, word gekombineer met die menings van historici, ekonome en armoede skrywers en aangebied as deel van hierdie tesis. Die manipulasie van teorieë is aanvanklik gebruik om apartheid tussen swart en wit teregverdig. Die arm blankes is later gedurende die eeu by die wit middleklas ingesluit, met 'n kombinasie van voorkeur-indiensnemingsbeleid, strenger apartheid en insluiting in die Afrikaner Nasionalistiese projek. Daar word aansienlik aandag gegee aan die invloed van wetenskaplike rassisme en eugenetika op die veranderende aard van rasseverhoudinge gedurende die tydperk tersprake. Die algehele gevolgtrekking beweer dat verstedeliking en industrialisasie 'n gunstige omgewing voorsien het waar die proses van insluiting van die arm blanke binne die Afrikanerdom, finaal afgehandel kon word.

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My gratitude to my friends who have taken an interest in this subject- Rob Speedie, Pat Coghlan, John Heathfield and Paul Cluver. Your comments and advice have been useful.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Aim of this Thesis

This thesis will analyse the ways through which the poor white was perceived by various influential power groupings in early 20th century South Africa. This interest in the poor white was on occasions altruistic, but as a rule, driven by a preconceived and often opaque agenda. By examining this evidence the thesis seeks to cast light on the process of knowledge accumulation about white poverty. Deprivation was often a consequence of Western colonialism, very often shared in different measures by both the colonised and coloniser. In her book “White Trash”, Isenberg explains how surplus people were transported to distant continents, often against their will.¹ The English governing classes considered colonisation an opportunity for their own enrichment often without having any idea of local conditions, climate or terrain. Inevitably new elites emerged in the colony occupying positions of power and influence over resources often to the exclusion of their own countrymen and of course the indigenous people.² This was certainly the case in North America, Australia, Rhodesia, Kenya, India, the West Indies, Sri Lanka and including South Africa.³ These considerations beg the question: why was so much attention and so many resources directed at uplifting the poor white in South Africa, given the indifference of colonial regimes in other countries toward local poverty?⁴ (The USA is perhaps a little different see “Why Carnegie?” in Chapter 3)

The manner in which race theories were manipulated and constructed to justify white hegemony starting from 1902 will be described. Support for the poor white was initially offered by the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) which resulted in a number of successful charitable projects. In 1924 the anti - imperialist Afrikaner National Party of Hertzog won an electoral victory over the pro-British South African Party of Smuts. For the first time since Union there was competition between the two major political parties for the white vote. The Act of Union excluded blacks from a qualified franchise in the rest of the country, though it continued in the Cape Colony. State funding for white upliftment increased as their political

¹ N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, London, Atlantic Books, 2017.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-8.

³ E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, (54), 2016, p. 75.

⁴ The USA is somewhat different in this respect. See “Why Carnegie” in Chapter 3.

support became crucial for the future success of the burgeoning Afrikaner nationalist movement. Thus from 1924, poor whites became defined by their race and class, but framed for their vote.

Approach

This thesis comprises eight chapters including this introduction and the overall conclusion. Each chapter has its own conclusion introducing the topic in the following. Chapter 2 describes the emergence of the poor white. The first subsection of this chapter describes the rapidly changing economic circumstances arising from the discovery of diamonds and gold late in the 19th century. Following the end of the Anglo Boer War in 1902, mining and industrialisation accelerated. It will be explained how this process led to rural depopulation and urbanisation of both blacks and whites. The next subsection explains how the DRC first became aware of white poverty, which in turn engendered concerns and anxieties about the possible effect of extensive deprivation on the rest of white society. By early in the 20th century, politicians began to share the church's concerns. A detailed description of the demographics of the poor white is provided in the next subsection. Various estimates of the extent of white poverty are presented. The following subsection reveals the largely critical way in which white poverty was regarded by the church and society generally. The conclusion of this chapter begins to flesh out explanations of white poverty based upon prejudicial interpretations of the consequences of miscegenation with people of colour. Gradually perceptions of white poverty began to be influenced by the political changes in South Africa in the early part of the 20th century.

Chapter 3 is entitled "The Carnegie Commission into the Poor White Problem". It commences with the emergence of a large number of impoverished whites and subsequent class formation in the United States of America. The similarities between societal attitudes to poverty in both countries are touched upon. The steps leading to the establishment of this commission in South Africa are dealt with in some detail. The next subsection explores the reasons why the Carnegie Corporation of New York decided to invest money and other resources into exploring white poverty in a distant country. Some local and international reactions to the publication of the Carnegie Commission report are explored.

The conclusion introduces the subject matter of Chapter 4, which are the reasons for white poverty. This chapter entitled "Why Whites were Poor" roughly follows the format of the five

volumes of the Carnegie Commission report.⁵ The conclusion of this chapter reiterates the anxiety of whites emanating from their misconceptions of white poverty. These concerns were heavily influenced by the prevailing attitudes to racial mixing.

The following two chapters explore in some detail the international emergence of scientific racism and eugenic theories and the strong influence they had on racial attitudes in the early part of the 20th century in South Africa.

The penultimate Chapter 7 is entitled “The Upliftment of the Poor White”. Here the collaborative and at times competing initiatives of the institutional players seeking to uplift the poor white are discussed. The state involvement which escalated from 1924 was funded by the fiscus, which was greatly enhanced by the abolition of the gold standard in 1934. The ultimate solution to the poor white problem was largely an unintended consequence of industrialisation due to South Africa’s participation in the Second World War.

The overall conclusion appears in Chapter 8. The various pathways leading to an understanding of the poor white phenomenon are summarised. The agendas giving rise to the various white upliftment initiatives are analysed. Inevitably there is a great deal of overlap between the various perceptions of the emergence and upliftment of the poor white. The conclusion ends with a synthesis of this complex and nuanced process.

Historiographical Survey of Secondary Sources

There has been a great deal of interest in the history of the South African poor white problem both locally and internationally. This interest has not been restricted to academia and has appeared in South African fictional literature in works like Andre P. Brink’s novel “Before I Forget”.⁶ The writer is aware of the sources listed in the footnote below and includes them for the sake of completeness. This material was not considered central to this study.⁷

⁵This material is supplemented by references to other sources such as Macmillan, Feinstein, Giliomee and Davie.

⁶A.P. Brink: *Before I Forget*, p. 10.

⁷See: I Abedian & B. Standish: “Poor Whites and the role of the state: The Evidence”, *South African Journal of Economics*, (53), (98), June 1985; D. Berger: “White Poverty and Government Policy in South Africa: 1892-1934”, PhD thesis, Temple University, 1982; P. Buirsky: “Aspects of Material Life in Oudtshoorn 1860-1927 with particular reference to the labouring poor”, BA Honours, University of Cape Town, 1983; T. Clynick: “White South Africa’s ‘weak sons’: Poor whites and the Hartbeespoort Dam”, in P. Bonner, A. Esterhuysen and T. Jenkins (eds.), *A Search for Origins: Science, History and South Africa’s “Cradle of Humankind”*, (Wits University Press: Johannesburg, 2007); B. Freund: “The poor whites: a social force and a social problem in South African history”, in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa 1880-1940*, (Unisa: Pretoria, 1992); T. Keegan: *Rural Transformations in industrialising South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914*, (Macmillan Press: London, 1987); R.A. Lewis: “A Study of some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, MA dissertation, Rhodes University, 1973; T.J.D. Middelmann: “The

The secondary sources used in this thesis were selected as being largely representative of the history of the poor white during the successive phases of social awareness, the concerns and anxieties of the DRC, urbanisation, political recognition, causation, and upliftment. This thesis will seek to analyse each of these processes through the perspective of race theories, class formation, the myths surrounding the Afrikaner nationalist project and incorporation into the white voting elite.

The report of the Carnegie Commission of enquiry into the poor white problem in South Africa was published in 1932. The report consists of five volumes. Volume I, written by Dr. J.F.W. Grosskopf, an agricultural economist, analysed the primitive farming methods of poor whites and gives reasons why they frequently failed.⁸ Volume II, written by Prof. R.W. Wilcocks, at the time the Head of the Department of Psychology at Stellenbosch University, deals with the psychology of the poor white. He also expressed strong reservations against the provision of charity on an open-ended basis.⁹ Together with E.G. Malherbe, Wilcocks conducted extensive intelligence testing upon the poor whites. Volume III, written by the educationist Dr.E.G.Malherbe, describes the shortcomings of the schooling of the poor whites, including the dearth of vocational and technical training.¹⁰ Dr. W.A. Murray, a medical practitioner, is the author of Volume IV which deals with the health of the poor white family.¹¹ Volume V comprises two sections. The first section, written by the Rev. J.R. Albertyn, describes the sociological circumstances of the poor whites. Tellingly he recognises the potential political influence of the poor white's vote.¹² The second section, researched by Mrs M.E. Rothman, is devoted to the mother and daughter of the poor white family.¹³ The findings of the Carnegie Commission form a core component of the material in Chapter 4. Furthermore the Carnegie Commission is frequently quoted in much of the secondary literature on the subject of the poor white.

Hartebeespoort Irrigation Scheme: A project of modernisation, segregation and white poverty alleviation, 1912-1926", *South African Historical Journal*, (67), (2), 2015; J.W.N. Tempelhoff: "Omgewingslagoffers of armblanks? Water en welvaartskepping in die era van Hertzog, 1914-1939", Ongepubliseerde referaat gelewer tydens die jaarlikse Hertzoggedenklesing van die Suid-Afrikaanse Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns, Pretoria, 21 September 2006.

⁸ J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

⁹ R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

¹⁰ E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

¹¹ W.A. Murray: *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

¹² J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

¹³ M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, Stellenbosch University, 1932.

It seems that all six of the commissioners were more or less sympathetic to the Afrikaner cause and the narrative tends to sanitise the poor white as being morally compliant and passive victims of circumstance. Whatever these shortcomings may be, the Report of the Carnegie Commission remains a very important source of knowledge about the South African poor white and is frequently referred to in this thesis. In many respects it was unique in the sense that the commissioners knowingly subjected themselves to considerable personal inconvenience and discomfort by visiting the white poor in isolated villages all over South Africa. This is indicative of the sincerity and determination of the commissioners to find the reasons behind the poor white phenomenon and suggest solutions to the problem. In many ways their concerns resonated with the anxieties and fears expressed by the DRC, Afrikaner politicians and intellectuals arising from perceptions of the risk of racial contamination of white society at large.

“Complex South Africa”, written by the liberal economic historian William Macmillan and published in 1930, provides an insightful account of the economic, social and agricultural practices of the pastoral economy from late in the 19th century into the early 20th.¹⁴ Very much contrary to popular opinion, Macmillan demonstrated as much sympathy for the poor white as the poor black. His views did not endear him to the ruling elite. “Complex South Africa” provides a balanced and nuanced perspective on the poor white problem based upon careful economic research when compared to the report of the Carnegie Commission. In many respects Macmillan’s systematic economic research pre-empted many of the conclusions of Grosskopf in Volume I, but did not deal as extensively with the educational shortcomings of the poor white as Malherbe did in Volume III. In comparison to the Carnegie Commission, “Complex South Africa” devoted little attention to the psychological, sociological and health circumstances of the poor white. The author recognises that Macmillan was certainly not a proponent of Afrikaner nationalism and shares his scepticism regarding the attendant mythology.

“A History of South Africa: Social and Economic” by Cornelis De Kiewiet, first published in 1941, provides a compelling account of the social and economic circumstances of South Africa until 1930.¹⁵ The perspectives offered on the process of land acquisition by the trekboers was useful for this thesis. As it happens De Kiewiet was a protégé of Macmillan and

¹⁴ W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, London, Faber and Faber, 1943.

¹⁵ C.W. De Kiewiet: *A History of South Africa*, London, Oxford University Press, 1941.

both shared the liberal historiographic perspective. The description by De Kiewiet of the regulation of industry aimed at placing whites at an advantage greatly assisted the author in acquiring a better understanding of the State's role in uplifting the poor white.

The Rev. P. du Toit compiled the final report of the Volkskongres of 1934 on the Poor White Problem.¹⁶ This gathering included representatives of the DRC, the Carnegie Commission, charitable organisations and representatives of the State. The report concluded with a series of resolutions which the conference wanted implemented, mainly by the state. One can detect an emerging political agenda driven by the Afrikaner nationalist project when comparing the report to that of the DRC Synodal Conference of 1916. This change by the state to a more assertive approach to white poverty was useful in understanding the reasons for the intensification of racial segregation before the Second World War. The agenda behind the manipulation of the conclusions of the Carnegie Commission for the benefit of the Afrikaner nationalist project supports the author's contention that the upliftment of the poor white was largely driven by political competition for their vote.

Charles Van Onselen is currently a research professor in the Department of Humanities at the University of Pretoria. He has authored a number of books on the social history of South Africa at the turn of the 19th century. "New Babylon, New Nineveh", originally published in 1982, offers interesting and useful insights into daily life on the Witwatersrand between 1886 and 1914.¹⁷ This book frequently covers topics which are ignored in much of the other historical writings of the period, such as prostitution, black crime gangs and the entrepreneurial business activities of both blacks and whites. The book challenges the morally pure and passive role of the poor white described by the Carnegie Commission and provides evidence of human agency and entrepreneurship. These perspectives have been useful when analysing the factors leading to the upliftment of the poor white.

"Volkskapitalisme" was written by the revisionist Dan O'Meara and first published in 1983.¹⁸ The book includes a helpful account of class formation amongst Afrikaners following

¹⁶P. du Toit: *Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem*, Cape Town, Nationale Pers Beperk, 1934.

¹⁷C. Van Onselen: *New Babylon New Nineveh*, Johannesburg, Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2001.

¹⁸D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983. Apart from a number of papers on Afrikaner Nationalism, he also wrote *Forty Lost Years: the Apartheid state and the politics of the National Party, 1948-1994* (Randburg: Ravan, 1996) which describes the apogee and subsequent decline of Afrikaner political power.

urbanisation in the 20's and 30's. O'Meara describes the process by which Afrikaners acquired a significant stake in the South African mining, financial and industrial economy between the late 1920's and 1940. These developments contributed to the upliftment of the poor white, mainly by complementing other initiatives, mostly by the state.

Paul Rich analyses the manner in which the concepts of race, based on pseudo-science, were promoted in order to underpin white supremacy. These views appear in a paper entitled "Race, Science and the Legitimisation of White Supremacy in South Africa," published in 1990.¹⁹ The paper covers the period 1902 to 1940 and provides a detailed account of the emergence of scientific racism and eugenics and was useful in understanding how these race theories shaped the segregationist narrative in South Africa.

A number of useful essays which describe facets of the life and times of the poor white are contained in "White but Poor" edited by Morrell and published in 1992.²⁰ Albert Grundlingh contributes an essay which refers to interracial co-operation and sexual intimacy amongst the Knysna forest woodcutters and the negative response of the DRC. In the same book, Tim Clynick offers an interesting perspective on class formation within the poor white alluvial diamond diggers which arose in response to State and mining capital interests. Similarly, Susan Parnell illustrates in some detail the efforts of local authorities to segregate the slums that had formed in and around Johannesburg in the 1930's. Gordon Pirie describes how poor whites were employed by the South African Railways in an unskilled capacity and later trained for more skilled work.

"Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa" by Saul Dubow, published in 1995, provides an insightful overview of scientific racism and eugenics in South Africa.²¹ In so doing he lends support to Rich's paper above. Dubow is a lecturer in history at the School of African and Asian studies at Cambridge University. A South African by birth, Dubow has written extensively about racism in South Africa, the development of segregationist policies and ultimately the implementation of apartheid. Frequent references to the poor white problem are used by the author to illustrate the way in which race theories became malleable in the hands of politicians in order to promote their political agendas. Dubow's perspective has been very useful in writing the sections on scientific racism and eugenics, in particular the narratives

¹⁹P. Rich: "Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990): 665-686.

²⁰All articles appear in R. Morrell (ed): *White but Poor*, Pretoria, University of South Africa, 1992.

²¹ S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995.

aimed at the inclusion of the poor white in the greater Afrikaner identity. He tends to be dismissive of biological determinism in favour of culture and language as the basis of race. This view is not widely accepted by most geneticists.

Hermann Giliomee has written prolifically on many aspects of Afrikaner history. His most widely read book, “The Afrikaners”, published in 2003, describes the major triumphs and calamities in the volks’ history and the manner in which these events were skilfully woven into the tapestry of Afrikaner nationalism.²² He is currently Emeritus Professor of History at Stellenbosch University. His description of the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism, urbanisation and segregation was useful at a number of stages of this thesis, but particularly when writing Chapter 7 and the conclusion.

“An Economic History of South Africa” written by Charles Feinstein, was published in 2005.²³ Remarkably, the book claims to be the first economic history of the country in 60 years. Feinstein provides a lucid explanation for the slow economic growth from 1652 until the mineral revolution late in the 19th century. This is followed by a description of the industrialisation of South Africa which reached a peak during the Second World War. The book was useful in explaining the rapidly changing economic environment and how initially the poor whites’ rudimentary education was a major impediment to adapting to urbanisation and industrialisation.

J.J.Froneman presents a novel approach to the student years of H.F.Verwoerd. He successfully challenges the contemporaneous view propagated by R.B. Miller that Verwoerd had no strongly held views about Afrikaner nationalism or segregationist ideology. The paper was published in 1999 in *Koers* and is entitled “H.F. Verwoerd: Foundational Aspects of His Thought”.²⁴ The paper provides some background to Verwoerd’s role during and following the 1934 Volkskongress, particularly his determination to recruit and train social workers to assist the poor white upliftment project. He was determined that the state should do much more to uplift the poor white.

²² H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, Cape Town, Tafelberg Publishers, 2003.

²³ C. Feinstein: *An Economic History of South Africa*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

²⁴ J.J. Froneman: “H.F. Verwoerd’s student years - cradle of political career and thought,” *Koers*, 65, (3),(2000), pp. 399-412.

Jeremy Seekings is a professor in the Department of Sociology and Politics at the University of Cape Town. He has contributed to numerous journals on the subject of poverty in South Africa as well as co-authoring a book entitled “Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa” with Nicoli Nattrass. One of the papers used for this thesis is entitled “The Carnegie Commission and the backlash against welfare state building in South Africa, 1931-1937” published in 2008, which offers a description of the competition and/or collaboration between the various parties seeking to uplift the poor whites. The other paper of relevance to this study is entitled “Workers and the Beginnings of Welfare State Building in Argentina and South Africa” published in 2007. Both papers demonstrate how state welfare is seldom altruistic, a view that was useful in formulating the author’s own stance on the political framing and definition of the poor white.²⁵

“Poor White” by Edward John Bottomley published in 2012 offers a limited analysis of the reasons for the emergence of the poor white.²⁶ Quite refreshingly he challenges the Carnegie Commission’s sanitised view of poor white morality with a number of graphic examples. He also considers the abolition of the gold standard and the subsequent industrialisation of South Africa during the Second World War as being crucial for the upliftment of the poor white.

The paper by Lindie Koorts published in 2013, entitled “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: D.F. Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid Era, 1912-1939” provided evidence of the influential role played by Malan in supporting an intensification of segregation and the foundations of apartheid.²⁷ These have been useful for the author in analysing the political agenda behind the upliftment of the poor white.

“Poverty Knowledge in South Africa” has turned out to be extremely useful in understanding the manner in which so called poverty experts often ignore evidence from other interested parties, particularly from the indigent themselves. The book is written by Grace Davie, Professor of History at Queens College, City University of New York and published in 2015.

²⁵See J. Seekings: “Workers and the Beginnings of Welfare State- Building in Argentina and South Africa”, *African Studies*, (August-December 2007) pp. 253-272 and “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa 1931-1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (September 2008), pp. 515-537.

²⁶ E.J. Bottomley: *Poor White*, Cape Town, Tafelberg, 2012.

²⁷ L. Koorts: “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912-1939,” *South African Historical Journal*, (2013), volume 65, No 4, pp. 555-576.

A chapter of the book is devoted to an analysis of the respective roles and opinions of Macmillan, Verwoerd, McCrone and the Carnegie Commission, with relevance to white poverty in South Africa.²⁸ This perspective was particularly useful in assisting the author in understanding the complexity of the contested debate about race and poverty in South Africa before 1948.

“The Retreat of Scientific Racism” by Elazar Barkan describes the manner in which scientific discoveries and empirical knowledge in the 20th century gradually broke down strongly held beliefs that certain races were superior to others.²⁹ These insights have been useful in understanding the demise of racism from a scientific perspective, despite the enduring nature of such beliefs. The book again illustrates the manner in which politicians manufacture and manipulate opinions about race to suit their agendas.

Leo Kuper is the editor of a collection of essays on the relationship between race and science and how these factors impact upon society. Unsurprisingly, the book is entitled “Race, Science and Society” and was published in 1975. One of the essays, written in the late 60’s, provides a practical and scientifically based description of the emergence of human races from the time of the final migration from Africa approximately 60,000 years ago.³⁰ In common with a number of the other publications used to research this thesis, the consensus in this book considers that race is a complex mixture of genes, culture and language.

The editorial in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* which appeared in 1998, described eugenic interventions originally proposed by the ancient Greek philosophers and later pursued by the Nazis. These practices are compared to certain circumstances under which contraception and abortion could also be construed to be of a eugenic nature. It would seem that there is a fine line between eugenics and equitable public health, a concept well understood by Doctors Cluver, Leipoldt and others.³¹ The publication has been useful in positioning the chapter on eugenics within the context of later South African legislation outlawing racial mixing, the control of black fertility and the incarceration of the mentally defective.

²⁸ G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

²⁹ E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992.

³⁰ L. Kuper: *Race, Science and Society*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1975.

³¹ R. Gillion: “Eugenics, contraception, abortion and ethics”, *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, (1998) 24: pp. 219-220.

In 1904 Francis Galton delivered a paper entitled “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims” which was subsequently published in the *American Journal of Sociology*.³² The audience included a number of distinguished members of London society, including such luminaries as H.G. Wells, Karl Pearson and George Bernard Shaw. The purpose of the occasion was to gather support for the fledgling eugenics project. The paper was used to describe the origins of eugenics in this thesis.

Maurizio Meloni, a Senior Research Fellow in the Department of Sociological Studies, University of Sheffield, UK, published a book entitled “Political Biology - Science and Social Values in Human Heredity from Eugenics to Epigenetics”. Published in 2016, he describes the period from the beginning of the 20th century until the end of the Second World War as that of “Hard Heredity” or alternately the view that biological determinism was the only factor determining the phenotype of future generations. This period coincides with the growth of the poor white problem in South Africa and the proliferation of race theories, which were so influential in defining the poor white and shaping segregationist political ideology. The description of the trial of Carrie Buck illustrates the almost fanatical determination of the believers in eugenics to promote such extreme measures such as forced sterilization in order to achieve a “better” type of humanity.³³

Towards the end of his illustrious career as Professor of Human Genetics at Wits University, Trevor Jenkins published a “History of Medical Genetics in South Africa” in the *Journal of Medical Genetics* in 1990. In this paper he describes the efforts of eugenicists in the 1920’s to prevent the degeneration of whites, which in their view, arose from inter and intra-racial sexual activity. Thus the race theorists were convinced that the future decline of whites would be arrested by the passage of the Immorality Act of 1927.³⁴ This thesis will demonstrate that in this respect they were deluded.

Understanding the establishment of the Carnegie Commission in 1929 was greatly assisted by the paper by Edward John Bottomley titled “Transnational Governmentality and the Poor White in Early Twentieth century South Africa”.³⁵ This paper sheds light on some of the motives behind the Carnegie Foundations’ participation in this project in South Africa.

³² R. Galton: “Eugenics: Its definition, scope and aims”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, (July 1904): pp. 1-25.

³³ M. Meloni: *Political Biology*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

³⁴ T. Jenkins: “Medical Genetics in South Africa,” *Journal of Medical Genetics*, 1990, 27, pp. 760-779.

³⁵ E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54 (2016) pp. 76-86.

One of the foremost supporters of eugenic interventions was H.B. Fantham, who published his concerns regarding the degradation of white society in a paper entitled “Some factors in Eugenics, together with notes on some South African cases”. This paper appeared in the South African Journal of Science in 1927. His emphasis on labelling the poor whites as “feeble minded” illustrated how prominent scientists frequently made dramatic generalisations which were often unsupported by robust empirical evidence.³⁶

“Looking for Goodness” is a biography of the late Dr. Eustace H. Cluver, a prominent medical specialist who at various times was Union Secretary of Public Health, Director of the South African Institute for Medical Research and Dean of the Medical School at Wits. It was written by his daughter, Anne Cluver-Weinberg, and published in 2008.³⁷ This book was helpful in understanding the role Cluver played in moderating eugenic initiatives as well as refuting racism. Cluver himself published extensively in the medical field. His most well-known book is “Public Health in South Africa”, of which eight editions appeared over the course of some 20 years.³⁸ The foreword provides a useful insight into his philosophy on health.

“Human Heredity”, co authored by Erwin Baur, Fritz Lenz & Eugen Fischer includes Fischer’s findings of hybrid vigour within the Rehoboth Bastards.³⁹ His later career as a race scientist is in conflict with his own discovery of the benefits of genetic variation. His story is included in this thesis to demonstrate the power and hegemony of race theories and the profound influence that these ideologies can have on future generations - whether Jews, poor whites or poor blacks.

Primary Sources

The Killie Cambell Museum in Durban provided useful primary source references with particular relevance to this thesis housed in the E.G. Malherbe collection. Many of these were used, particularly the handwritten notes and speeches describing aspects of the poor whites’ lifestyle, the reports of a number of the DRC synodal conferences dealing with the poor white problem and an overview of vocational and technical training early in the 20th century.

³⁶ H.B. Fantham: “Some Factors in Eugenics, Together with Notes on some South African cases,” *The South African Journal of Science*, (July 1925), pp.400-421.

³⁷ A. Cluver-Weinberg: *Looking for Goodness*, Johannesburg, Stapler Press, 2008.

³⁸ The first edition of E.H. Cluver: *Public Health in South Africa*, South Africa, Central News Agency Ltd, was published in 1934.

³⁹ E. Baur, F. Lenz & E. Fischer: *Human Heredity*, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1931.

CHAPTER 2

THE EMERGENCE OF THE POOR WHITE

The recognition of this problem, as it happened, coincided with the apogee of the confident belief in the superiority of the white race, a view supported by emerging scientific racism and the eugenics movement. Yet Afrikaner politicians, clerics and educationists had difficulty reconciling their racist views with the destitute position of many of their white countrymen. The question which was asked in hushed tones behind closed doors was: if whites were so superior, how could they be so poor? In time the difficulty of reconciling white superiority with white poverty led to a considerable degree of anxiety on the part of the ruling elite. The situation became so dire that a number of commissions of enquiry into the poor white problem were established, with the most comprehensive being funded by the Carnegie Foundation of the United States between 1929 and 1932. In the words of Dubow:

“What has tended to be ignored, however, is the way in which poor whiteism came to function as an important comparative discursive site for the expression of racial anxieties and the testing of racial theories.”⁴⁰

The Effect of Economic Change on Pastoral Whites

The trekboers' migration from the Cape to the banks of the Great Fish River started at the end of the 17th century and ended approximately 100 years later. The VOC allocated land on a quit rent basis and provided the rental was paid annually, tenure was secure. The vast land holdings that became available in this manner were suitable for pastoralism with little effort or skill required on the part of the farmer. When grazing became depleted, the livestock was moved to the next farm.

The process is aptly summarized by De Kiewiet:

“The claim of each man to a farm of not less than 6000 acres became ultimately an inborn right. In subsequent South African history, few factors are of greater importance than the uncontrolled and haphazard method of land settlement and the habits that were bred by the company's loss of control over Boer expansion.”⁴¹

⁴⁰S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 171-172.

⁴¹C.W. de Kiewiet: *A History of South Africa*, p. 17.

These huge farms were more often than not occupied by one or two families, resulting in a low population density in the rural areas of what was later to become the Cape Colony. As a result, the white settlers were isolated from one another, which restricted the exchange of goods and services which are essential in any modern economy. The British occupation of the Cape in 1806 led to a slight improvement in economic activity. Many of the restrictions imposed by the VOC on the commercial activities of the local population were relaxed. The Lombard Bank expanded its services in order to finance imports and exports. In 1825 the British currency was introduced and over the next few years the Rix dollar became redundant. In 1820, 1837 and 1857 significant numbers of British and German immigrants were encouraged to settle in the frontier regions. Soon after British occupation, duties on Cape wines were reduced thereby stimulating exports. This was soon followed by demand for wool by the British textile industry, which grew from 20,000 pounds in 1822 to 26 million pounds some 40 years later.⁴²

The situation in the interior of South Africa had been described as “abundant land and scarce labour”.⁴³ It has been suggested that where land is plentiful, potential sources of labour would prefer to farm for their own account rather than working for others. It was therefore in the interests of the white settlers to occupy as much land as possible in order to force blacks into employment. Needless to say, this approach led to ongoing conflict with the local chiefdoms. This remained the situation until the 1870’s when diamonds were discovered at the confluence of the Vaal and Hartz Rivers. This further exacerbated the demand for labour. The discovery of diamonds and later gold certainly increased British interest in southern Africa, leading to a number of conflicts with both the Boers and the various black groupings. By the end of the Anglo Boer War, both of the Boer republics were under British control and by 1910 political union of the four colonies had taken place.⁴⁴

The growth of diamond and gold mining had a dramatic effect upon the economy in general and agriculture in particular. Pastoral farming began to be replaced by commercial agrarian activities to supply the rapidly growing population living in the mining towns. The demand for maize led to the introduction of intensive farming methods in the northern Free State and southern Transvaal. Agrarian agriculture was also more labour-intensive than pastoralism which placed further demands on the supply of labour.⁴⁵

⁴²C. Feinstein: *An Economic History of South Africa*, pp. 25-30.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 32

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 32-35.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 49-50.

Mining activities led to a significant increase in imports. In 1871 they totalled approximately 3 million pounds and by 1875 had increased to just over 7 million pounds. The effect upon the budget of the Cape Colony was equally spectacular as evidenced by increasing surpluses. This enabled the Cape parliament to approve 14 million pounds for the construction of 1000 miles of railway from Cape Town to the Witwatersrand in 1886.⁴⁶

Very soon after the war, the mines had reopened and early industrialisation was gathering pace. The export of gold underwent a dramatic increase reaching 27 million pounds per year between 1906 and 1910, compared to 4.5 million pounds per year before the war.⁴⁷ As a result, the number of black city residents increased rapidly, growing from 350,000 (10% of total) in 1904 to 1.7 million (22% of total) in 1946.⁴⁸ A similar process was underway amongst white Afrikaners. In 1910 some 29% were urbanised, rising to 50% in 1936.⁴⁹

The Early Awareness of White Poverty

The traditional view is that the poor white phenomenon was only identified in the 1890's. This opinion was accepted by the Carnegie Commission as well as Macmillan in his publication entitled "The South African Agrarian Problem". The support for this view is often based upon John X. Merriman's findings of white poverty in the Cape Colony in 1892. Prior to this time there was little poverty in the Cape other than as a result "of idleness, sickness, accident or vice". Bundy disputes this finding. He argues for a variety of reasons that significant white poverty existed as early as 1860. In arriving at this conclusion he describes the existence of a number of impoverished rural and landless men and woman in the Cape Colony between 1860 and 1890. This group comprised bywoners and squatters, as well as unskilled people eeking out an existence in towns and villages. During this time, there was an expansion of capitalist agriculture to meet the need for wool, grain and ostrich feathers. At this stage of the 19th century, perceptions of white superiority were not as prevalent as later, resulting in a great deal more interaction between poor rural people irrespective of race. It was only after 1890 that the poor white problem started attracting attention as an exclusively white concern.⁵⁰

⁴⁶C.W. de Kiewiet: *A History of South Africa*, p. 97.

⁴⁷C. Feinstein: *An Economic History of South Africa*, p. 100.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁴⁹H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 405.

⁵⁰C. Bundy: *Poverty in South Africa*, pp. 102-104.

Support for Bundy's view can be found in Grace Davie's book "Poverty Knowledge in South Africa". She points out that during the 1860's there had been a collapse of wool prices, restrictions on the export of Cape wine and international banking uncertainty. Poverty in the Cape resonated with that in Victorian England. London newspapers described the hovels occupied by the London poor "as being 8ft.² and crawling with vermin". When these publications turned their attention to local Cape conditions, the impecunious of Cape Town were considered to be worse off than the poor living in London. Anthony Trollope, a visiting writer, predicted that if poor whites were not uplifted they would continue to deteriorate into the "snuff and butter coloured population."⁵¹

According to Giliomee, the Rev. Marchand, a prelate at the DRC in Knysna, became aware of the poor white problem whilst travelling in the Karoo during a storm. He was forced to seek sanctuary in the home of a poor white family for the night. During the course of his sojourn he became aware that the children had not received any school education whatsoever. He became determined to do all he could to rectify the situation. Marchand was instrumental in bringing the DRC's attention to white poverty during the synodial meeting in 1886. This resulted in a subsequent conference entirely devoted to the poor white issue in 1893 in Stellenbosch. Several synodial conferences in which the poor white problem received much attention took place over the next 40 years.⁵² By the early 1920's even the politicians were forced to confront this new and ominous threat to white hegemony. By the late 1920's it was estimated that one fifth of the Afrikaner population were considered poor and by definition had become dependent upon others for means of subsistence.⁵³

⁵¹G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 40-41.

⁵²O.P.J. Stander: "Die Voorkoms van wit armoede in Oudshoorn tussen 1914 en 1937," PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, December 2017, p. 14.

⁵³R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, p. 319.

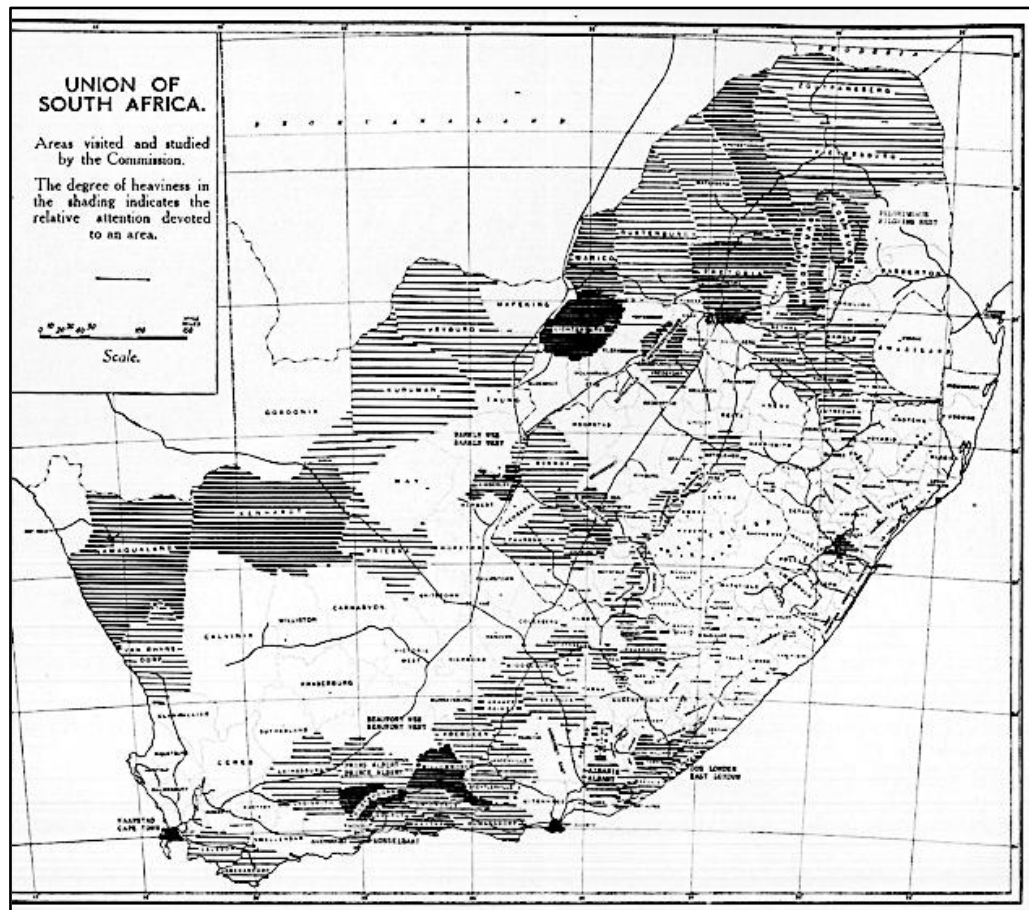
The Demographics of the Poor White

The full extent of the problem was finally brought into sharp focus by the census of 1921. The Western Cape, as a result of good rainfall, quality soils and progressive farming methods was unaffected. Some 200 miles east of Cape Town was the beginning of the Klein Karoo. It was generally sparsely populated as a result of poor soils and infrequent rainfall. The exception was Oudtshoorn, which had been undergoing an agricultural boom as a result of the worldwide popularity of ostrich feathers as a fashion item in women's clothing. The economic importance of the town led to the construction of a railway from the coast. This reached Oudtshoorn in 1913. Unfortunately, by 1914 the price of ostrich feathers had collapsed, leaving many farmers destitute. Up to that time many whites had earned a living by transporting essential goods from the coast and others had worked on the hitherto successful ostrich farms. The resulting poverty evolved in three different ways: in some cases individuals were able to overcome their straitened circumstances and re-establish an independent existence; there were others who were able to plant vegetables along the Grobbelaar River, an area which was reasonably close to the market. In this way, they too, were able to escape poverty. Unfortunately there remained a residual group who were too poor to purchase productive farms and became confined to areas in which rainfall was low, had infertile soils and were far from possible markets.⁵⁴

Further to the east, most coastal towns experienced no reduction in population. The industrial towns in the Transvaal and areas surrounding Kimberley experienced a dramatic growth in population numbers. From the census it was evident that the increase in population in the towns in the north had been due to a dramatic migration of white people from a central band in South Africa, stretching across the western and southern Free State into the central and eastern Cape. Small and previously thriving villages in these regions became ghost towns. These rural areas were littered with dilapidated and abandoned dwellings. Bigger towns, such as Riversdale, Alexandria, Albany, Bedford, Adelaide, Victoria East, King William's Town, Cathcart, Stutterheim and Komgha all experienced a reduction in population numbers. It became apparent that this migration had been gaining momentum since the start of the mineral revolution in the late 19th century. Further investigation revealed that the participants were mainly landless agricultural tenants known as "bijwoners", whose numbers were increased by unsuccessful farmers and their families from rural areas.

⁵⁴O.P.J. Stander: "Die Voorkoms van wit armoede in Oudshoorn tussen 1914 en 1937," PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, December 2017, p. 113.

Their obsolete farming methods were their only skills, certainly of no commercial value in the booming mining towns of Johannesburg and Kimberley. Soon the white labour market in the major centres became congested, leading to massive unemployment. The presence of large numbers of blacks in urban centres who were prepared to work for wages considerably less than what was considered to be a living wage for whites, did little to help matters further.⁵⁵



There was general agreement that the poor white had a rural background, was of mixed Dutch, German or French origins and had sunk into such a degree of poverty that they and their family required assistance in order to survive. A more objective definition of poverty was complicated by variations in the cost of living in different parts of the country. The prevalence of payment in kind made the computation of privation even more problematic. The Select Committee of 1913 described two classes of the very poor as being: “the indigent, degraded, vicious, living on charity or on crime; and the poor who do, or are willing to work, but lack training and all decent opportunity even to earn a livelihood, except under such miserable conditions as in the Knysna forests.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵ W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 45-47.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48. This distinction has been included for completeness sake. For the purpose of this thesis, the term white poverty or poor white will be used.

Since Macmillan's time, academics have struggled to agree on a generally acceptable definition of poverty. Wilson and Ramphela describe poverty as being "like illness. It shows itself in different ways in different historical situations, and it has diverse causes."⁵⁷

Writing in the *World Development Journal*, Lipton distinguishes between "absolute and relative" poverty, but fails to define either concept. In his PhD thesis, Stander defines absolute poverty as an individual's inability to provide for adequate diet, clothing, accommodation, protection and medical requirements. Relative poverty is defined as an individual's ability to meet the needs described above, but having insufficient income to participate as an active member of society. Others, such as Townsend, define poverty differently again:

"Poverty, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. Poverty is a value judgement: it is not something one can verify or demonstrate, except by inference and suggestion, even with a measure of error. To say who is poor, is to use all sorts of value judgements. The concept has to be limited by the purpose which is served by the definition."⁵⁸

In 1916, the Minister of Agriculture, a Mr J. van Heerden, estimated that there were approximately 40,000 whites living in absolute poverty, and a further 68,000 who were somewhat better off. This constituted approximately 8% of the total white population. At the time this figure was considered to be on the low side due to underreporting on the part of the indigent. It was generally agreed that the true figure was more likely to be 10% of the total white population of 1,5 million, of whom the bulk were of Dutch extraction. At the time, the black and coloured population was 5 million.⁵⁹

Later, the Carnegie Commission sent questionnaires to approximately half the schools in the Union requesting information regarding the financial status of the families of pupils. The school headmasters replied that some 17.5% of all the families of children at the schools were considered to be very poor. As the total white population of the Union was approximately 1.8 million in 1931, this percentage translates to a total of some 300,000 poor whites. Other calculations based upon the 1926 census, which included occupational dispensations, arrived at the figure of 220,000 persons who were considered to be poor whites.⁶⁰

⁵⁷O.P.J. Stander: "Die Voorkoms van witarmoede in Oudshoorn tussen 1914 en 1937," PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, December 2017, p. 4.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁹W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 48-53.

⁶⁰R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, p. 7.

Attitudes to the Poor White

Towards the end of the 19th century attitudes towards white poverty were viewed through the prism of class, race and sanitary prejudices. Often these perceptions became conflated with one another. In 1891 the Cape government brought a new public health department into being. The initial concern was the growth of substandard residential areas occupied by both whites and blacks. A few years later such racial mixing was blamed for an epidemic of bubonic plague due to the ingress of “uncontrolled Kafir (sic) hordes”. Not surprisingly, the Cape parliament attempted to ameliorate white poverty by implementing much of the British Poor Law legislation. The Boer republics on the other hand were much more sympathetic to the approach adopted by the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, who considered poverty to be due to structural flaws in the economy. This may perhaps explain the approach of the Pact government towards white poverty between 1924 and 1934.⁶¹

By the turn of the century the ruling class’s views on race were strongly influenced by eugenic theories. There was a general concern that “tainting the blood” would lead to the deterioration of white people. The effect of racial mixing would be aggravated by environmental factors such as industrialisation and the Roman Dutch property inheritance laws which are described in greater detail in Chapter 4. A report on education in the Cape authored by Haldane Murray in 1893 described the “evil effects of intermarriage” arising from adherence to this law of inheritance. He described the poor whites as once proud landowners undergoing racial degeneration and thereby joining the labouring classes. Concern for white poverty was also reflected in the attitude of the DRC.

Some of the earliest efforts to uplift the poor white emanated from the church, which was the first organisation to establish an orphanage for abandoned white children in the Cape. Later in the century, public spirited members of the white middle-class were assisting poor white mothers to care for their children. They also alerted the authorities to poor white urbanisation early in the 20th century.⁶²

⁶¹ G.Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 40-41.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

Early in the 20th century attitudes towards white poverty could best be described as paternalistic and disapproving. Following a visit to the DRC agricultural settlement at Kakamas, the Afrikaner politician, F.S. Malan, described the poor whites as “undesirable, insidious and multiplying.” In his view rehabilitative programs operated by the government would do little to rectify the moral shortcomings of the poor white. It was only the church which could provide the correct environment for moderating the poor whites’ recidivist behaviour. Later the Rev. Marchand commended the Kakamas Labour Colony for not tolerating alcohol abuse, obscenities and disorderliness. Elsewhere in this thesis reference is made to the Transvaal Indigency Commission which sat between 1906 and 1908. A similar attitude was expressed in their report when they warned that uncontrolled charity may save the white poor from starvation, but may destroy “the moral fibre which is the basis of self-support”. They were also critical of the reluctance of the poor whites to perform manual labour, which was considered by them to be only suitable for black people.⁶³

The poor whites were defined by their race, class and poverty. They were considered to be of questionable morality and more likely to mix sexually with other races. They existed on the fringes of respectable white society, but most importantly, they possessed the right to vote.⁶⁴

Conclusion

By 1916 it seemed that the ruling elite were surprised and shocked at rising white poverty. It was almost as if black poverty was acceptable and white poverty not. Many of the attitudes described above can be explained by the prevailing view that racial mixing led to degenerate behaviour, a flawed concept described in greater detail in the chapters on scientific racism and eugenics below. There were also concerns that white poverty could be a consequence of structural factors in the economy which could spread further within the white community. Moreover, middle class attitudes towards the poor white were highly critical of their lazy and unhygienic lifestyle, and the deleterious effect that it would have on white respectability. In his book “On Aggression”, Lorenz describes the process of militant enthusiasm by which a particular group protects their own culture and social norms against other groupings which appear as different.

⁶³G.Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 44-45.

⁶⁴E.J. Bottomley: *Poor White*, p. 81.

A feature of such an attitude is the use of critical language when describing “the other”. Typically, cruel words, such as “defilement, unhygienic, immoral, lazy and degenerate” characterise such narratives. In many respects the socially superior group becomes antagonistic towards the needs and concerns of the so-called degenerate.⁶⁵ White middle-class attitudes towards white poverty in the first half of the 20th century resonate with these descriptions. These perceptions become more complex and difficult to analyse in the light of emerging political affiliations, Afrikaner nationalism and future voting loyalties. In many respects the attitudes of the DRC also appear ambivalent. On one hand the church was seen to be following biblical injunctions to provide charity for the poor, but such assistance was often conditional upon certain standards of moral behaviour by the recipient. In the following chapter it will be demonstrated how attitudes towards white poverty in America were remarkably similar to those which emerged in South Africa. As in this country, the attitudes which emerged in America were influenced by both fear of and contempt for the poor whites.

⁶⁵ K. Lorenz: *On Aggression*, pp. 250-251.

CHAPTER 3

THE CARNEGIE COMMISSION INTO THE POOR WHITE PROBLEM

“Thus, if the poor could not speak for themselves, there were many who could speak about them or for them: those who wish to repress them, to reform them, to rescue them, to romanticise them, to represent them.”⁶⁶

White Poverty in the United States

White poverty in South Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries must be considered as part of a much wider problem. In the 17th century the British government arranged for so-called “surplus population and expendable rubbish” to be exported to the colonies.⁶⁷ These reluctant colonists were an eclectic mix drawn from very different segments of the British population. Some were men and women who were convicted criminals, others street urchins, many of whom had debt in common. Yet despite these differences in background, the surplus people had one thing in common – a desire to avoid incarceration in a dismal, poorly ventilated and rodent infested prison. They all had little alternative than to accept transportation to a British Colony in North America, Australia or New Zealand. British settlement in South Africa only took place after conquest in 1806. The United States of America was built on a number of founding myths, including American exceptionalism, a classless society, freedom and opportunity for all. A careful study of class formation over 400 years demonstrates the fault lines in American society to this day.⁶⁸

Clearly the emergence of a stratified class of poor whites in South Africa was not primarily due to British policy regarding the poor. There are however striking similarities between the white poor in this country and those who have lived in other British colonies. The early American colonists considered the indigenous peoples as barbaric. The Indians were nomadic, did not construct permanent dwellings and moved their flocks as the seasons demanded. Hunting was an important part of their means of subsistence. When it came to landownership the indigenous peoples were ignored. The more entrepreneurial and wealthier English colonists soon realised that the control of the land by a minority would lead to wealth.

⁶⁶G. Himmelfarb: *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*, p. 173.

⁶⁷N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

The bulk of the poorer settlers and indigenous people would be excluded from land ownership and be confined to a lower class of society.⁶⁹ By the beginning of the 18th century there emerged a view amongst the wealthy farmers and plantation owners that slavery led to idleness amongst the poor. Some black slaves referred to poor whites as “white slaves”. These concerns however, did little to reduce the desire of the elite to own slaves, a practice which continued throughout all the colonies of America until the Civil War the following century.⁷⁰ By the end of the 18th century slavery and white poverty were conflated and at times considered very similar. These views resonated in Benjamin Franklin’s views on laziness. He became obsessed with the need to force the poor to work by encouraging migration as a means out of their impecunious condition. Franklin considered the vast continent to the west of the original colonies of settlement as providing the ideal conditions for the expansion of whites. The poor settlers would be free to grow up in a vast hinterland rather than within the confines of crowded and unhealthy European cities. In his words this would encourage a society of a “happy mediocrity.”⁷¹

Thomas Jefferson, the third American president, shared some of Franklin’s concerns. In 1803, President Jefferson had successfully acquired Louisiana from France, which effectively doubled the size of the United States. The problem with populating this vast area was the antiquated farming methods and poor education of many of his fellow colonists. In order to develop American agriculture, the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who occupied land they never owned in his native Virginia would have to be taught the necessary agrarian skills to develop the vast continent. Jefferson was a highly educated man and considered part of the wealthy rural elite. Despite occupying this influential position in society, he failed to gain the necessary support to train and educate the majority of the settlers early in the 19th century.⁷² This failure on the part of the American leaders gave rise to a vast number of landless and poorly educated squatters in the country by 1850. They were considered to be “a numerous population, in a state of wretchedness” and “ripe for treason and spoil.” Many of them soon acquired common and unpleasant characteristics. They lived in crude and unsanitary dwellings, were boastful and arrogant, exhibited a disdainful regard for education and civilisation and displayed licentious and indiscriminate breeding patterns. In short, they were considered degenerate.⁷³

⁶⁹N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, pp. 18-19.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, pp. 64-66.

⁷²*Ibid.*, pp. 85-87.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 112.

Concern about these poor white squatters led Jefferson to encourage the more careful selection of suitable wives in order to breed better future generations. In his book entitled “Intermarriage” which was published in 1838 he advocated the need for “hygienic marriages between sexual partners with healthy skin, good teeth, and well formed and vigorous bodies.” This narrative was immediately conflated with concerns of racial mixing leading “to a degenerate, unnatural offspring, doomed by nature to work out its own destruction.”⁷⁴

The term poor white became fairly established in the American South by about 1870. This coincided with the expansion of tobacco and cotton plantations requiring additional labour. It must be remembered that slavery had been abolished as a result of the American Civil War which started in 1861. Large numbers of mixed race workers congregated in the states of Georgia, Alabama and other states along the Mississippi River. The wealthy landowners considered these labourers to be a distinctly separate class hence the pejorative “poor white”. The northern states, who were the victors in the Civil War, were generally better educated and wealthier than the majority of their countrymen living in the south. The poor whites were variously described by the northerners as “clay eaters”, “crackers” or “lubbers”. Clay eaters were considered to be physically deformed, poorly nourished, lazy and of mixed race, the crackers were antisocial and violent and the lubbers were those poor whites who felt that society owed them a living and were constantly objectionable, particularly towards their employers.⁷⁵

The prevalence of these terms was indicative of class formation within American society. The poor whites were considered to be inferior compared to the members of the middle-class, a distinction based upon prejudicial perceptions of intelligence, behaviour and ambition. It was not long before class stratification became conflated with that of race.⁷⁶

When reading the description of white poverty in the USA many similarities with South Africa become strikingly evident. Both narratives are replete with descriptions of the white poor which are paternalistic and dismissive. They are variously described as lazy, feeble minded and of a lower class than the rest of white society. Accusations of racial mixing are common to both groups. In both countries slavery was extensive and an important component

⁷⁴N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, pp. 139-141.

⁷⁵O.P.J. Stander: “Die Voorkoms van wit armoede in Oudshoorn tussen 1914 en 1937,” PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, December 2017, p. 12.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, p. 13

of the economy, ending within some 30 years of each other. The slave trade was outlawed in South Africa by the British in 1808⁷⁷ and all slaves were emancipated in December 1838.⁷⁸ In the United States slavery was effectively by the conclusion of the Civil War in 1865.⁷⁹ President Thomas Jefferson, an iconic and educated leader, recommended eugenic solutions to the poor white problem, suggesting that white poverty had an inherited basis. The implication in both countries was that sexual mixing of whites with people of colour had led to racial degeneration. As it happens, the trekboers were accompanied by very few Dutch women so a significant degree of racial mixing was very likely. The irony was that the illustrious Jefferson fathered a number of children with a concubine living in his home who also happened to be a slave – Sally Hemmings.⁸⁰

The Establishment of the Carnegie Commission 1929-1932

As early as 1923 a joint conference on the poor white question in South Africa requested government attention to this problem. Inter alia, the conference requested government to investigate white poverty in a scientific and analytical manner in order to develop a plan to reverse white poverty.⁸¹ This request was supported at an extraordinary conference of the DRC Synod which took place in November 1927. Soon thereafter, Dr. D.F. Malan, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Welfare and Education at the time, pledged the support of the government.⁸²

The late Andrew Carnegie, the Scottish American steel magnate, bequeathed a certain amount of money to what he called “The Dominions and Colonies Fund.” Carnegie stipulated that the money in this fund was to be used for educational and social research purposes. South Africa remained a Dominion until the passage of the Statute of Westminster in 1931. Accordingly, the country still qualified for funding from the Carnegie Corporation. In 1927, Dr. F.P. Keppel, the president of the corporation, undertook a tour of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in order to explore ways in which this money could be put to optimal use. Prior to his visit, Keppel had dispatched an educationist by the name of Dr. James E. Russell to conduct an initial surveillance of suitable projects. One of the future Carnegie Commissioners was Dr. E. G. Malherbe, who completed his PhD in education at Teachers College, Columbia

⁷⁷ R. Elphick & H. Giliomee: *The Shaping of South African Society*, p. 237.

⁷⁸ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 115.

⁷⁹ S.E. Morison, H.S. Commanger & W.E. Leuchtenburg: *A Concise History of the American Republic*, p. 315.

⁸⁰ N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, p. 100.

⁸¹ L. Pretorius: “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek-‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, August 1985, p. 30.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

University, under Russell. Keppel himself had previously been the Dean of Columbia University.

Upon Keppel's arrival in South Africa, he consulted with Malherbe, who persuaded him that the poor white problem was the most deserving of all the educational and social challenges facing the country at the time.⁸³ In doing so, Malherbe referred him to an article that he had written for the Cape Times in 1921 which included the following paragraph:

“Today we have over 100,000 so-called poor whites. They are becoming a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of our white people, living as we do in the midst of the native population which outnumbers as 5 to 1. We shall never solve the poor white problem adequately until we get a thorough and first-hand knowledge of the causes underlying this malady – the cumulative result of some maladjustment in our society in the past. The causes seem to be more psychological than otherwise. Much has already been done. But what is needed more than anything else is a case study of each of the hundreds of these families. We must get down to the very bedrock facts, by living right with these people and thus tracing carefully the personal history in each individual case. Only when we have made a correct diagnosis and we are certain of the causes, can we remedy them. Much of the praiseworthy efforts of the past failed to bring the expected results because some factors had not been sufficiently investigated. Such work can be done satisfactorily only by men trained in psychological, economic and sociological research. The results must be published so as to be accessible to the whole public. The seeking of a solution to this problem must become a national project.”⁸⁴

Keppel asked Malherbe to provide a budget by the next day. Malherbe set out what he considered to be the five important components of the investigation – economic, psychological, educational, health and sociological issues. As it turned out, the Commission ultimately adopted this approach. Some two years later, Keppel established a Carnegie Trust Fund for South Africa and appointed three prominent trustees:

The Hon. Mr Patrick Duncan - later the Governor General of South Africa.

Sir Carruthers Beattie - the Principal of the University of Cape Town.

⁸³E.G. Malherbe: *Never a Dull Moment*, p. 120.

⁸⁴E.G. Malherbe: “Educational Research: A Plea for a Bureau,” *Cape Times*, 18 June 1921.

Dr. C. T. Loram - a member of the Native Affairs Commission and later Superintendent of Education in Natal and a Professor at Yale University.

A small executive committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Senator F.S. Malan assisted by Dr. R.W. Wilcocks as secretary/treasurer. Wilcocks also became a commissioner (psychological issues) and was later the Principal of Stellenbosch University. The other commissioners were Dr. J.F.W. Grosskopf (agricultural economics), Dr. E.G. Malherbe (education), Dr. W.A. Murray (health matters) and finally Dr. Kenyon Butterfield, a sociologist from Amherst College in America. It was felt that sociology was insufficiently developed in South Africa for a local person to be appointed alone. As the DRC involvement was considered crucial, the Rev. J.R. Albertyn, who was head of the church welfare organisation, was asked to produce the sociological aspects of the report. He was assisted by Mrs M.E. Rothmann, who was active in Afrikaaner women's welfare organisations.⁸⁵

Apart from Malherbe's and Keppels' versions, there appear to be alternative opinions of how the Commission came into being. Bundy considers the Pact government as being largely responsible for bringing the Carnegie Commission into being.⁸⁶ Others attribute a major role to the DRC, who claimed to have invited Carnegie.⁸⁷

In analysing the work of the Commission it is important to recognise that at no stage were the trustees, executive committee or commissioners required to formally declare their interest in the matters under investigation. Furthermore, from the outset, it was quite clear that the Commission's work was to investigate the causes of white poverty and certainly not poverty in general. From the perspective of the 21st century, it is disquieting to note that neither the executive committee nor the trustees included any representation from the individuals who were being investigated, ie the poor white.⁸⁸

The following statement by Malherbe sheds some light on this position:

“Our commission was not an armchair commission. It was a fieldwork commission. We did not sit in panelled rooms, as commissions generally do, round table, smoking endless cigarettes, while listening solemnly to the evidence of witnesses. We went after

⁸⁵ E.G. Malherbe: *Never a Dull Moment*, pp. 119-121.

⁸⁶ C. Bundy: *Poverty in South Africa*, p. 49.

⁸⁷ R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, p. 1.

⁸⁸ L. Pretorius: “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek-‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, August 1985, p. 32.

our witnesses. We literally hunted them out in the most inhospitable parts of South Africa.”⁸⁹

The report consists of five volumes, each one dealing with the subject matter of the Commission’s investigation as described above.

The Carnegie Commission into the poor white problem distinguished a number of subclasses of poor whites. Most of these unfortunate individuals had been connected, one way or another, to the land. Thus they were those who worked as bywonöers, farm labourers, sharecroppers and shepherds in pastoral areas. Another group were unsuccessful farmers whose lack of success was due to recurrent droughts, the rinderpest, locust infestations, wars or floods. In the north-west of the country there existed small groups of poor whites who continued to live as nomads managing their livestock. In the northern and eastern Transvaal bushveld there were those who sustained a livelihood from hunting game. A considerable number of the poor, many of mixed races, eked out a living working as woodcutters in the Knysna, George and Tsitsikamma regions. Finally, there were small groups of poor whites, who lived in isolation in riverine valleys surviving on home-grown vegetables supplemented by livestock husbandry.⁹⁰

Why Carnegie?

The Carnegie Corporation’s involvement in South Africa has to be seen as part of a much larger project of expanding America’s influence and philanthropy in the English-speaking world. To some extent the Americans wished to promote their culture as an alternative to British imperialism. In this way, powerful foundations, such as those of Carnegie, Rockefeller and Ford were able to influence American domestic and foreign policy. E. G. Malherbe and Dr. C. T. Loram, a trustee of the Commission, had both trained at Columbia Teachers College in the US. The young Professor of Psychology and Sociology at Stellenbosch University, Hendrik Verwoerd, had been highly impressed by the influence of American sociologists during his visit in 1927. Both Malherbe and Verwoerd embraced a positivist philosophy concerning social research, combined with an obsession for measurement.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁹⁰R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, p. 6.

In the words of Malherbe:

“The ultimate justification of social research is a belief in the potency of facts... They are potential forces: more like sticks of dynamite. They can have an upsetting effect. They can act as a shock to mental inertia, to social complacency and to existing beliefs.”

Both men embraced these principles as a means of solving the poor white problem.⁹¹

Bottomley makes the point that the poor white problem was certainly not restricted to South Africa. In his opinion the particular attention to this problem was the heightened concerns about race conflict accentuated by rising Afrikaner nationalist sentiment. He concedes that the causes for white poverty in British colonies and the United States were not identical. In the case of the latter, the American Civil War and the period of reconstruction which followed contributed to white poverty. The great depression of 1929 to 1932 certainly increased the number of poor whites in both America and South Africa. Yet despite these differences in causality, there was a remarkable degree of co-operation and consensus amongst transnational experts as to how solutions to white poverty should be fashioned, according to local and national circumstances. The flexible approaches in different countries to what was considered to be the same problem, permitted a certain degree of obfuscation as a result of the difficulty in accurately defining what was meant by the term poor white.⁹²

The concept of transnational government requires some analysis. It appears the phenomenon is driven by experts and academics interested in various aspects of knowledge affecting the well-being of white people living in postcolonial countries. Typically matters such as healthcare, education, housing and sanitation emerged as areas of focus for transnational government attention. It is hardly surprising to find that these initiatives coincided with the growing power and influence of the United States early in the 20th century. This projection of knowledge, interest and concern was supported by foundations such as Rockefeller, Carnegie and Phelps Stokes, originally founded by highly successful international entrepreneurs such as Andrew Carnegie and the Rockefeller family.

⁹¹S. Dubow: “Scientism, social research and the limits of South Africanism: The Case of Ernst Gideon Malherbe”, *South African Historical Journal*, (44), May 2001, pp. 110-115.

⁹²E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th-century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, (54), 2016, pp. 76-77.

In the case of the poor whites, the transnational government networks which arose were concerned with this problem on an international scale and spent much time:

“...testing, classifying, cataloguing and sterilising the poor white population.”⁹³

The presence of poor whites in the United States, Australia and South Africa had thus given rise to the view that poor whiteism was an international phenomenon and it is in this context that the President of the Carnegie Foundation, Dr. F.P. Keppel, supported the establishment of the Commission in South Africa. Keppel was enthusiastic about disseminating the educational principles of the American progressive movement throughout the English-speaking world. To achieve this goal, he developed a network of “key men” in many of the Commonwealth countries, including E.G. Malherbe and Dr. C.T. Loram. The evidence collected by these experts became voluminous and ultimately highly influential. Representations and opinions from those humans who were directly affected by the social ills examined by these experts were conspicuous by their absence.⁹⁴

From the evidence presented in *White Trash* it is clear that a significant component of the US population were considered poor whites, particularly in the south. Malherbe was asked by Keppel, President of the Carnegie Corporation in 1933 to visit the American South and investigate parallels with South Africa. There were many - including segregation, isolation, previous slavery, white on black violence and exclusion of voting rights for blacks. There was no mention of the level of state intervention which took place in South Africa.⁹⁵ Isenberg is equally dismissive of any effort by the State or Federal Government of actively assisting with the eradication of white poverty in the US. She argues that for 400 years class and race prejudice have maintained differential levels of improvidence in American society and all that has happened is that the poor have been renamed from time to time – “cracker”, “clay eaters” and “white niggers”.⁹⁶ It thus seems uncertain whether the problem in the US contributed to the establishment of the Carnegie Commission in South Africa.

⁹³ E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th-century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, (54), 2016, pp. 77-78.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁹⁵ E.G. Malherbe: *Never a Dull Moment*, pp. 169-172.

⁹⁶ N. Isenberg: *White Trash*, pp. 320-321.

Some Responses to the Carnegie Commission Report on the Poor White Problem

The Carnegie Commission (CC) of enquiry into the poor white problem received a great deal of press coverage through articles and editorial exposure in all the major newspapers. Malherbe received complimentary letters from a variety of overseas institutions, including the Institute of International Education based in New York City. In the letter dated 14 February 1933, the director welcomes the receipt of the Carnegie Report on the poor white question and goes on to say:

“It is an exceedingly illuminating statement, particularly valuable for America which has a similar problem of a slightly different kind.”⁹⁷

In some instances the findings were attacked, often on political grounds. Malherbe, in a letter to Gen. J. Kemp, strongly defended the findings of the Commission on the grounds of scientific independence and objectivity. The occasion was an article in the *Vaderland* newspaper on 30 November 1932, in which he was accused by a Pro - Nationalist journalist, Gustaf Preller, of a “pro-South African Party bias” on the grounds that the leader of the opposition, Gen. Smuts, had quoted from the Commission’s report on the extent of the poor white problem.⁹⁸

During April 1932, an article appeared in the *Pretoria News* accusing Malherbe of saying that South Africa was producing a nation of poor white degenerates. This followed an address by him to the League of Women Voters. Malherbe, in a letter to the editor, denied ever having used the word degenerate and furthermore, criticised the newspaper for quoting the worst possible meaning of degenerate in Webster’s dictionary. He then goes to great length to caution against using words such as “race” indiscriminately, particularly in the South African context. On 11 April 1932 he received an apology from the editor of the *Pretoria News* and a copy of the retraction of the article.⁹⁹

⁹⁷KCM 56979 (58), 476/5

⁹⁸KCM 56999 (53), 476/5

⁹⁹ KCM56979 (48), 476/4

The Malherbe Papers, housed at the Killie Campbell Museum, contain a letter from a Robert Fife, Executive Officer of Columbia University, Department of Germanic Languages, thanking Malherbe for sending him the article in the Eastern Province Herald on “Education and the Poor White problem.” He advised that Dr. Wilcocks was currently visiting the University and was keen to arrange a luncheon with Malherbe and himself.¹⁰⁰

At times Malherbe had to vigorously defend himself from criticism from his teaching colleagues. On 26 May 1933, the Volksblad newspaper published an article by a Dr. Visser accusing Malherbe of saying that teachers were to blame for the poor white problem because of an apathetic attitude towards their profession. Malherbe denied the accusation and pointed out that Visser, by his own admission, had not read the complete report on the Education of the Poor White.¹⁰¹

The Eastern Province Herald published an article by Malherbe in the edition of Wednesday, October 12th 1932, which by all accounts was very well received by the readers.¹⁰² In April 1936, the African Observer, published in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, included an article by Malherbe on the poor white problem.¹⁰³

Much more recently a book entitled “Waste of a White Skin”, published in 2015 and written by Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, was extremely critical of the report of the Carnegie Commission of enquiry (The Poor White Study), describing it in chapter one, as a “Forgery of History.”¹⁰⁴ Willoughby-Herard claims that the Carnegie Corporation recruited Malherbe and the rest of the commissioners to act as “race relations technicians” on behalf of (unnamed) international philanthropies conducting race relations research.¹⁰⁵ In the next paragraph she proposes that one of the goals of the Poor White Study was to “create a coherent and unified Afrikaner Nationalist elite that could speak with one voice to its global partners.”¹⁰⁶ No such intention appears in the Joint Findings and Recommendations. Furthermore, perusal of the extensive coverage of the South African poor white problem in many textbooks and journal articles reveals no evidence to support these claims.

¹⁰⁰ KCM 56999 (53), 476/5

¹⁰¹ KCM 56979 (73), 476/5

¹⁰² KCM 56979 (73), 476/21

¹⁰³ KCM 56979 (235) 477/3

¹⁰⁴ T. Willoughby-Herard: *Waste of a White Skin*, p. 24.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

In Chapter 3, page 87, she becomes critical of Wilcocks' ambivalent views on the inheritance of intelligence in his report. In all fairness to Wilcocks, many biologists working in the field at that time were vigorously debating the relative influence of nature and nurture on all human characteristics, not just intelligence. It is thus hardly reasonable to criticise Wilcocks on this controversial subject some 80 years later. On the following page of the same chapter the author makes the most egregious claim. According to her, the recommendations of the Poor White Study included:

“the search for the missing link, the forced removal of whites from integrated residential districts and the sterilisation of whites.”¹⁰⁷

The Joint Findings and Recommendations of the Commission (The Poor White Study) are bereft of any such recommendation.

In Chapter 7, page 149, Willoughby-Herard seeks to:

“...make visible white privilege and white female culpability that enables us to analyse white women as perpetrators of racial, class and gender violence with the target being poor white victims.”

Nowhere in the Joint Findings and Recommendations of the Commission is there any suggestion that upliftment programmes should target poor white victims. The considerable body of literature on the poor white problem has been written from a wide range of historiographical perspectives. In none of these publications has it ever been claimed that the target of the upliftment programs were the white victims themselves. On page 157 of the same chapter she quotes Rothman as saying that one of the causes of poor whites is immorality within families, based on the prevalence of syphilitic infection in mothers. The actual conclusion by Rothman which appears on page 168 of her contribution to the Joint Findings and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission reads that “immorality, drunkenness, insanity, mental deficiency and crime are not characteristic of the poor white”. Elsewhere on the same page she makes the point that the presence of syphilis cannot necessarily be equated with immorality.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷T. Willoughby-Herard: *Waste of a White Skin*, p. 88.

¹⁰⁸R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, p. 168.

Conclusion

The similarities between white poverty in the United States and South Africa and the prejudicial attitude of the comfortable middle-class demonstrate a widespread disregard for our common humanity. There are echoes of this in the last two subsections of this chapter, particularly within some of the responses to the publication of the Carnegie Report. The following chapter will explore in greater detail the causes of white poverty, including an analysis of the sociocultural and structural aspects of deprivation.

CHAPTER 4

WHY WHITES WERE POOR

Isolation, Ignorance and Inheritance

The migration of trekboers from the early Cape in the 19th century and the haphazard system of land tenure left most farmers outside the Western Cape leading an isolated and often precarious existence. On the one hand these individuals were tough, independent and self-sufficient, but unfortunately often antisocial, stubborn and ignorant. For almost a hundred years their methods of pastoral farming, supplemented by hunting, remained unchanged. In 1805 the Cape Colony comprised 120,000 square miles with a total population of some 26,000 people. Less than 20,000 white people occupied the country districts, resulting in a population density of less than one person per 6 square miles. Throughout this period the only authority was the VOC, whose primary concern was maintaining the profitability of the company. There was little incentive for the directors to exercise any authority over the interior of southern Africa. As the trekboers moved further eastwards they found that the average annual rain fall declined and the markets for their livestock became too remote. Other than Cape Town and Stellenbosch, there were only five other villages in the rest of the colony by 1805. Under these circumstances, it was as difficult to educate the children as it was to teach the parents about modern farming methods.¹⁰⁹

During his research for the Carnegie Commission, Malherbe came across a family by the name of Landman farming in the Steytlerville district. During the interview it transpired that although they lived some 25 miles from the town, they only visited it two or three times a year for communion. Such isolation led to fears of the unknown. A trip to the nearest city, Port Elizabeth, was unthinkable. Malherbe records their comments as follows:

“A couple left us to live in the city and it goes very badly with them.”¹¹⁰

Most historians tend to give prominence to the nomadic nature of trekboer life. More recently evidence has begun to emerge that when more permanent dwellings were established, vegetable and crop farming often followed. The baking of the daily loaf of bread became a

¹⁰⁹R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, pp. 31-33.

¹¹⁰KCM56979(199), 476/21

matter of pride for some families. Surplus production was bartered with neighbours, often for brandy, tobacco and dried fruit. As a result of this isolated lifestyle, many successful farmers, out of necessity, acquired such skills as carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing and occasionally wagon building. In this society, cash was practically unknown and payment for labour was invariably in kind. From the earliest days hunting of game played an important role in the trekboer economy. Not only could game meat be consumed, but also dried as biltong and the skins used for thongs, whips and clothing. Such cash that existed could be earned from the sale of ivory, ostrich feathers and leather products. The Voortrekkers by and large continued this lifestyle when colonising the interior of South Africa. Until late in the 19th century most able-bodied white men were able to make a basic living on their farms, particularly as their lifestyles were simple and uncomplicated.¹¹¹

The mineral revolution of the late 19th century changed the economy of South Africa dramatically. Towns like Johannesburg, Germiston, Boksburg and Benoni sprang up along a rocky outcrop which stretched from west to east in what is today the southern Transvaal. When first discovered by the Boers, it was named the Ridge of White Waters or Witwatersrand. The discovery of gold led to opportunities for both rural and urban dwellers. Soon the mining camps that had formed on the Witwatersrand were packed with prospectors, adventurers, fortune seekers, scoundrels, prostitutes and drunkards. Horses, oxen, food, drink, building materials and firewood were in short supply.

For the efficient farmer, who was prepared to plough the rich soils and plant edible crops, there were great opportunities. For those less inclined towards manual work, there was the prospect of transporting these goods to the mining towns. Some more adventurous souls actually migrated to the mines in search of unskilled work. For others, the chance of finding spectacular mineral wealth on their own farms proved irresistible. Farmers began borrowing in order to purchase options on land in anticipation of easy and quick wealth. With the advent of the mineral revolution, land speculation became more attractive and ultimately economically devastating. The inefficient pastoral rural economy had barely sufficient capacity to support the Boers' extended family, domestics and workers. The mineral revolution tended to drive up agricultural land prices, which encouraged the so-called progressive farmer to purchase additional acreage by raising mortgages over the property.

¹¹¹J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, pp. 35-37.

The price of production and transport was not sufficient to leave a surplus after servicing the interest on the loans. Over the next few years, many of these farmers were forced to sell to others – some of whom had made fortunes on the gold and diamond fields. These hard-nosed businessmen had no time for the “bijwoner” or for that matter for any farm resident who could not add value to the means of production. The migration from the land had begun.¹¹²

The census of 1926 puts the white male population of South Africa over the age of 15 at approximately 170,000 individuals. Based upon information provided by the Department of Agriculture, approximately 8,500 young men wished to farm for their own account, join the family farm or follow a career as a farm worker. A survey conducted by Malherbe and his colleagues estimated the number of school leavers planning to work in agriculture to be approximately 8,400 young men. This figure tallies very well with the information provided above. The total number of trained agriculturists qualifying at schools run by the Union Education Department, the Department of Agriculture, and the Faculties of Agriculture at the universities totals 250 annually. One can therefore sympathise with the comments made by Mr B. de Klerk, inspector of Agricultural Education with the Union Department of Education who said:

“We can regard the condition of education as related to farming with the gravest concern, because modern farming has become a fine art, and a complicated science. It demands an extremely high degree of skill and experience. This applies in particular to mixed farming and the farmer who tackles the problem without the necessary knowledge, or relies only on the experience gained from his environment, will make but slight progress and can easily come to grief and unless he has at his disposal a considerable capital with which to venture on costly experiments and on undertakings, he is doomed to almost certain failure.”¹¹³

Malherbe estimated that only 60% of new young farmers possessed a Standard Six as their highest educational qualification. He goes on to propose that the lack of specialised agricultural knowledge coupled with a very low level of general education was a major cause of the poor white problem.¹¹⁴

¹¹²W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 70-72.

¹¹³E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, p. 119.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 119-121.

In 1929, Malherbe visited Outshoorn during his research into the educational standards of the poor white. He found that the levels were generally so poor that they made little contribution to the skills essential for survival. In some cases wealthy farmers were reluctant to provide education for their children. Upon further analysis it became clear that education away from the farm would reduce the pool of labour provided by children, whether his own or the children of the “bywoner”. Malherbe found that many of the farmers were quite unable to do basic arithmetic and thus unable to manage their farms. Under these circumstances it was impossible for farmers to learn modern farming methods.¹¹⁵

The provisions of Roman Dutch law had a strong influence on the inheritance of farm land to the extent that farms were subdivided generation after generation, ultimately rendering the individual units uneconomical. Families tried to maintain the collective ownership of the sub economic units by intermarrying. Very often the father’s will prescribed that all or part of the farm could only be sold to a family member. In many instances this led to an unhealthy prevalence of consanguineous marriages and in some cases, incestuous unions. In one sample of 53 children in a particular school, 37 had the same surname. Needless to say a number of these children were found to be mentally and physically deficient. The genetic basis of this phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 6.¹¹⁶

This practice is well illustrated by examining the family tree of the Landmans, who farmed in the district of Steytlerville. In 1850 Johannes Christoffel Landman married Miss Schoultz and thereby acquired the ownership of three adjacent farms totalling over 4000 morgen of unencumbered and undivided land. They had five children. When Landman died he left a clause in his will that left the farms to his offspring, but this was accompanied by a condition which prohibited the sale to non-family members. Following his death, the children illegally negotiated bonds on the properties which they were unable to service. Despite the provisions of Landman’s will, a proportion of the farms were transferred to the bondholder, a certain Mr Buckley. The rest of the farms were divided up until the members of the third generation, in total 11 children, each had a 1/11 portion of what was left. These farms were not big enough to be viable. The young men of the family were described as vigorous, strong and handsome. The girls had beautiful white skins and lively brown eyes.

¹¹⁵ O.P.J. Stander: “Die Voorkoms van wit armoede in Oudshoorn tussen 1914 en 1937,” PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, December 2017, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 66-68.

Inevitably cousins in the family married. One exception was Hannie Landman who succeeded in marrying outside of the family and commented as follows:

“The Landmans marry each other like Israelites as if they were putting a station together. They stick together as if joined by the same skin.”¹¹⁷

The Psychology of the Poor White

The Transvaal Indigency Commission published its report in 1908, which included the following statement:

“We have been impressed with the frequency with which it has been stated in evidence that unskilled work was Kafir’s (sic) work and as such not the kind of work which a white man should perform... This attitude of the white man has greatly affected his efficiency as a labourer. He has never regarded unskilled labour as an ordinary field of employment. When he’s had to do unskilled work he has done it grudgingly as Kafir’s (sic) work, and therefore inefficiently...The white man’s prejudice against Kafir (sic) work, his inefficiency as an unskilled labourer and the higher wage he requires, have had the natural result that coloured labour, inefficient though it is, is cheaper to the employer for unskilled work than white labour.”¹¹⁸

The Carnegie Commission drew a distinction between the “poor white” and the “white poor”. It appeared that the poor white was one whose poverty was to some extent attributable to low intelligence and dishonesty. Furthermore, it was argued that being in a state of poverty increased the tendency towards mendacious behaviour, carelessness and unreliability. It was argued that sustained poverty led to a loss of self-respect and the respect of others and as a result contributed to dishonest behaviour. It is therefore somewhat surprising to read in the report that their levels of morality were no different from that of the general population.

The “white poor” on the other hand, refers to those who are prepared to work, but were unable to find employment. As a rule the white poor followed the pattern of behaviour of the Afrikaner people who were generally opposed to alcohol abuse and drunkenness. The prevalence of serious and violent crime amongst the white poor was low. The commissioners attributed this to the strict administration of justice in the Boer republics.

¹¹⁷ KCM 56979 (199), 476/21

¹¹⁸ C. Feinstein: *An Economic History of South Africa*, p. 85.

In their report they conceded that if the white poor were to indulge in criminal activity, it would more likely be illicit diamond dealing, the illegal sale of liquor to natives and shooting game without the necessary permits. For the purpose of this thesis the terms poor white and white poverty will be used interchangeably.¹¹⁹

It is evident that the commissioners were strongly in agreement on the general principles of charity. In the first instance they argued that charity should be earned by an “equivalent performance in return.” They point out that the demand for charity by a poor white tended to place an obligation on a wealthier person to provide the charity. In their view, unfettered access to charity led poor whites to assume that they had a right to such assistance from either the state, church or any other charitable institution. All charitable donations were only to be made following a careful assessment of the applicant’s bona fide requirements. In the longer term, the ongoing access to charity reduced responsibility, independence and initiative.¹²⁰

The poor whites were attracted to the alluvial diamond diggings as a means of escaping their grinding poverty. The Lichtenberg site was discovered in 1926 and within a short time had attracted some 25,000 poor white men, women and children. By the time the commissioners visited the diggings, the population had fallen to about 12,000 people. A minority of the diggers were conscientious, systematic and thrifty with their earnings. Unfortunately, the majority “scratched about on the surface” and if fortunate enough to find a few good stones, squandered the money quickly. Even when diggers were totally destitute many were reluctant to leave the diamond fields because there was an outside chance of easy money.¹²¹

The commissioners visited a number of wage and agricultural settlements during their investigations into the poor white problem. The former were either forestry or agricultural settlements funded and managed by the state. By and large the latter tended to be managed and financed by the church. Generally speaking the wage settlements turned out to be more suited to the less intelligent and more dependent individual. On the other hand, the agricultural settlements deliberately selected a more entrepreneurial and hard-working individual. It seems that the most successful of the settlements was the one started by the DRC at Kakamas in 1899. By 1928 the average income per plot holder averaged just over £200 and in some cases, really innovative and hard-working individuals earned a great deal more. By 1930 there were 500 plot holders at Kakamas.

¹¹⁹R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, pp. 80-87.

¹²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 90-98

¹²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 99-102.

The success of this establishment encouraged both the church and the state to replicate similar models in order to provide poor whites with a meaningful income, a degree of independence and most importantly, self-respect.¹²²

Inadequate Education as a Cause

In the words of E.G. Malherbe:

“The poor white is not a class apart in the “caste” sense of class. He is the product of a process which has its roots far back into our past. He is the product of the whole social fabric which produced him in the past and is still producing him in ever-increasing numbers today. We are all, rich and poor, implicated in this. He is blood of our blood and flesh of our flesh. It is circumstances here which have in the course of time selected traits in him which marked him for deterioration and impoverishment. We all have those traits to a lesser or greater degree. There are some of the most intelligent and prominent occupying high positions in society and the intellectual world whose immediate relations are poor whites.”¹²³

He went on to point out that the poor white problem was not exclusively confined to the people of Dutch descent. The Commission identified over 100 English surnames amongst impoverished whites in the districts of Jansenville, Steytlerville, Willowmore, Humansdorp and Outshoorn. In his view, the dramatic economic changes brought about by the mineral revolution were indifferent to the national origin of the poor. Malherbe stated that education in the early Cape Colony was a pre-requisite for the confirmation of a person into the Protestant churches of the day. It seems that the definition of being educated was the ability to read the Bible. In the rural areas formally trained teachers did not exist. Those who passed as pedagogues were normally itinerant sailors, soldiers and disreputable adventurers, who because of a veneer of sophistication, were considered suitable to teach the children of the trekboers.¹²⁴

¹²²R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, pp. 108-115.

¹²³E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, p. 6.

¹²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

Poor education was a feature of life in rural areas and persisted until well into the 19th century. For reasons associated with perceptions of white superiority, many farmers were not prepared to enrol their children in the local “third class school” because of the attendance of non-white children. The teachers (or “meesters”) were also expected to assist with farm work when required. Anecdotally, it was said that “the only teachers which were available were vagabond Hollanders and runaway Englishmen.”¹²⁵

Matters improved following the British occupation of the Cape in 1806. Sir John Cradock initiated a collaborative effort between the DRC and the colonial administration to establish “Koster Scholen” (Church Clerk Schools), where existing church outposts would include educational facilities. The colonial government also subsidised itinerant teachers for very remote rural areas. The situation improved with the establishment of the Department of Education under a Superintendent of Education in 1839. The focus of this initiative was primarily small towns and villages, but was later extended to agricultural areas. In 1841 a number of mission schools were established which were managed by the various churches and funded to a large extent by the state. Whilst initially directed at providing education for coloured and black people in rural areas, many white children also attended. The white children were from the poorer sector of the population and the standard of education they received was less than ideal. Most of these rural primary schools only provided education up to the end of standard five. Second-class schools were permitted to teach up to the end of standard seven and first-class schools were able to offer matriculation. The latter were only established in towns. To extend the service to rural children whose parents wanted better education, District Boarding Departments were established in 1873 in the larger towns.¹²⁶

It was soon recognised that educational services for children living in rural areas remained inadequate. In 1887 circuit teachers were appointed for certain rural areas with low population density, supported by the DRC. In 1889 there were 29 of these schools with a total attendance of 685 pupils. In 1893 the circuit teaching system was replaced by Poor Schools, which suggests a degree of stigmatization of the poor white child. This ultimately gave rise to a very early form of class consciousness amongst white people. A very similar pattern of school development was adopted in the Transvaal, Free State and Natal over the same period.

¹²⁵ C. Bundy: “Vagabond Hollander and Runaway Englishmen,” in W. Beinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido (eds.): *Putting Plough to the Ground*, p. 102.

¹²⁶ E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, pp. 24-25.

In the words of school inspector Murray:

“In this connection, I may note that the church in some divisions is more fully realising the fact that aid in the education of the poor lies within their scope. The state of education in the divisions of Willowmore, Knysna and Outshoorn owes everything to the unwearied and persistent efforts of the Dutch clergy.”¹²⁷

The provision of education to the white population of what was to become South Africa was further challenged by the colonial government’s policy of anglicization. In 1822 Lord Charles Somerset is recorded as having said: “Import English teachers and the next generation will be Englishmen.” The idea, at the time, that 30,000 people of Dutch descent could not speak English was considered preposterous when they were “privileged” to be members of the British Empire. Late in the 19th century Dutch speaking children were taught about “primroses, lifeboats and nightingales” and the history of England since 1066. Similarly, the only geography that was taught was that of England, Scotland and Ireland. It was only late in the 19th century that Dutch could be used as a medium of instruction in state aided schools, largely as a result of agitation by Onze Jan Hofmeyr. It was only after the Act of Union in 1910 that both English and Dutch were made official languages on an equal basis. Afrikaners had to wait until 1925 before their home language replaced Dutch.¹²⁸

Following the Anglo Boer War, the Milner administration worked towards a political union of the Cape, Natal and the old Boer republics. Because the white population was predominantly Dutch, a plan for large-scale immigration to South Africa by British citizens was developed. This ultimately turned out to be a failure, so Milner turned to the schools to develop English as the country’s first language and instill pupils with loyalty towards the British Empire. It was not long before 600 young teachers were on their way to South Africa in order to achieve these objectives. E.B. Sargent, the acting director for education, and Milner instructed the teachers to “indoctrinate the children as comprehensively as possible.”¹²⁹

¹²⁷E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, pp. 26-27.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 27-32.

¹²⁹H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 265-266.

Unsurprisingly, Milner's education policies met with resistance from various quarters. The DRC was concerned that with the emphasis being placed on English and British imperialism they would lose support from their traditional Dutch speaking members. Most teachers who were working in the old South African Republic became embittered by Milner's policies. In practical terms, many poorer Afrikaners considered education to be of little value, resulting in their children undergoing no more than one year's schooling. Nevertheless, the Afrikaans intelligentsia comprising clerics, doctors, lawyers and journalists were similarly opposed to Milner's approach. The consequence of these policies was the formation of Christian national private schools, which were strongly supported by the DRC as well as the Calvinist Doppe churches. In order to achieve greater conciliation between English and Dutch speakers, Smuts introduced a new education policy in 1907 to be used in state schools. Education would be in the mother tongue, with English being gradually introduced to become the exclusive means of education in the sixth year of school. The newspaper of the Transvaal DRC "De Vereeniging" complained that:

"We must seek our political, national, religious and educational salvation along authentic Afrikaans lines".¹³⁰

The need for technical and vocational training for whites on the Witwatersrand was recognised as early as the end of the 19th century. The first such facility to train mine workers was started by the Witwatersrand Council of Education with a subsidy of 714 pounds and an enrolment of 29 students. Following the Anglo Boer War, the Transvaal Department of Education in collaboration with the Orange River Colony, established an apprenticeship school for tradesmen required by the mines and railways. In 1903 the Transvaal University College (TUC) was established by the Transvaal Education Department and offered classes in a wide range of technical subjects in Pretoria, Johannesburg and other sites on the Witwatersrand. The TUC trained some 2,000 students in a wide variety of technical vocations in the years between 1906 and 1908. In 1907 the Pretoria Polytechnic was established in order to train social workers. In 1909 the Transvaal Education Department saw fit to appoint an Organiser and Inspector of Continuation classes in the Witwatersrand area. By 1917 many of the mine workers were white and at best semi-skilled.

¹³⁰ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 269-273.

It soon became obvious that mining and industry needed more highly trained artisans equipped with knowledge of applied mathematics, technical drawings, science, mechanics, heat engines and electro-techniques. These courses were offered by the School of Mines and Technology under the control of the Chamber of Mines. There were now a number of facilities providing technical training, leading to duplication and inconsistent standards. In 1922 the government was persuaded to pass the Apprenticeship Act of 1922, a piece of legislation which ultimately led to uniform standards for the wide range of artisans and tradesmen being qualified. Unfortunately, early in the 20th century the urbanised poor white was seldom able to gain access to these courses as a result of their inadequate levels of basic education.¹³¹

Intelligence and the Poor White

Both Wilcocks and Malherbe devoted a lot of time to determine the intelligence of the poor white child in comparison to those of middle-class parents. Urban employers often described the poor white as being of low intelligence and ignored certain contributory factors, such as not being able to understand English or being poorly educated. Furthermore, malnutrition and chronic illnesses such as malaria and bilharzia most certainly stunted intellectual development in the young.

The intelligence testing performed as part of the Commission's research was restricted to white children in rural areas, generally of parents whose livelihood was agricultural. Some of the nomadic white families from the Northern Transvaal who depended on hunting as a livelihood and the woodcutters from the George, Knysna and Tsitsikama region were also included. The tests were limited to children between the ages of 120 to 155 months. Children were tested in their home language. The South African Group Test of Intelligence was generally used, with the exception of those children who were functionally illiterate in their home language, in which case the Army Beta test was applied. A total of 3,281 children were tested. The subjects were divided according to origin and those with observable evidence of illness such as malaria were excluded.

¹³¹ KCM 56979 (508), 477/22 -“ Brief Summary History Part Time Technical Classes”.- un dated.

Those children who lived on the successful Kakamas settlement managed by the DRC showed the identical distribution of intelligence as children of middle-class origin at good schools in towns and cities. On the other hand, the children of the woodcutters had an average intelligence of 90.8, where the median is 100. A number of children from families who had interbred extensively were tested and found to have significantly lower intelligence than the median of 100. The overall conclusion was that the average intelligence of poor white children was no different from the distribution of IQ scores obtained from children of middle-class families. However, an analysis of the distribution of intelligence below the median of 100 demonstrated that approximately 10% of the children below that median were less intelligent than their middle-class counterparts. There is thus some ambivalence concerning the interpretation of the intelligence tests by both Wilcocks and Malherbe. The inheritance of intelligence and the factors that influence intelligence in children will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on Scientific Racism.¹³²

Health Factors

Dr. W.A.Murray drew attention to environmental influences on the poor white in Book IV of the report of the Carnegie Commission. He concluded that poverty itself, fuelled by ignorance, led to widespread malnutrition amongst poor white adults and children. Such malnutrition as he detected by physically examining 1700 children in the Cape and Transvaal was caused by a diet deficient in proteins, fats and vitamins, to the extent that some people suffered from excruciating hunger pains. Malnutrition was often aggravated by droughts. Children in the Transvaal, and especially the low veld, suffered from a high prevalence of malaria and bilharzia. Poor white families from both rural and urban areas had high birth and death rates. This was largely due to poor sanitation resulting in faecal contamination of water and food. The effect of syphilis on children was considered to be negligible.¹³³

¹³² R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, pp. 139-149.

¹³³ W.A. Murray: *Health Factors in the Poor White Problem*, pp. 126-127.

A number of environmental causes for mental and physical deterioration were considered by the Commission. The book by Madison Grant entitled “The Passing of the Great Race” proposes that members of the Nordic race become “listless and cease to breed” when living in a warmer climate.¹³⁴ A similar argument states that racial degeneracy is due to a high concentration of actinic rays (ultraviolet rays), which is said to more intense in Africa. Ellsworth Huntington, a professor of geography at Yale University, submitted that the mental activity of white people slows down in warmer climates. An Australian doctor, Raphael Cilento, was convinced that the deterioration of the white race was due to diseases such as hookworm and malaria. None of these theories were supported by any empirical evidence and have since been totally discredited. Furthermore, hookworm is not found in southern Africa. Murray drew attention to the high prevalence of malaria in low-lying parts of South Africa, but at no stage did he propose that it caused racial degeneration.¹³⁵

¹³⁴M. Grant: *The Passing of the Great Race*, p.35

¹³⁵E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th-century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, (54),2016, p. 83.

The Sociological Circumstances of the Poor White

The Poor White and Society

The Rev. Albertyn personally visited 741 poor families living in 35 towns and districts of the Union of South Africa and interviewed members of the families, as well as reliable individuals who were well acquainted with family members. Much of his report supports the general tone and information provided in the other four volumes of the Carnegie Commission investigation. There are however, a number of perspectives which require attention for purposes of this thesis.

Albertyn refers to the intelligence tests conducted on the 17,000 children by Wilcocks and Malherbe, which reported that 4.6% of these children had an IQ of less than 80. In his view, this was a major contributory factor to the poor white problem, particularly because those individuals who were mentally deficient tended to congregate with others having similar shortcomings. This was often done in order to avoid the derision of those people who considered themselves more capable and intelligent than the poor white. Inevitably, there existed a higher than average prevalence of intermarriage within these groups and thus a greater chance of the perpetuation of the low intelligence.¹³⁶

The sociological research conducted by Albertyn into marriage patterns by the poor whites supports the view of the other commissioners that intermarriage was relatively rare. He did however draw attention to the influence of fathers' wills regarding the inheritance of property, a process described in greater detail above. Similarly, he reported that small groups living in isolated areas were likely to intermarry leading to mental deficiency and other inherited conditions. On the other hand, early marriage was the rule rather than the exception. The average age of marriage for females was 19 years. The reasons for early marriage were hardly surprising. One factor was the miserable housing conditions that young men and woman often had to endure when living with their parents. Albertyn considered that poor whites were generally "improvident and happy-go-lucky" and would thus marry with little consideration for the future care of any children they might produce. As a result, the families of poor whites were large, with an average of 6.57 children per family. Divorce, desertion and immorality were no higher amongst the rural poor white than amongst other rural population groups.

¹³⁶ J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, p. 5.

It seems that urbanisation had increased the prevalence of divorce amongst poor white families, particularly during wartime, when women occupied men's positions in commerce and industry.¹³⁷

In much of the literature describing the poor white there are numerous references to miscegenation and degradation, particularly in publications emanating from the churches. Albertyn is no exception. He describes miscegenation between white and coloured as being more frequent than in the past, but between white and black it remained unchanged. He expressed concern that urbanisation and racial mixing would lead to an increase in interracial sex, giving rise to negative social consequences for white families. Families retained European names, but were still regarded as coloured, because of the loss of a white skin. As a result, they were no longer considered poor white, which to some extent mitigated the extent of the problem. Albertyn considered that social mixing between races could lead to further deleterious influences on whites. He pointed out that most white children were reared by black maids during their formative years. As a result, the language and social norms of black culture could easily be absorbed by the white child. He was convinced that blacks were generally devious, immodest and obscene. He attributed this behaviour in the poor white to the influence of blackmaids during childhood. In a similar vein, poor whites were widely criticised for being lazy and indolent. Exposure to blacks was thought to be responsible for this behaviour. To some extent the black man's belief in witchcraft and sangomas had been adopted by the poor white as an explanation for illness, pestilences and droughts. This was contrary to the teachings of the DRC and concerned Albertyn greatly.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, pp. 31-32.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

On the question of state aid Albertyn was intransigent. He was generally critical of all state aid, irrespective of whether it was directed to the poor white or the more privileged classes. He quotes the Transvaal Indigency Commission of 1908 as follows:

“It is difficult for people who have not come into contact with it, to realise the strength of the spirit of dependence on the government in the more backward districts of the Transvaal. The government is expected to remove all difficulties and to take the first step in every measure for the aid of the farming community. This is proved by the great expectations cherished of the land bank and the disappointment everywhere evinced when it appeared that the bank was acting on strictly business principles, and was never intended to advance money to farmers on insufficient security.”¹³⁹

He supported this viewpoint by relating the experience of the other Carnegie Commissioners during hundreds of interviews with poor whites. Inevitably during the interactions, the Commissioner would ask the interviewee his or her opinion of a solution to their poverty. Without exception the responsibility of solving the poor white problem was placed on government.

Albertyn acknowledged the trend amongst Western nations towards social democracy and that in this respect the Union was no exception. In South Africa, however, there was strong competition between a few political parties for the vote of the enfranchised white man. This made it very difficult for successive South African governments to ignore the calls for state relief from a wide range of sources. Demands from workers, the elderly, the chronically ill, the mentally deficient, the poor white, the unemployed and the indigent children had all to be accommodated within the budgetary constraints of the Union government. The State's efforts to meet these demands were often not appreciated as they were considered to be insufficient. Albertyn was of the view that any indigent person who received State relief for any reason should lose the right to vote for the time that he or she received such relief.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁹J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, p.75.

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 76-78.

Both Wilcocks and Albertyn agreed that all charitable assistance, whether from the state or the church, should only be given on an individual basis, following a thorough assessment of need. Greater use should be made of social workers in assessing the individual's requirements for assistance and care should be taken to ensure that the person being assisted was not placed in a better situation than the "independent labourer." He quoted from the UK experience as follows:

"The labourer must find that the state is the hardest task master and the worst paymaster you can get, so that he should be induced to apply to them in the last and not the first resort."¹⁴¹

By 1930 the poor white problem had been gaining momentum for some 50 years. During this time class distinction within the white population had emerged. Albertyn was critical of this development and considered the unsympathetic treatment received by poor whites from more affluent members of society as unfair. Poor education, poverty and lack of opportunity had destroyed the confidence and ambition of the poor white. To make matters worse, in Albertyn's view, many within this class of society were mentally deficient, to the point of being feeble-minded. Most other sectors of society were able to make representations for their own advancement. The poor white had no such avenue other than to exercise their vote for a political party in the hope that they may receive relief from penury.¹⁴²

The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family

Using the structured methodology of her Carnegie commission colleagues, M.E. Rothman personally visited 462 families as part of her research. She was assisted by social workers, ministers of religion, teachers, doctors and municipal officials. She was also supported by the A.C.V.V. (Afrikaner Christelike Vroue Vederasie), the Women's Federation and the Child Welfare Society. She spent approximately one year conducting the studies. Of the 462 homes visited, Rothman considered that 30% could be regarded as slums on the grounds of being "dirty, disorderly and insanitary."¹⁴³ Many of the poor whites that were visited had previously been bywoners or farm labourers who had built up a reasonable stock of sheep and cattle from which they had earned a subsistence living. Many of these families had been impoverished by droughts at various times.

¹⁴¹J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, pp. 77-84.

¹⁴²*Ibid.*, pp. 103-106.

¹⁴³M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, pp.103 – 106.

At the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War many of the fathers of the families whom Rothman visited had joined up and fought against the British. As a result of the scorched earth policy of the oppressor, the Boer farms, livestock and crops had been destroyed. Rothman's general conclusions were that immorality, drunkenness, insanity, mental deficiency and crime were not characteristic of the poor whites. In her opinion, poor education, a dearth of intellectual curiosity and a total absence of social sense were the biggest challenges facing the poor white.¹⁴⁴

With regard to immorality, van Onselen would in all likelihood disagree. In his book "New Babylon, New Nineveh", he describes in some detail the commercial sex industry on the Witwatersrand between 1886 and 1914. Following the institution of self-government of the Transvaal in 1907, a concerted effort was made by the authorities to eliminate foreign prostitutes and pimps from their activities in Johannesburg. Due to the determined support of Gen. J.C. Smuts the project was very successful. Unfortunately, the unintended consequence was that by 1910 the majority of prostitutes were South African born women. It transpired that many Afrikaner families sent their daughters to work as domestic servants in wealthy homes of the city, but in order to compensate for their poor wages part-time prostitution became an attractive alternative. Within a few years there were a number of substantial brothels in suburbs such as Fordsburg and Vrededorp staffed predominantly with Afrikaner prostitutes with names such as Maggie van Niekerk and Trickey Beukes.¹⁴⁵

The lack of social sense that Rothman refers to became evident in different ways. The poor white mother seemed to make no effort to create order in her home, or to understand that order was a great deal easier to manage than disorder. There appeared to be no insight on the part of these mothers to understand the need for the children to receive education. She gave the example of a young girl she interviewed in such a home:

"I know you want me to live differently, but then I should have to sleep in that hole at night. I won't do it. I'd rather go and sleep with the men in their rooms."¹⁴⁶

Rothman concluded that the lack of social sense on the part of the poor white family was attributable to isolation and the habit of "trekking". That sort of lifestyle was normally bereft of social intercourse with other families and opportunities for even basic education.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, pp. 151-168.

¹⁴⁵ C. van Onselen: *New Babylon New Nineveh*, pp. 158-159.

¹⁴⁶ M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, p. 169.

The isolation of these families in addition to the trek habit, often gave rise to difficult confinements and perilous births. Many of these mothers were attended to by untrained midwives who allowed parturition to take place on filthy animal skins. In certain cases, first-time mothers had to fend for themselves including delivering the umbilical cord and placenta. It was rare for a mother to be assisted by a trained midwife and practically unheard of for her to be attended by a medical doctor. Postpartum haemorrhage and puerperal sepsis were the main complications of such births. In large families the death rate of neonates was approximately 50%, and that of mothers about 10%.¹⁴⁸

By early in the 20th century the DRC had become fully cognizant of the risks to society of the circumstances of the daughters of poor white families. Many felt that assisting the daughters would greatly minimise the perpetuation of the poor white problem. Many of these families were fortunate to be accommodated on church settlements, such as Kakamas. It was surprising to the authorities how many of these mothers had difficulty in adapting to the discipline and routine of the community. A good example was the habit of women about to give birth to insist upon the presence of an untrained midwife, often known as the “old woman”, when trained midwives and medical doctors were in attendance. Gradually the poor families reluctantly accepted the benefit of school and church education, which over a period of time led to progress amongst the daughters.¹⁴⁹

Several thousand of the daughters of poor families were committed to institutional care controlled by the Union Department of Education. These facilities were government controlled and funded, accommodating the girls until they were 18 years old. At this stage they were free to find employment, but remained under supervision until they were 21 years old. The girls were generally well cared for and taught the habits of orderliness and discipline. They normally attended the local government school. According to departmental records, the main reason for commitment to such institutions was indigence. The quality of personnel in these institutions varied greatly, but under the circumstances, Rothman considered commitment preferable to growing up in the typical poor family. Nevertheless, she regarded the ideal place for a young girl to always be a loving family environment, managed by a capable and caring mother.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, pp. 169-171.

¹⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 171-193.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

¹⁵⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 201-205.

Poverty as a Socio – Cultural Phenomenon

The report of the Carnegie Commission on white poverty describes multiple and complex causes within the context of a rapidly industrialising South African economy. In many respects this phenomenon meets with the following description by Spilerman and Elesh:

“In the narrowest use of the term, living in poverty means having a low income. As a concern of social agencies and social scientists, however, poverty is associated with a range of disabilities, some spawned by low income, others producing this condition. Psychologically, poor persons are likely to feel powerless, have low self esteem, have short temporal horizons, and be weakly motivated in their occupational roles. At the level of individual behaviour, low income is associated with inadequate nutrition, poor healthcare, living in dilapidated housing, unemployment, economic dependency, illegitimacy and crime, to cite but a few concomitants. Poverty ridden communities have some characteristics which are aggregates of these individual level disabilities – high rates of unemployment, crime, economic dependency – but also others which emerge only in a context of dense concentrations of poor persons, such as gang delinquency and a paucity of formal organisations to advocate interests which are shared by residents of a neighbourhood.”¹⁵¹

In the context of the Carnegie Commission Report it is important to distinguish between the reasons given for white poverty and the manner in which they may be interpreted. On the one hand there are sociocultural statements regarding the value systems and behaviour of a group of poor people and on the other where poverty is due to reasons such as alcohol and drug abuse, deficient morality and idleness. Other so-called experts consider poverty to be due to varying degrees of structural changes in the environment and or the economy. An extreme example of this would be the Marxist interpretation of the struggle between the proletariat and financial capitalism. Another would be the effect of apartheid policies on black education, employment, living standards and political participation. A more subtle form of structural barriers leading to poverty would be discriminatory laws such as job reservation, monopolies and cartels. In most situations sociocultural and structural barriers coexist with different emphases influenced by economic and political circumstances.

¹⁵¹L. Pretorius: “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek-‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, August 1985, p. 39.

In some respects it seems that the Carnegie Commission considers the major cause of white poverty was due to a structural cause:

“The economic decline has been caused principally by inadequate adjustment to modern economic conditions among a portion of the older white population of South Africa. This population had, on the whole, been severed from the European progress and development for many generations, and lived chiefly under the simple conditions of a pioneer subsistence economy, with hardly any difference between rich and poor.”¹⁵²

Followed by:

“The discovery of diamonds and gold, the capitalistic exploitation of mines, the influx of immigrants with the modern business outlook, the rapid penetration of railways into the interior – all this quickly forced the development of the country into new channels from about 1880, with a greatly increased pace after 1890. The older settled white population was faced with entirely changed conditions, under the direction mainly of English-speaking persons.”¹⁵³

Yet, despite the Commissions strong emphasis on a structural cause for white poverty, both Wilcocks and Albertyn in their own reports tended to prevaricate. Wilcocks seemed to accept a certain inborn deficiency in those whites who became poor, but tended to approach the matter with great circumspection. He described certain poor whites as being nomadic, coupled with a lack of independence, self-respect, enterprise and work ethic. Other poor whites were not prepared to perform certain forms of labour and were generally irresponsible and unsophisticated. Yet others were guilty of alcohol abuse and criminality. Albertyn described the poor white as guilty of alcohol abuse, absenteeism, gambling, irresponsibility and criminality. Somewhat disingenuously he simultaneously described others as law-abiding, respectful of God, peaceful and committed to their offspring. A possible interpretation of these contradictory descriptions of the poor white is to understand that in reality they were a heterogeneous group of people and assigned a class status for means of convenience and political expediency.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵²R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor white*, p. 8.

¹⁵³R.W. Wilcocks: *The Poor White*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴L. Pretorius: “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek-‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, August 1985, pp. 41-42.

The Carnegie Commissioners were selected on the basis of a particular field of expertise in the fields of education, psychology, agricultural economics, health or sociology. Grace Davie considers that the contribution of experts to the understanding of poverty requires qualifications. She proposes that a more realistic approach would be that of co - production in which the data assembled by human scientists is constantly modified by activists, lay experts, opinion polls, trade unions and sometimes mass movements. Regretably, the poverty knowledge produced by the experts was also manipulated by the vested interests of mining and industrial capitalism. She illustrates this phenomenon by describing the approach of the South African Chamber of Mines to the employment of black mine workers. By the beginning of the 20th century the expansion of gold mining on the Witwatersrand required more cheap black labour. In many respects the mining industry was between a rock and a hard place, operating as they did with a fixed gold price and the potential of rising costs. In order to maintain profitability, labour costs had to be held at a minimum. It did not suit the mine owners that black labour chose to work on a seasonal basis or to offer their labour for a limited period of time in order to suit their own needs.

The following statement is illustrative of the manner in which vested interests manipulate poverty knowledge:

“They come, in fact only in order to make enough money to return to their Kraals with sufficient money to enable them to marry and live in indolence... It was too easy for African migrants to earn a living, mine owners complained, because their material needs were so rudimentary”.¹⁵⁵

In 1903 the authorities appointed the South African Native Affairs Commission which collected evidence from white farmers and the mining industry, which ultimately concluded that the native was not accustomed to continuous daily labour. Furthermore, the commission recommended that the authorities restrict black land ownership and eliminate squatting in order to enforce a culture of ongoing wage earning. The so-called experts in the commission promoted the stereotype that Africans were inherently lazy in order to justify the passage of legislation limiting black economic development. In this manner poverty knowledge produced by experts became manipulated by hegemonic interests in order to influence legislation to suit, in this case, the mining industry.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 33-34.

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 34-35.

It seems that the Carnegie Commission was reluctant to acknowledge the heterogeneous nature of the poor white, despite the vast number of personal interviews with individuals and their families conducted over several years in many parts of South Africa. The Joint Report is redolent with generalisations such as “social isolation” or the “simple economic traditions of rural people”. Malherbe was insistent that the problems of the poor whites were inherited as a result of adverse selection of intelligence over many generations. In analysing the contents of the Joint Report one can detect a tautological argument between cause and effect, thus deflecting attention from the major structural changes in the South African economy. In this respect a possible exception amongst the commissioners was Grosskopf, who conceded that for a proportion of the white population, mining and industrialisation presented opportunities for those possessing an entrepreneurial spirit and better education.

Unfortunately these benefits were not evenly shared. This was particularly the case in the rapidly changing agricultural environment. In order to meet the food requirements of large numbers of city dwellers, agriculture became more capital intensive, often resulting in successful farmers acquiring the properties of those who failed. One of the consequences of this process was similar to the enclosure process which took place in England in the 16th century. In South Africa, by the early 20th century, private farming land became inaccessible to non-landowners because of fencing. This is a further example of structural changes to the economic environment which, in this case, had accommodated itinerant pastoral farmers and their nomadic lifestyle for many years.¹⁵⁷

It is surprising that even Grosskopf, a trained economist, appeared ambivalent about the relative impact of structural versus sociocultural causes of poverty. In his personal contribution to the Carnegie Commission Report he alludes to the development of a dual economy.¹⁵⁸ In this regard he acknowledges the devastating effect of industrial and mining capital on the indigenous economy, but offers no recognition for the contribution made to the overall economic output of the country from these commercial activities. Essentially, Grosskopf tacitly accepted both structural and sociocultural causes as jointly responsible for white poverty without fully reconciling the flexible relationship between both.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷L. Pretorius: “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek-‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch University, August 1985, pp. 43-45.

¹⁵⁸J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

Conclusion

This chapter refers to the concerns expressed by Malherbe¹⁶⁰, Albertyn¹⁶¹ and Rothman¹⁶² regarding racial miscegenation. Albertyn went further when he described how merely social mixing with blacks could contribute to white degradation. In spite of this highly prejudiced opinion, he was remarkably insightful when he pointed out that the poor white would ultimately seek redemption by exercising the vote. Under different circumstances, Afrikaner politicians and clerics expressed their concern with regard to the detrimental effect that poor whites would have upon the white population generally. Essentially the white poor were defined by their race, which, as it happened, allowed them the vote. Poor blacks were infinitely more numerous than the poor whites, but did not have the vote. It is tempting to speculate that in time the poor whites, had they not had a vote, would have blended with the poor black majority. The socio-cultural and structural causes of poverty are described. Reference is made to the hegemony of so called “poverty experts” in setting the terms of debate about indigence and the alternative view of those affected most – the poor themselves. The reluctance of the Carnegie Commissioners to fully acknowledge the major impact of mining, capitalism and industrialisation as a major cause of white poverty in some respects discredits the report. By the time the report on the poor white was published in 1932, Afrikaner nationalism had gained significant momentum. The struggle for the poor white vote would now intensify, a process in which the manipulation of race theories would play a major role.

¹⁶⁰ E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, 1932.

¹⁶¹ J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, 1932.

¹⁶² M.E. Rothman: *The Mother and Daughter of the Poor White Family*, 1932.

CHAPTER 5

SCIENTIFIC RACISM

The Background to Scientific Racism

The publication of Charles Darwin's book "The Origin of Species" in the middle of the 19th century did much to stimulate emerging views about inheritance in general and race in particular. This process was given further impetus with the rediscovery of Gregor Mendel's laws of inheritance at the beginning of the 20th century. In essence then, scientific racism can be defined as a process of the measurement of physical and mental characteristics of human beings, in order to classify them according to race, thereby building a hierarchical system seeking to prove the superiority of certain races over others.

During the 19th century the word race was considered an acceptable way in which to distinguish between the Dutch and English in the Cape Colony. At that stage, it was not considered a pejorative and the superiority of the white race was widely accepted. This prejudice was not homogeneous and varied in intensity from vicious to paternalistic. These underlying attitudes made it easier to manipulate pseudo scientific theories as a means of substantiating the superiority of the white race. The irony was that by the early 20th century, accumulating scientific evidence was beginning to discredit any biological basis for race. The Holocaust during World War Two stimulated the scientific study of mechanisms of heredity. Within 20 years of the end of the war the emerging science of genetics was able to prove conclusively that there was no biological basis for race and that differences in the appearance of individual humans could not account for variations in behaviour, integrity or intellectual ability.¹⁶³

Physical Anthropology

The difference in the physical appearance of individual human beings became the yardstick by which anthropologists developed a classification of humanity based upon race. By the end of the 19th century British anthropologists both professional and amateur, were busy developing racial classifications. The earliest was Caucasian, Negroid and Mongoloid, based largely on skin colour. Soon however, this classification was increased, modified and embellished by many other subdivisions, including shades of skin colour.

¹⁶³E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp. 18-19.

The physical anthropologist was obsessed by measurement. Cranial size, shape, skin colour, hair texture, shape of nose and in some cases appearance of male and female genitalia became part of an elaborate system of classifying humans according to a rigid racial typology. Later in the century, the work of the physical anthropologist was to some extent superseded by the social anthropologist who attempted to classify the “other” according to cultural and behavioural patterns. Such descriptions as laziness, promiscuity, primitive behaviour (atavistic) and ultimately intelligence were enthusiastically analysed and incorporated into the lexicon of race classification.¹⁶⁴

It is considered that Johan Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840) was the founder of physical anthropology. It was he who first separated humans into the three race classifications referred to above. A theoretical basis for race classification arose from the work of George Cuvier in the 19th century. He argued that physical appearance and human behaviour remained a permanent manifestation of race. Furthermore, an individual’s race influenced social behaviour and as a result there arose an innate resentment between one individual and another.

These views were supported by the publication of “The Races of Man” in 1850 by Robert Knox who argued that physical differences in individuals could determine the social behaviour of national groupings. It is of relevance that Knox worked as a military surgeon during one of the numerous frontier wars in the Eastern Cape early in the 19th century. He claimed responsibility for sending the first “Kaffir (sic) crania” to Europe for expert analysis. In 1847 a group of “Bosjemans” were taken to England to be exhibited in public. Knox, on the basis of his experience on the eastern frontier, was considered an expert and asked to lecture at the exhibition. He later wrote extensively on the behavioural characteristics of the “Boesjeman”, “Hottentots” and “Caffres”. He had the dubious distinction of being the first South African scientific racist. Many of the primary sources upon which “The Races of Man” was based were derived from his experience in South Africa.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁶⁵S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 27-28.

The Methods of Anthropology

Craniometry

The work of the physical anthropologists of the late 19th and early 20th century was largely concerned with the measurement and shape of the human skull. The Swedish scientist Anders Retzius developed the concept of the cephalic index in 1840. This ratio represents the relationship between the greatest width of the skull to its greatest length. The mathematical consequence of this ratio was used to divide human skulls into three major groups: doliocephalic (long headed), mesocephalic (medium headed) and brachycephalic (short or round headed). Of these three the doliocephalic cranial index was considered to be the most advantageous because it optimised the size of the skull to the surface area and weight of the brain. As it happened, this cranial index was considered typical of the white person's skull. When the same measurements were applied to the Negro races, there was some embarrassment when it was found that their cranial index statistically matched that of the white or so-called Nordic races. Further modifications of the cranial index measurements were introduced by the anthropologists to support what were rapidly becoming implausible justifications for white superiority.¹⁶⁶

Phrenology

Determined to find ways and means of further proving white intellectual superiority, attention was given to the writings of Paul Broca, a French surgeon and founder of the Anthropological Society of Paris. He is justifiably famous in medical circles for the identification of Broca's area, a part of the brain concerned with language. For Broca, the shape of the skull indicated areas of the brain which were indicative of greater or lesser intelligence and ability. Today medical scientists do not question the existence of Broca's area, but challenge the relationship between skull shape and intellectual ability.¹⁶⁷

Broca went further than just measuring skull shapes. After performing autopsies he carefully measured the weight of the brain and reluctantly had to admit that some so-called inferior races had brains bigger than the average. He thus concluded that "if the volume of the brain does not play a decisive role in the intellectual ranking of races, it nevertheless has a very real importance".¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, p. 29.

¹⁶⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶⁸G. Evans: *Black Brain, White Brain*, p. 65.

It is somewhat suprising that he did not describe the reason for its importance. After further research into the anatomy of the brain he decided that intelligence was located in the frontal lobe. The various bones making up the human cranium are joined to each other by sutures. These sutures allow the brain to expand as the skull grows. In his opinion, the sutures around the frontal lobe closed prematurely in black people, thus preventing brain growth and thereby rendering them less intelligent than whites. In due course, he concluded that the anatomy of a black person's skull was similar to that of a monkey.¹⁶⁹

Challenges to Anthropological Views of Race

One of the first scientists to challenge the traditional approach of physical anthropology was the American, Franz Boas (1858-1942). Boas's undoubted ability included the fields of ethnology, physical anthropology, linguistics and archaeology. On matters of race Boas remained consistently egalitarian. He suddenly died at the age of 85 while promoting antiracism during a luncheon at Columbia University. Boas was born a German Jew and studied physics in Heidelberg and Bonn. He completed his PhD in physics at Kiel University. In 1887 he migrated to the United States and became interested in anthropology which later became his life's work. He had been subjected to anti-Semitism in Germany, which resulted in a sword fight which left scars on his face. He never denied the source of the scars but never revealed the outcome of the challenge. In 1911 Boas published the "Mind of Primitive Man" in which, inter alia, he claimed that race, culture and language are independent variables and should not be conflated. Furthermore, he argued that the claim of white racial superiority had no scientific basis and was certainly not supported by the crude and unscientific methods of physical and social anthropologists both in Britain and the United States.

His statement that "the organisation of mind is practically identical among all races of man; that mental activity follows the same laws everywhere, but that its manifestations depend upon the character of individual experience that is subject to the action of these laws," was met with incredulity by the majority of anthropologists of the day.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹G. Evans: *Black Brain, White Brain*, pp. 65-66.

¹⁷⁰E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, p. 77.

Boas supported his arguments by re-measuring the skulls of hundreds of immigrants, Jews, local Indians and American-born whites to find that the results did not support any reliable means of determining race based upon skull shape. As a result of this research, Boas argued that the human skull undergoes plasticity as a result of environmental influences, starting with obstetric procedures, neonatal and baby care, and nutrition. He understood and accepted the teachings of Gregory Mendel and strongly argued that the shape of the skull was not genetically predetermined and had no influence whatsoever on intellectual ability.¹⁷¹

Across the Atlantic, British attitudes to race were far more tolerant and phlegmatic than in America. This was largely because of the demographics of blacks relative to whites in the two countries. Nevertheless, an anthropologist by the name of Bronislaw Malinowski, began propagating views very similar to those of Boas during the inter war years. In common with Boas, he too was trained in physics in Poland and Germany. He completed his postgraduate studies at the London School of Economics and thereafter conducted research in Australia and the Trobriand Islands on the local people. He returned to the London School of Economics in 1922 where he remained until 1938. As a foreigner, possessing a formidable intellect, he was not popular amongst his colleagues. At heart, Malinowski was an egalitarian, and sought to explain the reasons for the emergence of the culture of primitive peoples, and thereby rationalise it. His writing and teaching was based upon his empirical observations drawn from his field research, contrary to many of his American and British colleagues whose work was largely theoretical. He was able to see that aspects of primitive peoples' culture such as family, religion, magic, language, aggression, tribal law and sexual attitudes were culturally determined and not necessarily biological in nature. One of his books, "The Sexual Life of Savages", generated a great deal of controversy in middle-class Britain in the 1930's. Boas and Malinowski had a significant influence on racial attitudes in both America and Britain in the years before the Second World War. In some respects, this provided a stimulus for some to review contemporary views on race. After the war, emerging evidence of the Nazi eugenic programme acted as a powerful stimulus for elucidating the true nature of race.¹⁷²

¹⁷¹E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp. 78-85.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*, pp. 123-127.

A More Plausible Alternative

After the First World War the explanations of physical anthropologists concerning matters of race were considered, in some quarters, to be lacking in scientific rigour. The impression was gained that anthropologists were very enthusiastic about the classification of races, but apparently unable to define the nature of race. The shortcomings on the part of the physical anthropologists gave rise to greater interest in what the social and cultural anthropologists were able to offer on the subject of race and in particular human intelligence. The challenges that were presented by the likes of Boas and Malinowski were becoming difficult for the physical and social anthropologists to refute. Attention then turned to the biologists for rational answers regarding the nature of race. It must be noted that early in the 20th century the new discipline of human genetics was also in turmoil. Thanks to the tireless research of William Bateson, the views of the Mendelian school gained wider acceptance than the alternatives and underpinned a better understanding of the nature of race.¹⁷³

Modern Genetics and the “Superiority” of Whites

The extensive literature on the poor white is replete with confident statements proclaiming white racial superiority over people of colour. A bigoted misrepresentation of race remains at the root of all these narratives which were manipulated for a variety of political purposes and different agendas.¹⁷⁴ The validity of these statements will now, in the light of current scientific knowledge, be examined.

Scepticism regarding such narratives is perhaps forgivable when uttered by politicians, prelates and journalists. When emanating from well trained scientists like Fantham, Duerden and Dunston certain new questions come to mind. Could it be that racial prejudice had influenced their interpretation of the scientific evidence of the day? Perhaps debate and disagreement in the scientific community was a harbinger of uncertainty? Or does the view of Karl Popper prevail that all knowledge is provisional according to the empirical evidence of the day? A further question which arises is the extent to which society determines the selection and funding of projects thereby influencing the nature of research. The possibility of all these issues acting together at different times, thereby affecting scientific opinions, cannot be discounted.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷³E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp. 137-140.

¹⁷⁴G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, p. 42.

¹⁷⁵K. Popper: *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, p. 249.

The following critique of this perception which has had a significant bearing on the poor white debate will be based on the widely accepted views of mainstream scientists. Much of the thinking about race in the early 20th century was influenced by the dubious concepts of scientific racism as discussed above. These widely held assumptions also had considerable influence on policy making in other countries colonised in Africa, the Americas, the East and the Antipodes. Simultaneously, the evidence that the colonised were able to adapt to western customs and thrive under very new and different circumstances led to considerable anxiety in the ruling elite. The South African poor white was a case in point. The question has been posed above – if whites were superior, how could they be poor? The traditional responses to this question are, in the light of modern science, considered to be irrational. Yet the conviction that white people were superior held sway despite growing evidence that these presumptions were flawed.

The Nazi regime's preoccupation with the superiority of the "Nordic" race was a further manifestation of belief systems being manipulated to support a political agenda. When the Second World War ended the full scale of the consequences of this horror became evident. The Holocaust thus had far-reaching implications for perspectives on race. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) published the following statement in the 1960's:

"Scientists have reached agreement that mankind is one: that all men belong to the same species, *Homo sapiens*".

This statement was only possible because of the major advances made in human genetics compared to inheritance knowledge at the dawn of the century. It should be noted that the majority of geneticists, evolutionary biologists and modern anthropologists supported the UNESCO statement. Humans, in common with other animals and plants, receive their hereditary material from both parents in almost equal quantities. The hereditary material is transmitted from the mother through the ovum and from the father through the sperm. The egg and sperm consist of chromosomes of different sizes which collectively contain about 20,000 genes. Humans have 22 pairs of chromosomes and two sex chromosomes in every cell of the body, with the exception of red blood cells. The sex chromosomes are called X or Y, where XX determines female sex and XY male sex. Humans share 99.9% of the genes with each other, and for practical purposes no human other than identical twins have exactly the same genome.

Whilst there are slight differences in the genetic make up between one individual and the next, these genetic variations lead to slight differences in physical appearance. Children born from a population which happens to live in a given geographical location tend over many generations to develop common physical appearances, as they are more likely to share a common ancestry. These slight differences in appearance between population groups have contributed to a wide variety of misconceptions about the concept of race.¹⁷⁶

The prevailing scientific view is that all humans are ultimately descended from a common ancestor. Over thousands of generations, differences in our appearance (phenotype) have arisen as a result of slight differences which have emerged in our common gene pool. For example, brothers and sisters of common parents will share more genes than those in the random population. At any one time a population sharing common cultural values and beliefs often leads to common marriage circles. Under these circumstances the concentration of common genetic variants within members of that population will increase. The prevalence of these variants will lead to similar appearances of the individuals who share the variants. A good example is the small fold of fat which partially obscures the eyes of those members of the Mongoloid race. This feature of their appearance is common, but not exclusive, to all Mongols. Similarly, curly hair is a prominent feature of the Negroid race, but also appears occasionally in the Caucasian race. Thus for purposes of definition “a race can be considered a group of related inter-marrying individuals, a population, which differs from other populations in the relative commonness of certain hereditary traits.”¹⁷⁷

It is important to understand that genes are transmitted intact, being the same chemical entity from one generation to the next. Occasionally however, genes undergo a change in structure which is called a variant. These variants are mostly neutral as far as evolutionary selection is concerned. Very rarely they can confer a selection advantage to the individual which has the variant, but they can also be negative in the case of cells which become malignant tumours. In summary therefore, most variants are neutral in effect, but a minority can either be positive or negative. Most variants are caused randomly when the paired chromosomes separate from one another in preparation for producing either an ovum or sperm. Exposure to certain chemicals and radiation can lead to an increase in the frequency of variants known as mutations, which may be deleterious to the individual's health.

¹⁷⁶L. Kuper: *Race, Science and Society*, pp. 31-32.

¹⁷⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 38-41.

A very good example is skin colour. It is widely agreed among scientists that *Homo sapiens* originated from Africa and had dark skins. As a consequence of human migrations certain humans ended up living in northerly latitudes where there is less sunlight. Those individuals, who possessed a variant which led to a reduced production of skin pigment called melanin, were more likely to survive, as they were able to absorb sufficient ultraviolet rays essential for vitamin D production. As vitamin D is a crucial dietary component, those individuals who were unable to produce this vitamin were less likely to survive and consequently less likely to perpetuate their genes. This is a classical example of beneficial evolutionary selection as a result of a variant of a single gene and an important factor in the evolution of races.¹⁷⁸

Without genetic variants evolution would not be possible. Fortunately, the slight differences between individuals due to inheritance or genetic variants can be beneficial as has been described above. In the words of Yuval Harari:

“Evolution is based on difference, not on equality. Every person carries a somewhat different genetic code, and is exposed from birth to different environmental influences. This leads to the development of different qualities that carry with them different chances of survival. Created equal should therefore be translated into evolved differently.”¹⁷⁹

Geography, human migration and conflict are also contributory factors in the formation of races. Cultural behaviour and religious affiliation contribute greatly to an individual's choice of marriage partner. When these intracultural relationships are disturbed through migration and conflict, the choices of marriage partners often become more restricted. Through this process the interchange of new genes takes place between the warring and migrating groups, not always voluntarily. Furthermore, much of the world population is distributed according to geographical zones. Most black people live in Africa, most whites in Europe and North America, and most Mongoloids in East Asia. Whilst the zones are not exclusive, most of the individuals living in these regions tend to share each other's general appearance. It is clear therefore that migrations between the zones can give rise to a redistribution of genetic material and consequently a change in phenotype.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸L. Kuper: *Race, Science and Society*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁷⁹Y. Harari: *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, p. 109.

¹⁸⁰L. Kuper: *Race, Science and Society*, pp. 52-53.

Physical or cultural isolation is a very important factor in race formation. The world's population is not distributed evenly across the globe. In reality, humans live in large groupings and usually have similar physical characteristics. However, the distribution of races in this way has not always been the case. At one stage there were humans in Africa only. It is estimated that the populating of the globe was the result of a migration from Africa about 60,000 years ago. The various groups leaving Africa took different routes through Europe, Asia and the Antipodes, resulting in exposure to very different climates, geographical conditions and flora and fauna. Over thousands of years adaptations took place within these groups giving rise to phenotypic changes through the process described above. Similarly, over time, cultures emerged which became typical of the various groupings populating the world. Generally, the choice of marriage partners is more frequent amongst those people who share the same language or religion and are from the same class or cast. When such a grouping is small and lives in isolation from other humans, the combination of genes from the partners will be less random than in large groupings. Mating under these circumstances tends to concentrate the gene pool and make phenotypic changes more distinctive for that group.¹⁸¹

The Human Genome Project, which was completed in 2003, provides the most decisive and compelling negation of prejudicial race theories. There is certainly genetic variation between individuals worldwide and more so within population groupings. For example, the greatest genetic variation exists in the oldest population groups which are the Khoikhoi and San in Africa. In the words of Luigi Cavalli-Sforza, the great Stanford geneticist, "racial classification is a futile exercise infinitely more influenced by culture than genetic variation".¹⁸²

¹⁸¹L. Kuper: *Race, Science and Society*, p. 53.

¹⁸²S. Mukherjee: *The Gene*, pp. 340-343.

Scientific Racism in South Africa from 1902 to 1948

Before Union

Even before William Bateson had coined the word “genetics”, scientific racism had seeped into the growing discourse on what was called “the native problem”. Immediately after the end of the Anglo Boer War a period of reconstruction was initiated by Lord Milner and his administration in the Transvaal. It soon became evident that the British would encourage the Cape, Natal and the old Boer republics into some type of union. Central to this debate was the need for a consensus on race policy, which was complicated by the emergence of a number of vested interests. For the mine owners, the availability of cheap labour was essential for profitability as the gold price was fixed. For the white farmers, access to land as well as affordable labour was important. The liberal politicians were keen to introduce the Cape Colony model of a qualified franchise as an option for a unified South Africa. In contrast, the ex-Boer War leaders of Het Volk favoured minimal representation for blacks.

Common to these vested interests was the firm conviction that white people were superior to the indigenous black people. Essentially, the debate devolved around how to sustain white dominance in a manner which would meet the needs of the vested interests, without damaging the economy. At times there were a minority of voices calling for race policy to be tempered by humanitarian concerns.¹⁸³

Early in the century, race theorists promoting segregation of one kind or another were drawn from political groupings, race activists, amateur anthropologists and churchmen. Many of their opinions on scientific racism were anecdotal and unsubstantiated, but united in their efforts to provide a justification for white supremacy. C.T.Loram, an educationist, identified three main schools of thought on future race relations, being: repression, equality and segregation. In his view, segregation represented a reasonable middle path. He had realised that the indigenous black people of southern Africa were resilient and based upon the census held in 1904, outnumbered the whites 3½ to 1. Furthermore, they had held onto this numerical superiority despite the many conflicts in the 18th century arising from both white and black migrations in southern Africa.

¹⁸³P. Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), p. 668.

The segregationist ideology at the beginning of the 20th century was conceived in terms of areas of white and black settlement. The existing cities and temperate areas such as the Highveld were considered suitable for white people, while the more humid low-lying areas and places of indigenous settlement such as Zululand and the Transkei were appropriate for blacks.¹⁸⁴

Even in the late 19th century, the viability of the qualified franchise dispensation in the Cape Colony was being questioned. In 1897, James Bryce, a prominent liberal scholar, wrote that white and black would have “no social intercourse, no mixture of blood, but will each form a nation by itself for all purposes save those of industry and perhaps of politics.” This viewpoint, which soon gained momentum, strongly supported the segregationists. In due course, the South African Native Affairs Commission of 1903-1905 was established by the Milner administration to make recommendations on future native policy. The chairman of the commission was Sir Geoffrey Lagden, the secretary of Native Affairs in the Transvaal. The commission published its report in 1905, which was heavily influenced by Milner’s obsession with social planning, to the extent that it recommended political and territorial segregation between black and white in a future union of South Africa. After union, many of the Lagden Commission’s recommendations were incorporated into the 1913 Land Act.¹⁸⁵

As commissioner for native affairs, Lagden was also concerned about what white racists in Johannesburg described as “the black peril”, essentially a fear of the large black servant population in the city. Between 1890 and 1914, there were a number of incidents of sexual relationships between black “houseboys” and white domestic servants, resulting in a few permanent unions. If this was not bad enough for public sensitivities, some of the mistresses complained of sexual advances from black servants. To make matters even worse, a commission into the black peril in 1913 reported a number of white mistresses having had consensual sex with black servants. In the final report these liaisons were swept under the carpet by explaining that the white women “were extorted due to the occult powers of the offender.”¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁴P. Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), pp. 667-668.

¹⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 668.

¹⁸⁶C. van Onselen: *New Babylon New Nineveh*, pp. 257-261.

To many historians the Native Affairs Commission was a delaying strategy on the part of the colonial government prior to union. The extent to which scientific racism was now influencing the discourse on race can be gauged from the following quotation from a local newspaper, *The Transvaal Leader*, October 19, 1904:

“We can say with scientific certainty that the process of evolution must be so prolonged as to deprive any speculations based on it of present political interest or importance, even were the Negro or Negroid races on ethnological equality with the people of Aryan or Caucasian descent. That, however, is a position that no one yet maintains. The very formation of the Negro skull is so antagonistic to the theory, recalling as it does the Neanderthal head, which is admittedly a member of the European race which existed many thousands of years before the dawn of history.”¹⁸⁷

Lagden considered the annual meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, which was due to take place in South Africa in 1905, as an opportunity to promote a more moderate and cautious approach to race relations. Lagden was asked to address the meeting, but demurred in favour of Howard Pim, who was considered to be a humanitarian concerned about the future of the indigenous peoples of Southern Africa. As it turned out, Pim was more anxious about the economic viability of African reserves, and more importantly, considered them necessary as a means of social control. By this stage, it was clear to the educated black elite that the prospect of a qualified franchise in a future Union of South Africa was becoming less and less likely. This feeling was enhanced by the dominance of the *Het Volk* Party of generals Botha and Smuts in the Responsible Government of 1907.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷P.Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), p. 669.

¹⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 669-671

Outside of the Cape Colony there were very few academics and politicians who supported the introduction of a non-racial qualified franchise in the proposed Union of South Africa. Very much against prevailing attitudes, Olive Schreiner wrote a letter to the Transvaal Leader in 1908 supporting the introduction of a similar franchise system to that which operated successfully in the Cape Colony. Yet, despite this liberal approach, her correspondence demonstrates elements of racial bias:

“In our small, to - day dominant European element we have the descendants of some of the most virile of the northern races, races which, at least for themselves, have always loved freedom and justice; in our vast Bantu element we possess one of the finest breeds of the African stock. A grave and almost fatal error is sometimes made when persons compare our native question with the Negro question in the southern states of America. Not only is the South African Bantu (a race probably with a large admixture of Arab blood!) as distinct from the West Coast Negro, who was the ancestor of the American slave, as the Norwegian is from the Spaniard, but he has never been subject to the dissolving and de-socialising ordeal of slavery element. We find in him in the land of his growth with all the instincts of the free man intact”.¹⁸⁹

There was little in what Schreiner proposed that resonated with the debate on native policy which was raging in the Transvaal prior to Union. Essentially, it was either segregation in one form or another or repression. F.W. Bell, an avowed racist, was asked to address the Transvaal Native Affairs society in 1908. The title of his address was “The Native as a Political Factor and the Native Franchise”, in which he described Africans as a “lower race.” To substantiate his opinion he quoted references from “scientific experts“, in the form of A. H. Keane (Britain) and Robert Bennett Bean (United States). It was Keane’s contention that Africans occupied the “lowest position in the evolutionary scale.” The speech was widely reported in the Rand Daily Mail and other local newspapers which strongly supported a segregationist approach to native policy.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, p. 89.

¹⁹⁰P.Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902 – 1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), pp. 89-90.

Despite the domination of segregationists, driven by a mixture of ignorance, prejudice and opportunism, there remained a modicum of concern about the direction of racial policy at the time of union. Some were concerned about alienating moderate and influential politicians in Whitehall. Others such as H.J.Crocker, held the view that the domination of whites was “physical and intellectual” rather than “moral and spiritual.” For this reason, he argued that segregation in South Africa should be practised on an ethical basis. This concern appeared to be shared by Gen. Smuts who pointed out in a speech given at Troyeville in Johannesburg that “if they wanted to push the ideal of segregation further they must be prepared for the gravest trouble that South Africa had faced in the course of its whole history.”¹⁹¹

The writings of the American, Harry Johnson, which compared race relations in the American South with the situation in southern Africa was but one example which resonated with the amateur racial theorists dominating the discourse on native policy. By the time of union, the influence of American segregationists on the evolution of South African native policy had become significant. The comparison between the American experience and that of South Africa was extensively debated in such exclusive circles as the Fortnightly Club. It was only after the First World War that the newly appointed academics at the University of the Witwatersrand began to contribute to the debate about race. But by 1910 the die was cast. The minority of white liberals and the black intelligentsia were unsuccessful in having the Cape qualified franchise incorporated into the legislation leading to the formation of the Union of South Africa. Segregationist policies prevailed and then seemed to develop their own momentum, as represented by the passage of the 1913 Land Act. Further discriminatory legislation would continue for many years to come.¹⁹²

After Union

Following Union, segregationist ideology began to permeate the administrative echelons of the Union government, in particular the Department of Native Affairs. This alarmed senior administrators in the Cape Native Affairs Department, who were concerned about the viability of the Eastern Cape and Transkei reserves which risked overpopulation if the segregation policy was strictly enforced.

¹⁹¹P.Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902 – 1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), pp. 672-673.

¹⁹²S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, p. 93.

Gen. J.B.M.Hertzog's strong support for segregation concerned a number of prominent Cape politicians, including John X. Merriman, who considered that segregation would lead to the demise of the European race in South Africa.¹⁹³

In the early years of the 20th century, the shortcomings of the physical anthropologists to provide a satisfactory explanation for the apparent differences in the intellectual capacity of different races was taken up by the psychologists. In 1917 a series of IQ tests were performed on 170 African children and students between the ages of 6 and 22 at the Amanzimtoti and Adams Primary Schools in Natal. In some quarters it was observed that the Stanford Binet tests were often more a test of cultural awareness than mental acuity. There followed intense debate about what test would suit African students given their different educational and cultural inheritance. In the same year, the Natal educationist, Dr. C.T. Loram, who was later a trustee of the Carnegie Commission, published a book called the "Education of the South African Native". The book was based upon a doctoral submission to Columbia University in the United States, at the time when intelligence testing had become very popular. Loram suggested that the education of Africans should be focused upon industrial and agricultural skills rather than academic topics. He was highly critical of the qualified franchise dispensation in the old Cape Colony, as he considered this assimilationist. As far as mathematics was concerned he argued that black children were 30 to 100% slower than whites. Interestingly he did not consider that these features of black intellectual ability arose from an inherited form of arrested development. He supported a progressive eugenic program based upon "the spread of civilisation, selective breeding, improved environment, and better teaching" which would in time "lead to lesser differences between Europeans and natives."¹⁹⁴

In 1917, H.B. Fantham was appointed the Professor of Zoology at the University of the Witwatersrand. He came to South Africa with an impressive academic pedigree, having graduated at Cambridge University as a gold medalist in zoology. He was an enthusiastic eugenicist and propagated his views widely. He used his position as a member of the University Senate and Dean of the Science Faculty to good effect, promoting eugenics in terms of the Darwinian laws of natural selection. He considered that intellectual ability was entirely inherited, a view based upon the germ plasm theory of August Weismann. According to Fantham, the influence of heredity was "ineradicable, certain and immediate". Culture had no role to play whatsoever in the determination of intellectual ability.

¹⁹³P.Rich: "Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), pp. 673-674.

¹⁹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 675-676.

He was very concerned about the growth of the black population and the effect this could have upon the future of the white race. He supported a prohibition of white/black marriages and all sexual contact between the races. Those individuals who were mentally subnormal should be subjected to forced sterilisation. He used his prominent position in the South African Association for the Advancement of Science to propagate his extreme views. In 1927, the first Immorality Act, prohibiting sexual relationships between blacks and whites, was passed by the South African Parliament.¹⁹⁵

In 1920 Alfred R. Radcliffe Brown was appointed professor of anthropology at the University of Cape Town. He was born in 1881 in Birmingham and later studied anthropology at Cambridge, where he later became known as “Anarchy Brown.” He was heavily influenced by the teachings of the French anthropologist Emile Durkheim. After graduating in 1908, he left Britain to conduct field studies in the Pacific before returning to Britain in 1936 to occupy the chair of anthropology at Oxford University. In the interim, he had variously been professor of anthropology in Cape Town, Sydney and Chicago. He was asked to address the South African Association for the Advancement of Science in 1923, where he described the difference between ethnology and social anthropology. During this speech he rejected a specific race psychology, but conceded that it may become a useful field of study in future. During his time in South Africa he remained above local politics and restricted his academic debates to those with his professional colleagues. However, local activists manipulated his teachings to support their own racist agenda. He left the University of Cape Town in 1925 to occupy the chair of anthropology at Sydney University.¹⁹⁶

The extreme hereditarian views of Fantham and to a lesser extent Loram, were challenged from an unlikely quarter. A retired Rhodesian magistrate, Peter Nielsen, published a book called “The Black Man’s Place in South Africa” in 1922. He rejected the work of the physical anthropologists and their obsession with skull measurement and shape, which still had resonance with organisations such as the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. He also challenged the concept of arrested development at puberty amongst Blacks as a “popular notion for which a sort of pseudoscientific authority may be quoted from encyclopedias and old books of travel”. He rejected the concept of a native mind distinct from that of whites and condemned the idea that human ethics were determined by natural selection. Nielsen’s views began to find common purpose with a number of the English-

¹⁹⁵P.Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), pp. 676-677.

¹⁹⁶E. Barkan: *The Retreat of Scientific Racism*, pp. 121-124.

speaking liberals who were beginning to challenge the biological determinist views which were dominating the narrative on race in South Africa. Those individuals were part of what was known as the Joint Council Movement. One of the promoters of this society was the liberal J.D. Reinhardt Jones, who was dismissive of the concept of a “primitive mentality”, a view previously supported by the earlier anthropologists.¹⁹⁷

Intelligence Testing in South Africa

Towards the end of the 1920's, the attention of race theorists of one persuasion or another became preoccupied with intelligence testing. By this time local social scientists, psychologists and anthropologists had developed strong ties with American institutions, such as the Phelps Stokes Foundation and the Carnegie Corporation. In 1929 Dr. E.G. Malherbe had been appointed the director of the National Bureau of Educational and Social Research within the Department of Education. In the field of social sciences, the influence of American, British, Canadian and Australian bodies was being felt, particularly from the Social Science Research Council of the USA. As a result, the Bureau under Malherbe became involved with a number of studies involving the relative intelligence of blacks and whites. Malherbe had been born and raised in the Orange Free State, received his initial education at Stellenbosch University and received his doctorate in education at Columbia University in the United States. His major subjects were mental testing and psychology and he later studied the extent to which intelligence could be inherited at the Institute for Mental Defectives in Rome, New York State.

Malherbe was a competent organiser and pragmatic individual who strongly supported social reform based upon scientific principles untainted by political interference. In 1934 he convened a major conference in South Africa in collaboration with the New Education Fellowship, which focused upon “Educational Adaptation in a Changing Society”. Much time was devoted to the education of black children. This topic led to a great deal of controversy, particularly when two prominent overseas speakers, R.F.A. Hoernle and Bronislaw Malinowski argued for the separation of culture and inheritance in assessing intelligence amongst races.

¹⁹⁷P.Rich: “Race, Science and the legitimization of white supremacy in South Africa, 1902-1940”, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, (1990), p. 679.

Malinowski called for the admission of black children into white culture, while continuing to receive “education along African lines”. He was highly critical of any assertions that there was a relationship between brain size and intellect. Needless to say, this view was not widely shared in the South Africa of the 1930’s.¹⁹⁸

Many of the South African race theorists in the 1920’s and 1930’s did not share Malherbe’s tolerant views. One such was a Dr. M.L. Fick, who was a Harvard educated psychologist working for the Mental Hygiene section of the Department of the Interior. In 1929 he presented a paper to the British Association of Science, which claimed that only 2% of Zulu children reached intelligence standards of whites of a similar age. In the course of presenting his paper he appeared ambivalent regarding the relative influence of cultural issues when testing intelligence. Later he presented again to the 1934 education conference of the British Association, where he confidently claimed a distinctive inferiority of Africans in comparison to coloured and Indian children, with whites proving to be more intelligent than other races. In 1939 he was appointed head of psychology at the National Bureau of Educational and Social research and published “The Educability of the South African Native.” This paper paid scant attention to environmental and cultural differences between white and black children and continued to propagate Fick’s strongly held views regarding the dominance of heredity in the determination of intelligence. His opinion was supported to some extent by Werner Eiselen, the Chief Inspector of Native Education, who stated that: “the native is not educateable in precisely the same way as the European and education policy should be remoulded accordingly.” Later Eiselen would play a central role in designing so-called Bantu education for the future apartheid state.¹⁹⁹

The views that intelligence was entirely due to heredity and was racially distributed were soon challenged by a number of luminaries. In 1927 the Rev. H.B. Booth Coventry, a lecturer at Fort Hare College, presented his experience of teaching post matriculation African students and comparing the results to whites of a similar age grouping. In his view, there was no significant difference. Dr. D.D.T. Jabavu, a prominent graduate of Fort Hare described the experience of many Africans who had successfully graduated with overseas degrees and was highly critical of intelligent tests which were being used primarily “to discredit the mentality of aboriginal Africans”.

¹⁹⁸S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 214-216.

¹⁹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 216-217.

Prof. I.D. McCrone, the Professor of Psychology at the University of the Witwatersrand expressed his concern about intelligence tests being used for political purposes, particularly when interpreted by individuals with well-known racist prejudices. The most influential critique of those who adopted the hereditarian approach to intelligence came from Simon Biesheuvel, who at that stage was head of the South African Air Force Aptitude Testing Unit. In association with Alfred Hoernle, he published a book called “African Intelligence” in 1943. In this monograph he carefully analysed the contribution of cultural, environmental, and temperamental factors, as well as that of widespread malnutrition among South African blacks. His views resonated with those of the original inventor of the IQ tests, Binet, who considered IQ as a measure of determining an individual’s potential to understand and acquire knowledge under given circumstances.²⁰⁰

During the 1920’s the poor white problem in South Africa was beginning to receive greater attention. During this time the well-known Afrikaans author and medical doctor C. Louis Leipold was the Medical Inspector of Schools in the Transvaal. Early in his career he expressed considerable confidence in intelligence testing being used to identify those individuals who would benefit from an academic education. Later he became concerned, as did others, that IQ testing could not be conducted without adjustments for cultural factors as well as general health and nutrition. It is uncertain whether this change in approach was a means of deflecting the criticism of the leaders of the Afrikaner nationalist movement who may have been concerned that the cause of poor whiteism was inherited.²⁰¹

The conflict between inherited and cultural causes of the poor white problem became particularly evident in the five volume report of the Carnegie Commission into the poor white problem. One of the commissioners, R.W. Wilcocks, privately considered that the intelligence of an individual was largely determined by heredity. Another commissioner, E.G. Malherbe, supported the view that the poor white problem was due to environmental, social and psychological factors. It is important to note that Wilcocks had great sympathy for the Afrikaner Nationalist movement.²⁰²

²⁰⁰S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 220-221.

²⁰¹C.L. Leipold: *Bushveld Doctor*, pp. 54-55.

²⁰²*Ibid.*, pp. 224-227.

Intelligence and the Poor White

In this thesis there appear a number of references to intelligence and intelligence testing. Wilcocks and Malherbe devoted a lot of time to testing the intelligence of the poor whites compared to those of the middle class. These tests require careful interpretation, but do suggest a lower than average level of intelligence for those individuals below the mean of 100. Factors such as physical isolation, malnutrition, disease and disregard for education were certainly factors which must be considered. Other than the above circumstances, there is no genetic reason why the poor whites should on average be any more or less intelligent than anyone else. Evidence is also presented in this thesis on the agency and entrepreneurship of the poor white which certainly does not support the stereotype that poor whites generally inherited a lower level of intelligence.

“Intelligence is a very general mental capability that, among other things, involves the ability to reason, plan, solve problems, think abstractly, comprehend complex ideas, learn quickly and learn from experience. It is not merely book learning, a narrow academic skill, or test taking smarts. Rather, it reflects a broader and deeper capability for comprehending our surroundings – catching on, making sense of things or figuring out what to do”.²⁰³

During the First World War, the U.S. Army was persuaded by a psychologist, Robert Yerkes to conduct intelligence testing on recruits in order to decide suitability for officer training or non-commissioned officer potential. These tests became known as the Army Alpha and Beta tests. The flaw in these tests was that they were more a measure of American cultural familiarity than cognitive function. It was thus not surprising that peoples living outside of the U.S. performed badly with the Army tests.²⁰⁴ The tests have since been improved to measure specific cognitive function. In the 21st century the most widely used intelligence test is the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale III. This test examines an individual’s verbal comprehension, perceptual organisation, working memory and processing speed. The stability of an individual’s intelligence is quite remarkable.

²⁰³I. Deary, F. Spinaath & T. Bates: “Genetics of Intelligence,” *European Journal of Human Genetics*, (14), 2006, p. 690.

²⁰⁴G. Evans, *Black Brain, White Brain*, pp 144-146.

In a Scottish Mental Survey performed in 1932 a follow-up study was conducted on those individuals who were still alive after some 68 years, which found a correlation of .66 between the same tests performed at age 11. It has been shown that intelligence scores are strongly associated with successful academic studies and are the best single predictor of vocational success. On average, children born with higher intelligence quotients (IQ's) tend to have greater longevity.²⁰⁵

Many of the studies on the inheritance of intelligence have been conducted by testing monozygotic (identical) twins. Here the average degree of correlation of intelligence between the pair of twins is 0.86 if they are reared together and 0.72 if they are reared apart. By comparison, siblings who are reared together exhibit a 0.6 correlation and if reared apart, the correlation is 0.47. Scientists have thus concluded that inheritance is responsible for approximately 50% of an individual's intelligence, but that rearing, poverty and low birth weight can also be strong negative determinants. The cultural factors referred to above must also be taken into account. It is generally agreed that there is no such thing as a single gene for intelligence, and the inheritance thereof is due to the interaction of hundreds of genes.²⁰⁶

The effects of alcohol consumption during pregnancy are well documented with heavy ingestion giving rise to a decreased brain size and mental retardation in the fetus. Similarly, smoking during pregnancy is known to retard infant development in the first few years of life²⁰⁷. There is further evidence that disordered home circumstances and parental neglect can affect those components of the brain responsible for problem-solving. A group of Romanian orphans were neglected during their early years, having minimal contact with any other humans for protracted periods. When they were found, neurological examination demonstrated gross deficiencies in their cognitive and emotional functions. This evidence is supported by a British study published in 2010 which demonstrated that children from the poorest homes had difficulty speaking English by the time they started primary school.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁵G. Evans, *Black Brain, White Brain*, p. 691.

²⁰⁶I. Deary, F. Spinaath & T. Bates: "Genetics of Intelligence," *European Journal of Human Genetics*, (14), 2006, pp. 696-697.

²⁰⁷Kasper et al.: *Harrisons Principles of Internal Medicine*, p. 2564.

²⁰⁸G. Evans: *Black Brain, White Brain*, pp. 190-192.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the 20th century race theorists turned to science to explain and justify white domination. The narrative of the physical and social anthropologists and ethnologists turned out to be bereft of scientific rigour. After Union, the anthropologists took a back seat and were replaced by the psychologists and educationists to develop alternative race theories to justify white hegemony. The main thrust of this endeavour was intelligence testing, which was soon shown to be flawed in the absence of any adjustment for culture, disease or nutritional status. By using intelligence tests designed for Westerners, it was easy to demonstrate that blacks were mentally inferior to whites. On the basis of the evidence presented above it is reasonable to assume that the poor whites would have performed poorly on the Army Alpha and Beta tests.

There is evidence from the Carnegie Report that poor white families lived under circumstances where parental neglect, disordered home life, lack of stimulation and poverty was common. The impact of alcohol consumption during pregnancy by poor white mothers is difficult to quantify. Certainly it was possible due to ignorance. Whether they could afford to drink when pregnant is unlikely. At that stage the dangers of smoking were generally unknown. In this regard it is worthwhile to consider the influence of universities, associations and quasi government organisations, both in South Africa and abroad. Both Malherbe and Loram studied at Columbia University in the United States. H.B. Fantham was a celebrated Cambridge graduate, a professor at the University of the Witwatersrand, the Dean of the Faculty of Science, and an influential member of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science. Radcliffe Brown was also a Cambridge graduate. Organisations such as the Phelps Stokes Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation and the Social Science Research Council of the USA influenced the race debate.

Race theorists, such as F.W. Bell, extensively quoted and often misquoted scientific experts such as Radcliffe Brown, A.H. Keane (Britain) and Robert Bennett Bean (USA). Public platforms were used to influence public opinion amidst the strident debate on segregationist race policy. The liberals and the black elite who promoted the incorporation of the Cape franchise at the time of Union did not stand a chance.

The elephant in the room was the intractable poor white problem. Was it because they were genetically inferior? Was it cultural? Were poor whites amenable to eugenic methods of salvation such as segregation? How could whites be superior to blacks if many remained stubbornly poor? How could the Afrikaner nationalist project succeed when confronted with poor whites? The Afrikaner leaders desperately turned to eugenics for a possible solution.

CHAPTER 6

EUGENICS

Francis Galton

There is nothing new in eugenics. Socrates was quoted as saying:

“We must mate the best of our men with the best of our woman as often as possible and the inferior men with the inferior woman as seldom as possible, and bring up only the offspring of the best.”

Plato went on to propose organising society in such a way that only the guardian class would be permitted to mate with selected woman at special marriage festivals. The selection of both the males and females for this pre-planned mating would be the responsibility of the “Philosopher King”. Those members of the guardian class who were considered sub optimal would be prevented from mating.

Essentially this was no different from the Nazi Lebensborn program, where suitable Nazi SS officers had sex with women who were considered to be ideal examples of the Aryan lineage, replete with blonde hair and blue eyes.²⁰⁹

Francis Galton was born in 1822 and grew up in the shadow of his famous cousin Charles Darwin. As a child Galton was considered to be quite brilliant, becoming adept at complex mathematics from a very early age. In 1859 he read his cousin’s book “Origin of Species” and became entranced by evolutionary theory. He did his best to develop and popularise a plausible theory of heredity, which he ultimately named the Ancestral Law. But his arguments were superficial and eventually repudiated by the biologist, William Bateson, the man who coined the word “genetics”. By 1910 Mendel’s laws of inheritance were becoming widely accepted in biological circles and became infinitely more plausible than Galton’s theories.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ R. Gillon.: “Eugenics, contraception, abortion and ethics”, *The Journal of Medical Ethics*, (24), 1998, pp. 219-220.

²¹⁰ S. Mukherjee: *The Gene*, pp. 65-70.

Galton was determined to find an opportunity for his personal aggrandizement within the exciting and rapidly expanding field of human biology. By 1904 he was actively promoting his new theories in order to improve the human race by directed breeding. This process he called “eugenics”, which literally meant better born:

“What nature does blindly, slowly and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly and kindly. As it lies within his power, so it becomes his duty to work in that direction.”²¹¹

At a public lecture held at the London School of Economics in 1904 Galton held forth in front of London’s social and scientific elite. The audience included George Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells, the psychiatrist Henry Maudsley and unfortunately for Galton, William Bateson. It did not take long for the latter to identify the flaw in Galton’s theory. He pointed out that Galton wished to use evidence of physical and mental ability to identify those individuals or their children for whom selective breeding would offer an advantage. Whilst at that stage the chemical structure of DNA and genes had not been identified, Bateson was able to show that the mechanism of inheritance lies within a fertilised ovum and as a result of cellular division becomes distributed throughout every human’s body. Despite Bateson’s impressive standing as a biologist, the audience was largely receptive to the general concept of the better breeding of humans. Galton received considerable support from H.G. Wells, who became enthusiastic about the opportunity to create a “fitter society.”²¹²

In the same lecture, Galton laid down the steps to be taken to successfully achieve a better society by using eugenics. He considered that the laws of heredity should be widely disseminated to all educated individuals. Successful, intelligent and highly civilised individuals should be encouraged to improve their fertility. Unsuitable marriages should be prevented by means of social ostracism. Finally, Galton proposed that eugenics should form part of the “national conscience like a new religion.”²¹³

²¹¹ F. Galton: “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, (July, 1904), p 5.

²¹² S. Mukherjee: *The Gene*, pp. 72-74.

²¹³ F. Galton: “Eugenics: Its definition, scope and aims”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, (July, 1904), p.6.

The Spread of Eugenics

The beginning of the 20th century marked the end of the Victorian era, of which liberalism and confident optimism were prominent features. These were replaced by widespread concerns by the elite of the spread of degenerative behaviour within the masses. These negative perceptions were perpetuated by the emergence of socialism and certainly hardened by the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The high birthrate of the lower classes compared to the aristocracy was a further reason for disquiet. In Europe and North America there emerged a widely held belief within the upper classes of a decline in the general quality of human society. Sidney Webb, a leading member of the Fabian Society and a future communist was quoted as saying:

“No consistent eugenicist can be a laissez faire individualist unless he throws up the game in despair. He must interfere, interfere, interfere.”²¹⁴

Soon eugenics spread to other counties in Europe, the United States, countries in the east and of course South Africa.

Positive and Negative Eugenics

Positive eugenics is a process through which certain desirable characteristics in humans are developed in future generations. Unfortunately, desirable characteristics can be quite subjective and very often heavily influenced by ideological preference. A famous geneticist and socialist, J.H. Muller, considered Vladimir Lenin to be an ideal model for future generations of men. Positive eugenics, according to Harry Laughlin, a prominent American enthusiast, was about the “art of breeding better men by promoting high fertility and frequent mating amongst the more talented families”. The British scientist J.B.S Haldane supported education and artificial insemination as positive eugenic interventions. Negative eugenics on the other hand, was largely about voluntary or forced sterilisation, restrictions on immigration, racially directed contraception programmes, incarceration of the mentally deficient and the outlawing of interracial sexual relations.²¹⁵

²¹⁴M. Meloni: *Political Biology*, pp. 69-70.

²¹⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 70-72.

Early in the 20th century a notorious court case, which was finally resolved in the US Supreme Court, concerned a young woman called Emmett Buck. She and her daughter, Carrie, were poor and it was said that Emmett was a prostitute who drank excessively. In 1920 she was arrested and following a superficial mental examination was considered to be feeble-minded. She was confined to the Virginia State Colony for Epileptics and the Feeble-minded situated in Lynchburg, Virginia. Her daughter was placed in foster care. Soon she was raped by a relative of the foster parents and to cover the matter up she appeared before the same judge who had incarcerated her mother. Whilst awaiting transfer to Lynchburg, Carrie gave birth to a daughter whom she named Vivian. She was examined upon admission and found to be intellectually normal for a person of that age. Despite this assessment she was classified as “moron, middle grade” and incarcerated.

The superintendent, a Dr. Priddy, was conducting a political campaign in order to have eugenic sterilisations legalised. On the grounds of her mental assessment the superintendent approached the Virginia authorities for authorisation to perform a sterilisation on Carrie Buck. The Court obliged, but Priddy was concerned that the consent may be overturned by a higher court. In order to seek confirmation of the sterilisation order Carrie again appeared in court. Priddy reasoned that if Carrie Buck’s daughter could also be found to be mentally defective there would be stronger support for his application. The social worker who had examined Vivian was ambivalent about the extent of her mental deficiency. Eventually the case ended in the Supreme Court of the United States in 1927. By this time Priddy had died, but the matter was resumed by his successor at the colony, Dr. John Bell. The presiding judge was none other than Oliver Wendell Holmes, who granted the order for sterilisation on the grounds that “Three generations of imbeciles is enough”. Carrie Buck underwent a tubal ligation in October of that year. The result of the Supreme Court judgement in the Buck versus Bell case was that 29 American states passed similar laws to those in Virginia, resulting in some 63,000 so called feeble-minded people being sterilised against their will by the 1960’s.²¹⁶

²¹⁶S. Mukherjee: *The Gene*, pp. 78-84.

The Eugenic Movement in South Africa

Fantham, Duerden and Hogben

These three men were products of British science and had outstanding academic credentials, yet they understood inheritance very differently. It is no exaggeration to say that in many respects they were diametrically opposed.

It took quite a while for eugenics to gain a foothold in South Africa. In 1920 the Eugenics and Genetics Standing Committee of the South African Association for the Advancement of Science was established with H.B. Fantham, Prof. of Zoology at the University of the Witwatersrand, as its president. The committee popularised eugenics by lecturing at universities and study groups in South Africa. They also tried to convince the government to legislate against inter- and intra-racial sexual relations between “people of different potentialities.” To some extent they were successful – the Pact government passed the first Immorality Act in 1927. This legislation was restricted to inter racial sexual activities between white and blacks and did not touch on intra-racial relations as proposed by Fantham and his colleagues. They also agitated for compulsory sterilisation laws along the lines of those passed in the USA. In this respect, they were ultimately unsuccessful.²¹⁷

Whilst in South Africa, Fantham wrote extensively on eugenics targeted at the scientific community. In a wide-ranging paper published in the South African Journal of Science in 1925 he set out his views on eugenic solutions for many of South Africa’s problems. In the section entitled “Differential breeding in various strata of society” he expressed concern about the large numbers of children born to poor white couples still living in rural areas in the 1920’s and ‘30’s. He described these families as being “thriftless, all inheriting the same low grade social traits and many of them bordering on the feebleminded.” He compared them to the small families produced by educated and successful couples, advising that their inherited characteristics were essential for the survival of the white race in South Africa. He then proceeded to describe how welfare measures and philanthropy had allowed individuals who are physically, mentally and morally unfit to survive. In more primitive societies those individuals would not have survived the processes of natural selection. In his words:

“In short, the undesirables of the race, with whom the hand of natural selection would have made short work early in life, are now nursed along to old age.”²¹⁸

²¹⁷T. Jenkins: “Medical Genetics in South Africa,” *Journal of Medical Genetics*, (27), 1990, p. 27.

²¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 405.

In this respect he was not alone. Between 1914 and 1915 Dr. C. Louis Leopold was the Medical Inspector of Schools in the eastern Transvaal lowveld. His writing on the local blacks' approach to deformed children and twins illuminates the approach of many educated people to eugenic theories. He describes how the local people, knowing that food and sometimes water in the bushveld are limited, realise that physically challenged children are unlikely to be able to contribute to the community as adults and while growing are likely to consume precious resources. In his book, "Bushveld Doctor", he supported the infanticide practiced in this way by the indigenous peoples. Thus it is not surprising, that at the time, he agreed with compulsory sterilisation for those who were mentally subnormal. He later changed his opinion.²¹⁹

Under the heading "Social Inheritance and Racial Admixture" Fantham stated confidently that "The ideals, sentiments, moral standards and general relations of life are all inherited." No reference is made to cultural or environmental factors. He strongly warned against racial admixture particularly between whites and blacks, fearing that the white would sink to the level of the black as far as these behavioural characteristics were concerned. He referred to a study undertaken by Dr. Ferguson in Virginia of the USA of the relative intelligence of Negroes, coloureds and whites. On the strength of this, he warned that white people mixing with blacks would lead to lower intelligence in the white group.²²⁰

Fantham's approach to inheritance differed significantly from his colleague James Duerden, who was Prof. of Zoology at Rhodes University. Politically, Duerden was a moderate who supported restorative social and welfare programs. He acknowledged the important, but not exclusive, role of germplasm in the process of inheritance. In short, he subscribed to the view that humans were a product of both nature and nurture and that under the correct circumstances and with adequate education and training, the South African black could rise to the level of the white person. Duerden also brought a fresh and innovative approach to the poor white problem. In his opinion, most of the whites in South Africa were descended from the Dutch and the British, being, in his words, "two of the most virile nations of Europe".²²¹

²¹⁹C.L. Leopold: *Bushveld Doctor*, pp. 46-47.

²²⁰H.B. Fantham: "Some Factors in Eugenics, Together with Notes on some South African cases," *The South African Journal of Science*, July 1925, p. 408.

²²¹S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in South Africa*, p140.

It was therefore not possible for a subgroup of the white race to have undergone genetic deterioration. He considered that the causes of the poor white problem were the physical isolation of the Dutch farmers, the challenges of the environment and competition from the inferior black races. Unfortunately, nothing could be done about the adult poor whites, but the prognosis for their children was excellent.²²²

The eminent British scientist, Sir Lancelot Hogben, worked at the University of Cape Town from 1927 to 1930. During his time in South Africa he became aware of the local eugenics movement, of which he expressed extreme disapproval. When Fantham left Wits in 1932, the South African eugenics movement lost some momentum. It had become apparent to the diehard eugenicists that many of the interventions that they were promoting were unlikely to find support amongst the leaders of the Pact government, particularly as the poor whites would logically have been the prime targets.²²³

During his time in Cape Town, Hogben embraced his new position with great enthusiasm. Apart from stimulating primary zoological research at UCT, he also vigorously attacked the eugenics movement. In a number of speeches he declared his opposition to compulsory sterilisation on the grounds that the inheritance of mental traits was, at the time, poorly understood. If however, it was shown that there was a clear relationship between maternal mental illness and the same condition in the child, sterilisation could be justified. He also warned that such diagnoses would prove to be difficult to confirm. Prior to the Second World War the intensity of scientific publications challenging the concept of race increased. Hilda Kuper, building on the work of Malinowski, Jacques Barzun ("Race: A study in Modern Superstition", 1937) and Huxley and Haddons ("We Europeans"), argued convincingly that whites, blacks and coloureds were part of the same race and that differences in phenotype had nothing to do with mental or cultural capabilities.²²⁴

²²²S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 137-140.

²²³T. Jenkins: "Medical Genetics in South Africa," *Journal of Medical Genetics*, (27), 1990, p. 762.

²²⁴S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 191-195.

Mental Health, Contraception and Public Health

Early in the 20th century, local doctors in the Cape began taking an interest in the genetic basis of mental health, contraception and general public health. The South African Medical Journal and the South African Medical Record were full of editorials and review articles on these subjects. The interest spilled over into the public domain and ultimately led to the formation of the National Society for the Care of the Feeble-minded in 1914. The initial goal of the society was to determine the extent of feeble-mindedness in the country and agitate for the establishment of suitable institutional facilities for the care of these individuals. On the face of it, the purpose of the society seemed to be altruistic and sincere. There existed, however, a concern amongst some of the members regarding race deterioration and degradation. The authorities responded by passing the Mental Disorders Act of 1916. For the first time in South Africa mental disorders were described in medical terms and then converted into suitable legal definitions. Included in the Act were provisions by which doctors and magistrates could certify and incarcerate individuals suffering from certain mental disorders.²²⁵

One of the doctors responsible for drafting the Act was the Physician Superintendent of the Pretoria Mental Hospital, Dr. J.T. Dunston. From his writings and teachings it was quite clear that Dunston was a strong supporter of eugenics and was particularly concerned about the influence the feeble-minded would have on resolving the poor white problem. He admitted that the definition of feeble-minded was borderline with normality, and often difficult to diagnose. Because of the insidious nature of this condition, incorporation of the feeble-minded into South African whites would be slow and only detected when it was too late. He was quoted as saying:

“Feeble-minded girls were not infrequently quite pretty, sexually attractive and easily influenced”. This, he postulated, made them susceptible to prostitution and therefore they should be incarcerated.”²²⁶

²²⁵S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 145-147.

²²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 148.

Both Dunston and Fantham were convinced that mental disorders were exclusively due to mechanisms of inheritance and were therefore incurable. Accordingly, Dunston supported the incarceration of the mentally defective, the removal of the franchise and argued for compulsory sterilisations where necessary. When speaking in public he was ambivalent about the conditions under which he would support compulsory sterilisation, sensing that it would lead to a public outcry. Towards the end of the 1930's the outcome of the Buck versus Bell case in the US was starting to raise the intensity of debate about compulsory sterilisation in South Africa. In 1929 the Union Medical Officer of Health, a Dr. Mitchell, supported compulsory sterilisation of the mentally defective. He was joined by a Justice Krause of the circuit court who wished to include sex offenders as well.

The comments along these lines by these prominent individuals led to a furious debate on compulsory sterilisation within the medical profession. The Dean of Johannesburg, Rev. W.A. Palmer, became concerned about the intensity of the rhetoric and suggested a middle position, being the segregation of the unfit and the restriction of marriage certificates for any marriage partner who was considered to be mentally defective. Following Britain's example, support for compulsory sterilisation was on the wane and gradually the moderating influence of doctors such as C. Louis Leipoldt, Egerton Brown and Cluver persuaded the authorities to reconsider their position. In 1933 the Department of Justice declared compulsory sterilisation inadmissible.²²⁷

If one accepts Galton's definition of eugenics to mean better born, it can be argued that contraception, could, under certain circumstances, fall into this category. Clearly, a woman's voluntary wish to delay pregnancy for personal reasons cannot be considered a eugenic intervention. If however, the use of contraception is to prevent a serious genetic disorder in the unborn child, such an action may well fall within the scope of eugenics.²²⁸

In South Africa, the promotion of contraceptive services was driven by a variety of interests. On the one hand, there were well-meaning individuals who sought to assist mothers in controlling their reproductive ability because of limited resources, educational facilities and bona fide medical reasons. On the other hand, there were those who sought to direct contraceptive services as a means of controlling race degeneracy. These interests, surprisingly enough, coalesced within the Race Welfare Society which was formed in 1930 in Cape Town.

²²⁷S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 148-153.

²²⁸R. Gillon: "Eugenics, Contraception, Abortion and Ethics," *Journal of Medical Ethics*, (24), 1998, pp. 219-220.

Within a few years, the Society had established Mothers' Clinics in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Benoni, Port Elizabeth and Pietermaritzburg. In some religious quarters contraception was unacceptable. For this reason the phrase "family spacing" became the codeword for contraceptive programs. The Secretary of Public Health, Dr. E.H. Cluver, was a strong supporter of the contraceptive programs offered by the Mothers' Clinics, despite evidence that the controlling entity, the Race Welfare Society desired to:

"...limit the propagation of persons obviously unfit for parentage, such as the feeble-minded and those suffering from other grave hereditary diseases."²²⁹

The thrust of the Race Welfare Society towards the poorer elements of the white, Indian and coloured population groups gave the lie to the strong eugenic undercurrent of its activities. Late in the 1930's there was an increasing awareness that improved living conditions, better education, easily accessible medical care and nutrition could become more acceptable moral alternatives to both positive and negative eugenics.²³⁰

One of the earlier medical practitioners who became concerned about the physical state of the poor white was Dr. C. Louis Leipoldt who was born into a Dutch reformed missionary family in Clanwilliam in the Cape. In 1902 he entered Guy's Hospital as a medical student and graduated in 1907 as a medical doctor. He became interested in the health of school pupils and in this capacity worked in the UK, Europe and America. In 1913 he returned to South Africa and was appointed the Medical Inspector of Schools in the Transvaal. He later became the editor of the South African Medical Journal.²³¹

Leipoldt was aware that whites were considered to be superior in every respect to blacks, but despite the educational and other advantages they enjoyed, many of them had degenerated physically and mentally and had joined the ranks of the poor whites. In the Transvaal bushveld, malaria and bilharzia had added considerably to the health burden of the poor whites. At that stage of his career it appeared that Leipoldt was ambivalent about the relative influence of inheritance or environment. He nevertheless was highly critical of the politicians who, in the early 20th century, were largely ignoring the poor white problem.²³²

²²⁹S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 162-163.

²³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 161-164.

²³¹*Ibid.*, p. 174.

²³²C.L. Leipoldt: *Bushveld Doctor*, pp. 48-50.

In the late 1920's and early 1930's Dr. E.H. Cluver (1894-1982) emerged as a passionate and determined advocate of preventative medicine and public health. Cluver had a Masters Degree in Humanities, a Masters in Medicine, a Diploma in Public Health and was a fellow of the Royal Society of Ireland. During the course of his illustrious career, he became the Director of the South African Institute for Medical Research, Professor of Preventative Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand and an editor of a number of medical journals, both local and international.²³³

When he was appointed Secretary of Public Health in the late 1930's he was able to put into practice the training and experience of a lifetime. In his mind, public health comprised two important components. On the one hand, the general fitness of the citizens of a nation had to be raised to a level where they would become immune to preventable disease. On the other, the public health authorities had a duty to ensure the safety, cleanliness and sanitation of the general environment of a particular work place, school, hospital or any other public building. The monitoring and elimination of insect vectors and communicable diseases formed a major part of public health. Physiological and anatomical disorders of individuals remained the responsibility of clinicians.²³⁴

His book "Public Health in South Africa" describes an exceptionally detailed programme of preventative medicine and a rigorous analysis of the relative responsibilities of the state, provincial authorities, local authorities and the private sector. It is thus surprising that the last chapter, entitled Medical Sociology and Sociological Medicine was written by Prof. J.R. Gray of the Social Studies Department at the University of the Witwatersrand and not Cluver. Nevertheless it is worth reflecting on the following:

"The selective process which determines the present and future distribution of genetic types in civilised populations is largely a social one."

The statement stands in stark contrast to the biological determinism of Fantham, Duerden, Dunstan and many of the other proponents of eugenic solutions to mankind's problems.²³⁵

²³³ A. Cluver Weinberg: *Looking for Goodness*, p. 406.

²³⁴ E.H. Cluver: *Public Health in South Africa*, p. introduction.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

In 1935 Cluver and his colleague Jokl conducted physiological and fitness tests on poor whites in the country and concluded that the degenerate state of health had nothing to do with miscegenation or poor intelligence, but everything to do with inadequate exercise and inappropriate diet. Eugenic “fitness” was considered by Cluver to mean something very different to Fantham and his race science colleagues. The application of public health measures such as diet, exercise and immunisation to whole population groups, black or white, could lead to improved national outcomes.²³⁶ In many respects Cluver was a man before his time. In 1959 he was appointed the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at Wits. He campaigned for the admission of black medical students to the University strictly on merit. He was supported by the University Council and Senate.

The initiative was opposed by a group led by Dr. Hans Pirow, brother of the lawyer and Nazi sympathiser, Oswald Pirow. At the time black students were being offered bursaries by Sweden. Their failure rate was higher than that of the white students. Cluver, as Professor of Public Health, examined them in their fourth year and also found them to be below standard. He was then asked to assist the newly established Natal Medical School, which was for blacks only. The principal, Dr. George Gale was a friend of Cluver’s. He recognised that his students were inadequately prepared for university and simply added another two years to the curriculum. Cluver was astonished at the standard they had reached in comparison to the students at Wits. Thereafter Cluver became convinced that the average intellectual capacity of black people was no different to that of whites.²³⁷

²³⁶S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 163-165.

²³⁷A. Cluver Weinberg: *Looking for Goodness*, pp. 371-372.

Malherbe and Eugenics

The extensive literature on the poor white problem reveals a degree of ambivalence about Malherbe's position on eugenics. Davie in her book "Poverty Knowledge in South Africa" describes Malherbe as being "comfortable with eugenic taxonomy" by promoting birth-control and sterilisation. On the other hand, she concedes that Malherbe was reluctant to support hardline eugenics or forced sterilisations.²³⁸

Willoughby- Herard excoriates Malherbe by stating that he

"...helped distract contemporaries from labour colonies, American expansionism, and economic and social violence against industrialising black people. He could traffic in eugenic explanations about the status of poor white people and sanitise earlier discourses of segregation through objective social science."

Throughout her book "Waste of a White Skin" there are further references to Malherbe's interpretation of white poverty based upon eugenic principles.²³⁹

The relevant contribution of heredity versus environmental factors, such as malnutrition, poor living conditions and chronic illness had been a matter of contention for many years. During a speech which he gave to a group of teachers in 1931, Malherbe commented on the widely held misconceptions of race deterioration and the manner in which they were being disseminated in local newspapers:

"The peculiar thing about most of the newspaper discussions was, however, that they no sooner raise the question of race degeneration when they immediately speak of purely environmental factors such as malnutrition, unbalanced diet, climatic influences, etcetera – things that can but very indirectly, if at all, influence the quality of the germ plasm transmitted from one generation to the next."²⁴⁰

Malherbe quite clearly understood the difference between nature and nurture or put differently, heredity and environment. Much of the discussion on the causes of the poor white problem was uninformed in this respect, thereby creating considerable confusion amongst newspaper editors and, in all likelihood, their readers as well.²⁴¹

²³⁸G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, p. 88.

²³⁹T. Willoughby Herard: *Waste of a White Skin*, p. 39.

²⁴⁰S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in South Africa*, p.180.,

²⁴¹S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 179-180.

Malherbe addressed the DRC Synod on “Education and Economic Condition in Relation to Size of Family” in the 1930’s. Unsurprisingly, he delivered the speech behind closed doors. He pointed out the relationship between better education and lower birthrate.

Somewhat controversially he then asserted that:

“Decrease in the size of family at this level leads to depletion of the relative proportion of intellect in the population.”

He then presented the following table:

	Very Poor	Poor	Adequate	Well to Do
Percentage of Population	17.53	30, 97	47, 69	3.26
Number of Children	7.11	6.13	4, 84	4.64

Malherbe then stated that the solution to the high birth rate amongst the very poor and poor was by education and hygienic techniques of birth control. He considered that the high birth rate amongst the poor was “dysgenic and unbalanced“. He expressed concern about the financial burden these large poor families had upon the wealthier taxpayers and questioned the sustainability thereof.²⁴²

In the light of Malherbe’s comments it is perhaps not surprising to find a brochure promoting the Third International Congress of Eugenics in New York City in 1932. This brochure forms part of the Malherbe papers housed in the Killy Campbell Museum. The president of the Congress was Charles Davenport, supported by vice presidents representing countries from all over the world, including H.B. Fantham from South Africa. Scientists from all parts of the world with an interest in “eugenical research and in race and family stock betterment” were invited to attend. There is no reference in the papers to Malherbe attending the conference.²⁴³

According to Bottomley, the Carnegie Commission “was saturated with eugenic thought”. He supports his argument by stating that the commissioners considered racial degeneration to be caused by miscegenation, as well as social and residential contact with other races. Whites would learn bad habits from inferior races which would be transmitted to their offspring and thereby lead to the deterioration of all whites.

²⁴²KCM 56979 (240) “Notes on Lecture on Birth Control to the DRC Synod” – Circa 1930’s

²⁴³ KCM 56979 (46) file 476/4 “Third International Eugenics Conference” – August, 1932.

He quotes the testimony given by Dr. J.T. Dunston, Commissioner in the Union for Mental Disorders, to the Unemployment Commission of 1921 saying:

“...the poor whites lacked foresight or reasoning power and unless they are supervised they gradually degenerate.”²⁴⁴

Eugen Fischer

The German anthropologist, Eugen Fischer, arrived in Rehoboth in 1908 in what is known today as Namibia (previously German West Africa). The purpose of his visit was to determine the extent that miscegenation could have had on the virility and health of the Rehoboth Basters. These unfortunate pastoralists had come into conflict with white trekboers in the Karoo in the 1860's. The whites were able to persuade the Cape Government to pass legislation which would cause the Basters to lose access to their grazing lands and they had no alternative but to migrate to what was then German West Africa, where they settled at Rehoboth in 1870.²⁴⁵

The Rehoboth Basters were descended from white fathers and Khoikhoi mothers. At the time there was a vigorous debate about the effect of so-called miscegenation and the consequences for mixed race people. Outrageously, some scientists proposed that a new type of race which was genetically stable would emerge. On the other hand, the German colonial administrators were concerned about the stability of such a race and their acceptance of German rule and control. Fischer spent four months with the Basters measuring every aspect of their physical appearance and in modern genetic parlance, describing their phenotype. He concluded that the Basters were not a stable race, but occupied a position in human development slightly more advanced than the Khoikhoi, but inferior to the white Boers. In 1913, Fischer published “The Bastards of Rehoboth and the Problem of Miscegenation in Man” recommending that the German colonial officials pass legislation to protect “German blood and honour” by outlawing interracial marriages and sexual relations between whites and mixed races. These recommendations resonated with the later Nazi Marriage Act of 1935, which outlawed sexual activity between Jews and gentile Germans.

²⁴⁴E.J. Bottomley: “Transnational governmentality and the poor white in early 20th-century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, (54), 2016, pp. 82-83.

²⁴⁵S. Robins: *Letters of Stone*, pp. 75-78.

Fischer's intellectual standing was further enhanced by his co-authorship of a book known as "Human Heredity", first published in German in 1927 and later in English in 1931. He contributed some 200 pages of the book which comprised approximately a total of 700 pages.²⁴⁶

It is of great relevance to note that despite Fischer's ideological bias, he was sufficiently objective to note that in many cases children born from parents of different races displayed what he described as "hybrid vigour". In fact, he had to acknowledge that frequently such interbreeding could lead to an improvement in health and fertility. Of course this was hardly what the eugenicists and later the Nazis wanted to hear. The matter was glossed over by promoting the view that "hybrids" were intellectually and morally inferior to pure races.²⁴⁷

The section contributed by Fischer to "Human Heredity" requires careful consideration in the light of the overall eugenics project. The measurement of the human skull gave rise to certain characteristic shapes of the human cranium which, according to many anthropologists of the day, were typical of certain races. He did acknowledge that certain environmental effects such as nutritional deficiencies and birth trauma could affect the shape of the skull. He considered however that such effects were minimal and that heredity played by far the major role in determining skull shape. The specific manner in which these measurements took place he described as "the cranial index", which it was claimed could identify the racial provenance of the skull. The study of skull size and shape later became known as phrenology. He also proposed that the children of Jews who had emigrated from eastern or central Europe to the United States had smaller skulls than their parents. This difference in size, he claimed, was in proportion to the number of years that had elapsed from the original migration.²⁴⁸

By the time "Human Heredity" was published, Fischer was a prominent German scientist and a member of the international eugenics project. Within a few years he had joined the Nazi party and become a leading racial scientist, ultimately leading to his appointment as director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics in Berlin. Initially, Fischer and his co-scientists did experiments on the inhabitants of mental asylums and prisons without their permission. After the war started, these experiments were also conducted in prisoner of war camps.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶S. Robins: *Letters of Stone*, pp. 125-127.

²⁴⁷S. Dubow: *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa*, pp. 183-185.

²⁴⁸E. Baur, E. Fischer, F. Lenz: *Human Heredity*, pp. 114-123.

²⁴⁹S. Robins: *Letters of Stone*, pp. 75-76.

At a time when race theories in the Western world were beginning to moderate, eugenic thinking emerged from under the shadow of a new political development in South Africa. There was much opposition within Afrikanerdom to the country's involvement in the war against Nazi Germany. A number of political groupings were formed that actively supported National Socialism. The largest of these was the Ossewa Brandwag (OB), which was founded in 1938 ostensibly in support of the Great Trek celebrations of the same year. By 1941 it was under the control of J.F.J. van Rensburg who had previously been the Administrator of the Free State. He used the OB to promote the idea of an Afrikaner Republic based on Nazi ideology. At one stage it was thought that its membership was of the order of a hundred thousand.

A number of influential Afrikaner Nationalist leaders were members of the OB such as Nico Diederichs, L.J. du Plessis, Piet Meyer and H.G. Stoker. A militant arm was established called the Stormjaers based upon the Nazi Brownshirts. The OB leadership were confident of an Axis victory over the Allies. A young South African lawyer, B.J. Vorster, soon became a member and because of his strident militancy was incarcerated during the war at a small town in the Free State called Koffiefontien. He would in due course become one of South Africa's prime ministers and later state president.²⁵⁰

Racial Degeneration of the Poor White Due to Miscegenation

The chapter on eugenics describes in some detail the research conducted by Eugene Fischer on the Rheoboth Basters. His flawed assumption was that increased genetic variation would lead to the physical and mental deterioration of subsequent generations. To his credit he soon discovered the direct opposite, where increased genetic variation resulting from sexual mixing between people of different races led to what he described as the "vigorous hybrid". This discovery was not considered to be politically acceptable early in the 20th century and the findings were subsequently interpreted differently. Exactly the opposite process takes place when mating is restricted for geographical, religious, cultural and ideological reason. Under such circumstances there arises an increase in the prevalence of recessive alleles, which in subsequent generations can increase the incidence of genetic disease.

²⁵⁰H. Giliomee : *The Afrikaners*, P 442.

A good example would be the Indian caste system, but this can also apply to small numbers of humans who have migrated to isolated parts of the earth and had little contact with other populations. The consequence is known scientifically as “the founder effect” and in South Africa is responsible for a number of inherited disorders which are prevalent in white South Africans of Dutch descent.²⁵¹

Many of these marriages were consanguineous in which uncles and nieces, first, second and double first cousins were permitted to marry. Very early in human development it was found that incestuous relationships (father and daughter, mother and son and brother and sister) gave rise to an unacceptably high prevalence of abnormal children, many of whom died soon after birth. The monotheistic religions, as well as Buddhism and Hinduism, soon outlawed such relationships.²⁵² To this discussion must be added the denouement of the false idea of races being static. Racial mixing has taken place throughout the world over hundreds of thousands of years. In southern Africa a good example of this process was the assimilation of the Khoisan as a result of the migration of the Bantu peoples along the south east coast of Africa.

In the words of Jared Diamond :

“... the legacy of those former Khoisan inhabitants reduced to clicks in scattered non-Khoisan languages, as well as buried skulls and stone tools waiting for archaeologists to discover; and the Khoisan-like appearance of some southern African Bantu peoples.”²⁵³

There is strong evidence that a reduction in genetic variation can affect intelligence negatively. A number of the sources used in this thesis confirm that poor white families intermarried in order to preserve extensively subdivided farms. Whilst most marriages were consanguineous, there were some suggestions of incest. Dr. Leipold relates the story of examining identical twins at one of the schools in the bushveld during his term as a school doctor in 1914. He was astonished at how physically well formed they were. The father wanted confirmation that they were healthy in every respect, which Leipold, on clinical grounds, was able to confirm. It turned out that their grand father and grand mother were siblings and were forced to flee the Orange Free State because of “Blood-Shame” a euphemism for incest. He regretted not being able to test their intelligence.²⁵⁴

²⁵¹ L.H. Hartwell: *Genetics: from Genes to Genomes*, p. 688.

²⁵² G. Alvarez et al.: *Inbreeding and Genetic Disorders*, pp. 266-269.

²⁵³ J. Diamond: *Guns, Germs and Steel*, p. 396.

²⁵⁴ C.L. Leipold: *Bushveld Doctor*, pp. 66-67.

The tools of modern genetics were not available early in the 20th century. It would have been highly likely that even though the twins were second generation, the risk of them developing diseases caused by genetic disorders would have remained at levels above that of the general population.

Conclusion

A central theme of the eugenics movement both in South Africa and abroad was an obsession with the concern that miscegenation would lead to racial degeneration. Even a confirmed racist such as Eugen Fischer had to concede that the inter-racial mixing which had given rise to the Baster population, produced, what he called, a vigorous hybrid. The period 1900 to 1948 is considered by some authors to be the era of hard heredity, during which largely flimsy scientific evidence was manipulated for political, social and ideological reasons.²⁵⁵

Inevitably, politicians and Afrikaner nationalists used this “evidence” to justify racial segregation in South Africa. In South Africa eugenic interventions were practised extensively. The passage of the Immorality Act in 1927 was but one example. The element of subterfuge behind the establishment of Mothers’ Clinics is another. Residential segregation attempted to reduce contact between the races to prevent cultural mixing and thereby limit the opportunity of racial defilement. The Mental Health Act of 1924 gave doctors and magistrates wide powers to certify and incarcerate individuals with borderline and often difficult to diagnose mental disorders. The Union Government must be given credit for resisting the eugenicists’ demands for compulsory sterilisation when it became so widely used in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Recognition must be given to courageous doctors such as Leipoldt and Cluver for being able to detect the flawed logic and twisted morality of eugenics and scientific racism at a time when this flimsy evidence supported the politics of the day. Despite their moderating influence, they were unable to entirely prevent the eugenic interventions which emerged in South Africa.

²⁵⁵M. Meloni: *Political Biology*, p. 64.

These measures were implemented by government, with the tacit support of the DRC and Afrikaner Nationalists, in the absence of any consultation with those who would be affected most – the poor whites. The erosion of civil liberties which started during the term of the Pact government continued beyond 1934 into Fusion government policy. The strongly segregationist tone of the resolutions following the 1934 Volkskongres was but one example. A further consequence of the genesis of the Fusion government was the breakaway “Purified National Party.” Their policies, influenced as they were by eugenic theories, would later resonate in South Africa as apartheid.

CHAPTER 7

THE UPLIFTMENT OF THE POOR WHITE

Class Formation within Afrikanerdom

Between 1891 and 1911 the white population in urban areas had increased by some 203%, later slowing down to 70% over the next 20 years. This growth in population was directly linked to huge American and European capital investments into the diamond and gold mining industries. This led to the establishment of secondary industries which then required skilled tradesmen such as carpenters, boilermakers, steelworkers and machinists of various kinds. The skills were simply not available within the local population and thus the needs of industry were met through immigration - between 1890 and 1905 South Africa experienced the largest influx of foreigners in all its history. The 1921 census figures showed that the rural exodus was well underway, with the Cape Province and Free State experiencing a net decrease in rural population.²⁵⁶

The mineral revolution of the late 19th century became an opportunity for some farmers and a disaster for many. The growth of towns and cities led to a dramatic demand for agricultural products which could only be met by adopting capitalist systems of agricultural production. This only became possible after the end of the Anglo Boer War when the Boer fighters returned to their devastated farms. Those who were able to prove ownership received compensation from the Milner administration. There was no longer room for the *bijwoners*. This accentuated class differentiation within the Afrikaner people, as their society became more divided into capitalist producers and the landless rural white. Nevertheless, they all remained Afrikaans speaking and subscribed to the value systems of *platteland* culture and lifestyle. Further changes in the demographics of the Afrikaner people were marked by the urbanisation of both the intelligentsia and the poor whites, comprising distinctly separate classes of Afrikaans speaking peoples. One consequence of this process was that by 1930 many Afrikaners had become teachers, clerics, academics, lawyers, journalists and office workers. The class differentiation was intensified by the disdain and contempt with which the poor whites were regarded by intellectuals and the bourgeoisie.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁶J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, pp. 5-7.

²⁵⁷D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, pp. 54-55.

Before the Anglo Boer War, a white South African miner was a rarity. Even early in the 20th century the urban population comprised skilled workers who were mostly immigrants and labourers who were almost exclusively black. By 1917 however, up to 48% of all underground and surface miners were South African, with 80% of them being white Afrikaners. Within two years, up to 90% of all underground miners were white. In the next few years the South African Police Force would be predominantly Afrikaans speaking white South Africans, and the same would apply to the South African Railways. These changes in employment patterns were strongly driven by preferential employment legislation in an effort to support poor whites living in urban areas.²⁵⁸

The significant growth in the employment of poor whites in the mining industry was not without its problems. In 1913 a minor conflict on the New Kleinfontien mine led to a walkout of the mineworkers. The ability of the police to deal with the situation was misjudged by the politicians. Eventually there were 19,000 men from several mines on strike. Gen. Smuts, as Minister of defence, was concerned that the new Active Citizens Force (ACF) would be unable to control the strikers. There was a distinct possibility that the strikers would receive support from rural Afrikaners who were embittered by Botha and Smut's conciliatory approach towards the British. The two leaders of the South African Party personally negotiated on behalf of the mine management and were able to end the labour unrest. The following year there was a strike by Railway and Harbour employees. As the government had already passed legislation outlawing strikes on the railways this insurrection presented a serious challenge. Since 1913 the ACF had been significantly reinforced with more men and artillery. Ironically, the soldiers were led by two ex-Boer war generals, Beyers and De la Rey, who rapidly arrested the leaders and many of the strikers. Whilst both these strikes were unsuccessful, they furthered a sense of worker unity and class identity.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 58-59.

²⁵⁹R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, pp. 268-269.

Class formation was well underway in the Union by the 1920's. The white bywoner and tenant farmer were no longer considered to be on the same level as the farm owner and his family. Inevitably, the poor white socialised with people within his class irrespective of skin colour. Again, the risk of increased miscegenation was possible. As an example, Albertyn describes the case of a poor white farm labourer who was forced to fraternise with coloured families as a result of his rejection from white society. His major complaint was that he was no longer called "baas" and was now addressed by his first name.²⁶⁰

The ingress of literally thousands of landless poor whites into urban areas created further problems for the Union government. Following the First World War there was an economic depression in South Africa between 1920 and 1923. All sectors of the economy were affected, including the mining industry, where the gold price fell from 130 shillings an ounce in 1920 to 95 shillings an ounce in 1921. The gold mining profits were so badly affected that the Chamber of Mines sought to renegotiate the preferential white labour agreement which had been signed with the South African Industrial Federation, representing the white miners. Acceptance of this proposal by the miners would result in significant layoffs of whites, as blacks were prepared to work for 1 pound a week and whites 1 pound a day. Negotiations between the miners and the Chamber continued, but it soon became apparent that the Federation had lost control of the situation and were usurped by a so-called Council of Action led by five radicals.

By February 1922, the miners had decided to overthrow the Smuts government using whatever means possible, including force. The miners approached both the Labour Party and National Party, both of whom were in opposition, for support. Whilst both parties expressed sympathy for the miners, they deprecated the use of violence. Internecine unrest continued until March 1922 when Smuts declared martial law and ordered the South African Army and Air Force to restore order. The rebellion ended in a total defeat of the miners and the arrest of the leaders. Some 18 of the accused, of whom half were Afrikaners, were sentenced to death. Ultimately only four were executed. Smuts was severely criticised for the ruthless manner in which he suppressed the rebellion. There is little doubt that the Rand rebellion of 1922 contributed significantly to Smuts' defeat by the National and Labour Party Pact government in 1924.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ J.R. Albertyn: *The Poor White and Society*, pp. 37-38.

²⁶¹ R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, pp. 280-283.

Whilst the leaders of the future Pact government were very critical over the manner in which Smuts suppressed the uprising, a very different attitude prevailed after 1924. The events of the Bolshevik revolution were very fresh in the minds of both English and Afrikaans speaking politicians. Collaboration between the white and black proletariat would most certainly have been a threat to white hegemony. A solution to the poor white problem was becoming urgent. Privately Smuts feared a “red revolution and the establishment of a Soviet republic.”²⁶²

The Carnegie Commission tended to view the poor white as generally moral, but often the unfortunate victims of circumstance. Bottomley saw things very differently. The poor whites living in the slums of Johannesburg were regarded with opprobrium by the affluent middle classes. In their view the residents of the slums were criminals, mendicants and prostitutes. There was no appreciation of the limited choices available to the poor whites or recognition that living in slums could generate the recidivist behaviour they condemned. The Commissioner of Police for the Witwatersrand, when giving testimony in front of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, was questioned about the level of crime amongst the poor whites. He replied as follows:

“Yes, a great deal of immorality and crime – illicit liquor dealing, et cetera. They fall quickly into crime. It is a consequence of the dreadful conditions under which they live... A large number of them are forced into criminal life.”²⁶³

The authorities were concerned that if blacks considered whites capable of the crimes prevalent in the slums, the illusion of white superiority would be shattered. One of the main criminal activities attributable to whites was the illegal sale of alcohol to blacks. In 1907 the police prosecuted some 3564 individuals for liquor related crime of whom a tiny fraction were black. In 1913 the Commission of Enquiry into Assaults on Woman was established in order to investigate the prevalence of black men attacking white woman. One of the commission’s conclusions was as follows:

“... one of the causes of the natives losing respect for the white race, which is one of the strongest factors calculated to restrain him from even entertaining the idea of the possibility of having any sexual relations with a white woman.”²⁶⁴

²⁶² H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 334.

²⁶³ E.J. Bottomly: *Poor White*, p. 82.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

The Confluence of Events of 1934

South Africa, like so many other countries, was trying to find its feet following the Great Depression of 1929 to 1933. Of all sectors of the economy, agriculture was by and large the worst affected. The effect however, was somewhat uneven. Farmers involved with the export of produce were more severely affected than those selling in the local market. In 1932, the value of agricultural exports had fallen to 32% of what it had been in 1928. During the years of the depression, the country had experienced one of the worst droughts in living memory. The total revenue receipt for wool exports fell by 70% between 1929 and 1933. This acted as a stimulus to further urban migration.²⁶⁵

In September 1931 the British government abandoned the gold standard – the means by which the pound was underpinned by a predetermined quantity of gold. The Hertzog government refused to follow suit and for the next 15 months agriculture bore the brunt of the crisis. In the light of the National Party government's reliance on the rural agricultural vote, the action was surprising. In all likelihood the decision to remain on the gold standard following Britain's decision could be explained by the National Party's vitriolic anti-imperialist philosophy. Initially, the gold mining industry had supported remaining on the gold standard, but within a few months agitated for a withdrawal. Many National Party cabinet ministers, including the Prime Minister, were farmers and were acutely aware of the devastation the gold standard crisis was having on agriculture. As a result income tax revenue was used to subsidise commercial agriculture, much to the chagrin of the mining industry who paid most of the taxes. By the end of December 1932, South Africa had abandoned the gold standard, resulting in a dramatic increase in the price of gold, and thereby lifting the profits of the mining companies and increasing income tax for the government.²⁶⁶

One of the consequences of the dilatory manner in which the National Party had handled the gold standard crisis was a significant reduction in their rural support. This development led to discussions between Gen. Hertzog of the National Party and Gen. Smuts of the South African Party, which soon advanced to the point where political amalgamation was considered feasible. By December 1934, the fusion of the two parties gave rise to the United South African Nationalist Party (more familiarly known as the United Party). Hertzog retained the position of Prime Minister, with Smuts his deputy. Hertzog had always supported a Republican agenda for South Africa.

²⁶⁵D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, pp. 36-37.

²⁶⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 4-42.

At the 1926 Commonwealth Conference he was able to negotiate Dominion status for the country, which he considered to be the equivalent of full sovereign independence. Smuts on the other hand, had always been an enthusiastic supporter of the British Commonwealth, a viewpoint which often brought him into conflict with Afrikaner nationalists. A number of the Hertzog supporters were not prepared to co-operate with Smuts because of his “Imperialist agenda”. In 1935, a Purified National party under the leadership of D.F. Malan was formed. In due course it became the official opposition in the South African Parliament and in 1948 formed the government of the country. Malan and the Purified Nationalists proved to be resolute republicans.²⁶⁷

Welfare, Competition and Co-Operation

The release of the findings of the Carnegie Commission of Enquiry into the South African poor white in 1932 focused renewed attention on a problem which had been evident since the late 19th century. From that time until 1924, support for the poor whites had been largely a project adopted by the DRC. The early post-union government of Botha and Smuts passed the Mines and Works Act in 1911 which provided some protection for whites in certain jobs. Other than this legislation very little was done by the state before 1924 to benefit the poor white. The South African Party government had not considered the matter a particularly important priority.²⁶⁸

The Pact government under Gen. Hertzog came to power in 1924 and viewed the poor whites very differently. A number of far-reaching pieces of related legislation were passed during their first term, which had a significant effect on improving the lot of the poor whites as explained below. During the tenure of the Pact government the Afrikaner nationalist movement gained momentum. Until the Second World War, the South African economy had been dominated by English-speaking interests, particularly mining. By the early 1930's a number of commercial projects were planned by Afrikaner nationalist leaders with the Broederbond as powerful, but ostensibly secret, partners in the Volkskapitalisme project. The rallying cause for this initiative was that the Afrikaners were alone and if upliftment was necessary, it would have to be their own responsibility. To complicate matters further, educationists such as E.G. Malherbe enthusiastically promoted the essential role of school and technical education.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, pp. 304-307.

²⁶⁸H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 330.

²⁶⁹I. Wilkins & H. Strydom: *The Broederbond*, pp. 18-19.

From the time of the abolition of the gold standard in 1932 until the end of the Second World War, the South African economy expanded dramatically. Technically qualified whites and white artisans were in great demand and in short supply. English business interests turned to the growing number of technical colleges being established on the Witwatersrand, as discussed previously in Chapter 4, but generally the nascent Afrikaner businesses chose to train their own personnel.

In many respects the paragraph above is an oversimplification of a fractured process which was never teleological and often nuanced, complex and overlapping. Many welfare initiatives along a wide spectrum, started by non-government organisations and ranging from the poor whites to the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, were later adopted and then funded by government. Initially the Non-Government Organizations (NGO's) would have a large say in the distribution of resources, but soon the state would assume a more peremptory role. The NGO's would gradually lose control over the distribution of funding. Ostensibly, the reason given was to avoid waste and pilferage, but more often than not the purpose of the state's involvement was for purposes of patronage and political kudos.²⁷⁰

It is thus with these limitations in mind that an examination of the various role players in the ultimately successful upliftment of the poor whites will be examined. Where possible, the relative contribution of the church, state and Volkskapitalisme will be evaluated.

The Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) and the Poor White

“The poor white problem, though consciously felt and formulated only in recent years has its roots far down into the past. The problem touches the social and economic structure of our country at all points and, to trace its genesis really adequately, would require the writing of the social and economic history of South Africa. This is however impossible within the limited scope of this enquiry.”²⁷¹

These were the words used by E.G. Malherbe in his introduction to the poor white problem in volume three of the Carnegie Commission report.

²⁷⁰J. Muirhead: “The children of today make the nation of tomorrow,” MA thesis, Stellenbosch University, March 2012, pp. 13-14.

²⁷¹E.G. Malherbe: *Education and the Poor White*, p. 3.

The early awareness of white poverty has been described in some detail in chapter 2, which led to the first DRC conference on the subject in 1894. The conference concluded with a resolution to pressurise government for compulsory educational facilities for rural Afrikaans speaking peoples as well as industrial colonies, along the lines of the DRC labour colony later established at Kakamas in 1898.²⁷² After the Anglo Boer war the matter received official attention with the establishment of the Transvaal Indigency Commission in 1906-8, which concluded, inter alia, that: “most of the poor had themselves recently been landowners who had only made room for more efficient men”.²⁷³

The young Dr. D.F. Malan had studied theology at Stellenbosch and in 1912 was appointed a DRC minister in the Western Cape town of Montagu. From this time until 1948 he made a number of speeches in which he outlined his ideas on race and the poor whites. It seems that his ideas on both subjects underwent revision coinciding with his career as a cleric, politician and later party leader. His early views on race were heavily influenced by his theological training: racial differences were the will of God and as such, a preordained ordering of mankind. Racial conflict only arose when this order was disturbed. Afrikaners were white and as a result were part of Western civilisation and were therefore superior to blacks. This relationship was confirmed, in his view, by blacks addressing whites as Baas or Inkosi, the latter being a synonym in the black languages for God. Malan illustrated his delusions with the following statement:

“The Afrikaner has power over the Kafir (sic). But truly, we would not have possessed this power if it had not been given to us from above. Has God not embedded it with a high and holy calling for a nation?”²⁷⁴

Malan’s views on poor whiteism were equally paternalistic and racist. In his view, the existence of the white poor was due to spiritual and mental shortcomings which resulted in a lack of self esteem. The church had a major role to play in rebuilding the character of the poor white. The existence of poor whites could disturb the racial hegemony of whites as a whole. The threat of poor whiteism was infinitely more threatening than the blacks who outnumbered them.

²⁷²J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, pp. 1-21.

²⁷³W.M. Macmillan: *Complex South Africa*, pp. 87-89.

²⁷⁴L.Koorts, “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater”: D.F. Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre – Apartheid Era, 1012 – 1939, *South African Historical Journal*, 2013 Vol. (65) , (4), p. 558.

“The black peril would not exist if it were not for a white peril that is a hundred times greater, which undermines and destroys the blacks’ respect for the white race. That the Kafir (sic) is wicked is in the first instance not the Kafir’s(sic) fault, it is in the least not the fault of mission work, it is the fault of the many whites who live worse than Kafirs.” (sic)²⁷⁵

From the end of the Anglo Boer War until 1924, the DRC played a crucial role in collecting, controlling and dispensing charity to white people. After union, provincial governments provided the church with charitable grants, often via magistrates in rural areas. The DRC very seldom provided the poor with cash and thus the charity took the form of payments in kind, for example, blankets or food. Until about the 1930’s the church was assisted by the ACVV - the Afrikaans Christian Women’s Association.²⁷⁶

Early in the new century the poor white problem received further attention from the DRC. A conference entitled “Het Arme Blanken Vraagstuk” was held on the 22nd and 23rd of November 1916 in Cradock. A number of decisions were taken, the most important of which was creating an awareness of the problem within the various church communities, government and the public at large. Concern was expressed about criminal activities amongst the youth, who should be confined to mendicant colonies where they could be put to work. Abandoned children should be accommodated in orphanages and educated. Most importantly, the poor white should be encouraged to return to the land and to be assisted as farmers by agricultural schools. Poor whites that had become urbanised should be protected from unfair competition from coloured people and strict segregation should be practised in the workplace. Finally, local industries, concentrating on clothing and foodstuffs should be established to benefit poverty stricken Afrikaners.²⁷⁷

At the DRC Synod held on 12 November 1919 in Cape Town, a presentation was made by the Rev. J.R. Albertyn (of Willowmore) on the benefits of De Volkschool.²⁷⁸ This was followed by an educational congress convened by the DRC in Stellenbosch in June 1922, which decided that primary and secondary school education should be based upon Christian principles and that children should be educated with a specific career in mind.

²⁷⁵L. Koorts: “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912 – 1939,” *South African Historical Journal*, 2013 Vol. (65), (4), pp. 558-560.

²⁷⁶J. Seekings: “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa 1931-1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2008, p. 518.

²⁷⁷KCM 56979 (577) 478/4 “Het Arme Blanken Vraagstuk” – 22 – 23 November, 1916.

²⁷⁸KCM56979 (578) 478/4 “Die Volkschool”- 12, November 1919.

The government should be persuaded to make provision for the training of additional teachers and matrons for boarding schools. Specific attention should be directed at training young people in agricultural skills in order that they could succeed at farming. Furthermore, the conference recommended the establishment of more centralised educational facilities rather than small farm schooling.²⁷⁹

At the centenary of the DRC in South Africa held in 1924, the matter of the poor whites was once again the centre of attention. The theme of the conference was a review of the charitable efforts of the church since 1824. In the opening address Rev. A.D. Luckhoff pointed out that in the words of Jesus Christ “the poor will always be with us.” This truth should encourage the church to do their best to improve the lot of the poor whites. Reference was made to the meeting of the Dutch Reformed Church Synod in 1894, where for the first time the poor white problem was raised. Delegates were reminded that the theme of that conference was “De Kerk en Liefdadigheid.” An impressive list of charitable ventures, undertaken by the DRC, were presented, including labour bureaus, labour colonies, the Deaf and Blind Institute in Worcester, homes for unmarried mothers, orphanages, old-age homes, industrial schools and agricultural colleges.²⁸⁰

The DRC considered themselves the moral custodians of the Afrikaner white. On certain occasions impoverished whites were able to exploit opportunities to improve themselves. Such a group were the Knysna woodcutters in the early years of the 20th century and a further example of poor white agency will be described below. By the 1930’s there had emerged considerable social and residential integration between the white and coloured woodcutters. An investigation in 1933 into their living conditions described a fairly egalitarian society, living peacefully in the forests between George and Knysna. It was reported that a number of young white women were quite prepared to marry coloured men, as they were often more affluent than their own parents.

The DRC took a dim view of these developments. Early in the century, the Rev. A.D. Luckhoff expressed concern that the coloured people may be developing faster than whites. Furthermore he argued that the absence of coloured people would allow the poor white problem to largely solve itself. The DRC responded by establishing church settlements, which in practical terms were only capable of accommodating a small number of the total poor whites in the forests.

²⁷⁹ KCM 56979 (580) 478/4 “Opvoedingskongres” - June, 1922.

²⁸⁰ KCM, 56979 (579) 478/4 “Referaten gelerverd bij Het Eeuwfeest”- 1924.

The white and coloured woodcutters continued their racially tolerant attitudes until exploitation by capitalist timber traders and restrictive government legislation brought their lifestyle to an end.²⁸¹

In the sociological report of the Carnegie Commission, Albertyn was particularly critical of the manner in which old age pensions were managed by the state. In his opinion, pensions were paid to elderly people who had other means of support, some of whom wasted the money on debauchery or allowed their children to spend it. All those applying for pensions should be individually assessed on the basis of need and opportunities for self-help. The church and state should collaborate in managing old age pensions, with the former supporting the pensioner administratively, morally and spiritually and the latter providing the financial support. In Albertyn's opinion, the "state should undertake as little purely charitable work as possible". That the Carnegie Commission placed the Church in such a key role is hardly surprising. The Church had been instrumental in the establishment of the Commission, contributed financially and had appointed six of the 14 members of the Commission's Board of Control. One of the five commissioners was the Rev. J.R. Albertyn, who had played a leading role in the provision of charity by the DRC for many years. It thus transpired that the DRC and the Carnegie Commission were critical of the Pact government's generous welfare policies, to the extent that Seekings considered them to be anti-modern. M.E. Rothman differed in one respect with the DRC. She considered that trained social workers should assist the church with its charitable work.²⁸²

Following each of the DRC congresses from 1894 to 1934 there were motions to encourage the poor white, one way or another, to return to the land. From a cynical perspective, one could argue that if the return to the land was possible at the time, in some ways the poor white problem would still exist, but remain out of sight and out of mind. However well-intentioned they may have been, the DRC congresses could not reverse the consequences of the mineral revolution, the rinderpest, multiple droughts, locust infestations, the Anglo Boer War and finally the great depression from 1929 to 1933. In reality, the rural, subsistence lifestyle of the Boers was gone forever.

²⁸¹A.M. Grundlingh: "God het ons arm mense die houtjies gegee: poor white woodcutters in the southern Cape Forest area c. 1900-1939," in R. Morrell(ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 47-49.

²⁸²J. Seekings: "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa: 1931-1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2008, pp. 522-524.

The charity offered by the church was most certainly conditional upon compliance with certain standards of behaviour, including a commitment to some form of reciprocity. The urbanisation described in this thesis initially had an extremely disruptive effect on the lifestyles of these poor white Afrikaners. White city dwellers were being forced to perform the work considered only suitable for black people, in some cases taking orders from them, living in squalor and speaking what they considered to be a foreign language – English. As a result they were considered an underclass by both middle-class Afrikaners and the English. By 1907 the imperial administration introduced self-government to the Transvaal, with the Het Volk party assuming power. At this stage the political loyalty of the urbanised poor white was undecided with some supporting Het Volk and others the pro British Labour Party. It soon became evident that the political party which was first able to demonstrate its ability to uplift the poor white out of poverty was likely to gain their loyalty.²⁸³

In this unstable situation the DRC was able to provide direction and purpose. Whilst the eradication of poverty would prove to be difficult to achieve in the short term, the church was nevertheless able to provide spiritual and social relief. By 1909 DRC churches in Vredesdorp and Fordsburg were popular and regularly attended. The church was also successful in establishing schools teaching poor white children in Afrikaans. Gradually the semiliterate could speak, write and read their mother tongue. With the assistance of the church and through education, the poor whites were gradually able improve their standard of living. By the 1920's politicians had begun to take notice of the poor whites and started to realise that their vote would become important in future.²⁸⁴

Despite the growing political influence of the poor white, Smuts, now Prime Minister was unperturbed about the current generation of poor whites, choosing rather to focus on educating their children. In 1924 Smuts's party lost the general election to the Pact coalition of Gen. Hertzog. Dr. D.F. Malan was appointed to Hertzog's cabinet. As a DRC theologian, Malan considered the church duty-bound to care for their fellow Afrikaners. At the centre of his political philosophy was the struggle for the survival of Afrikaners. The DRC was the Afrikaners' church and as such was duty-bound to support them in their time of need and work towards eliminating their abject poverty.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 324-325.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 325-326.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 327-328.

It seems therefore that the DRC's agenda for poor white assistance and upliftment was very largely based on charitable injunctions and the need for social solidarity with fellow Afrikaners. Political involvement emerged after the electoral victory of the Pact government in 1924 and with that the introduction of substantial state funded welfare programs described below. It appears that until then the church avoided adopting an overt political stance regarding the poor whites.

The Volkskongres of 1934

It is thus within the context of the disasters described above that the Volkskongres of 1934 should be viewed. The widespread public interest in the Carnegie Commission's findings prompted the DRC to appoint a number of working groups to prepare for a Congress on the poor white problem, which finally took place in Kimberley in 1934. The gathering was opened by the Minister of Labour Mr. A.P.J. Fourie, representing the Union Government. From the outset, as the Minister of Labour, he referred to his daily interaction with the poor white problem. He expressed appreciation for the work done by the Carnegie Commission, which had for the first time critically analysed the problem and brought it to the attention of the public. He made mention of the discussions and co-operation which the government had enjoyed with the DRC over many years, for which he was grateful. It was time for determined action by the state and church to finally solve this problem. He pointed out that the state considered the poor white problem so important that it had funded three quarters of the preparatory costs of the Congress.

The minister went on to enumerate a number of pieces of legislation passed by Parliament to ensure that the poor white received education and found employment. He specifically referred to regulations to control the spread of squatter camps in cities and to ensure racial segregation. He placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of employing civilised labour even if it was only semi-skilled or unskilled. Wages had to be increased in order that a reasonable standard of living could be maintained by the poor white. The state proposed the establishment of Poverty Committees in cooperation with the DRC as a means of eliminating the poor white problem. The legislation of 1927, making provision for the establishment of forced labour colonies, would be implemented. In collaboration with the Department of Public Health, medical and nursing services would be provided in rural areas. Towards the end of his speech, he emphasised the need for a solution to the poor white problem as it threatened the very existence of white civilisation in South Africa.

Whites were surrounded by millions of natives who were themselves developing. Furthermore, there was no possibility of encouraging immigration into the country when 20% of the white population were living in poverty. Finally, he pointed out the benefit to the economy of converting the poor whites into producers and consumers. The contents of the Minister's speech indicated a growing awareness of the political and economic value of the poor white. No mention was made of the contribution black production and spending would make. There is little doubt that the leadership of the newly formed Purified National Party also recognised the political value of solving the poor white problem.²⁸⁶

At this stage it was estimated that the poor whites comprised between 200,000 and 300,000 people, thus approximately 20% of the total Afrikaner population of the country. One of the key speakers at the 1934 Congress was the young Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Stellenbosch and later a Prime Minister of South Africa.²⁸⁷ Other speakers included Wilcocks, Malherbe, Albertyn and Rothman, all four of whom had played prominent roles in the Carnegie Commission. From the introduction by Albertyn it was quite clear that the purpose of the Congress was to develop and implement an action plan to rectify the poor white problem, based largely on the findings of the Carnegie Commission.²⁸⁸

The chairman of the Congress, Rev. W.M. Nicol, emphasized that in trying to solve the poor white problem it was important not to increase conflict with the blacks. The race problem could not be solved by the whites until such time as they resolved the impoverishment of their own. He considered the whites the bearers of civilisation in South Africa, who should set the example for others. Nicol considered the training of social workers on a large scale essential for the resolution of the poor white problem.²⁸⁹

The determination of the delegates to the 1934 Volkskongres to bring about a successful solution of the poor white problem is demonstrated by the establishment of the Continuation Committee of some 30 members representing the DRC, universities and political parties. The work of the Continuation Committee would be controlled by an executive committee, under the chairmanship of the Rev. Du Toit and vice chairmanship of none other than Dr. H.F. Verwoerd.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶P. du Toit: *Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem*, pp. 15-23.

²⁸⁷R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, p. 308.

²⁸⁸P. du Toit: *Report of the National Conference on the Poor White Problem*, , pp. 2-5.

²⁸⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 11-13.

²⁹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 264.

The resolutions passed by the Congress were designed to persuade government to pass legislation that would further benefit the poor white. Considerable attention was devoted to the need for university trained social workers, a matter that received no attention during the 1916 Cradock conference. The resolutions covered practically every aspect of the poor whites' lives and simultaneously stressed the need for whites to be segregated from other races. The conference welcomed the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act, the Commission on the Wage Act and the Apprenticeship Act, designed to ensure preferential employment for whites. For the Volkskongress, this was still insufficient. A resolution was passed asking government to ensure that whites were never supervised by blacks. The Congress considered competition from tribal blacks for employment in cities as being unfair. Furthermore the government should establish a national bank to finance industrialisation, thereby creating more jobs for whites.²⁹¹ The Congress reiterated the mood of the 1916 Conference for the poor whites to return to the land. The establishment of a Landbank was considered essential. The work-shy, vagrants and beggars should be accommodated in labour colonies, against their will if necessary. During the period of their incarceration they should be deprived of the vote. There were also a number of resolutions regarding schooling, apprenticeship and adult education. The conference also appealed to all South African citizens to contribute financially to the work of the Continuation Committee. The schools and the teachers would only be able to solve the poor white problem when the national education system was based upon Christian principles.²⁹²

Contrasting Views on White Poverty, Race and Upliftment

By the time of the Volkskongress the Afrikaner Nationalist project had developed considerable momentum. By 1924 Gen. J.B.M. Hertzog had consolidated his control of the National Party and assumed power with the formation of the Pact government. D.F. Malan, having been in politics for 10 years was now a minister in Hertog's cabinet. A year before, the DRC had arranged a further conference on the poor white issue which both Malan and Hertzog attended. The conference was notable for the absence of South African Party cabinet ministers. Almost by default, the National Party was able to position itself as the champion of the poor whites. By this stage of Malan's career the influence of DRC ideology on his political views had begun to elide. He had elected instead to perform a careful study of the census statistics of South Africa.

²⁹¹It should be noted that a few years later, Volkskas Bank came into being.

²⁹²R. Davenport: *South Africa: A Modern History.*, pp. 292-317.

To his horror he discovered that between 1911 and 1921, 70,000 white people had left their rural environment and migrated to the cities. Malan's initial response was to try and improve conditions in rural areas, control the middlemen exploiting the poor farmer and promote education for those whites already in the city. A further concern was unfair competition between white and black employees. Other luminaries addressing the conference proposed different remedies. Hertzog for example supported more effective job reservation for whites, whilst others proposed racial segregation and a minimum wage for white workers. Concerns were expressed by many in the conference that racial segregation could infringe upon God's will for blacks, considering that they were also human beings. A suitable expedient was considered to be industrial segregation.²⁹³

Following this conference Malan had cause to reflect. Whereas previously he considered the poor white problem as having been brought about by individual shortcomings, he now regarded it as a collective problem as a result of external circumstances. He likened white urbanisation as akin to a new Great Trek. The depopulation of rural areas was due to unfair competition with black people who were capable of working for low wages because their material requirements were remarkably less than those of whites. So-called civilised whites were no longer able to compete with blacks for the same wage because their requirements were greater. The "black tidal wave" spreading through the countryside was also engulfing the cities leaving the poor white with limited options. Malan now considered industrial and territorial segregation as the only alternative for the rescue of the poor white. The following statement demonstrates the extent to which his religious beliefs had now become more flexible:

"The segregation of the native, which is absolutely necessary if the white civilisation in South Africa is not to go under in the near future, does not have to offend our Christian feeling, and cannot and may not, in our own interests, mean that we simply chase the Kafir (sic) back behind his own border, and then leave him to his own devices. If it was the Lord's intention that we never distinguish between people on the basis of race or nationality, then he would have made all peoples skin colour the same and he would have allowed them to complete the Tower of Babel and to keep their single language. But that would have been a monotonous world."²⁹⁴

²⁹³L. Koorts: "The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912-1939," *South African Historical Journal*, (65), (4), pp. 565-566.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 566-567.

In the years since the Anglo Boer War, white Afrikaners had undergone class differentiation along the cleavage lines of wealth and education. The white proletariat may have been poor, but they remained enfranchised. Co-opting them into the Afrikaner nationalist project was crucial for future political power. Thus it was that the authority and credibility of the Carnegie Commission report would be manipulated in order to incorporate the poor whites into Afrikaner group identity. The Commission's estimate of 300,000 poor whites became part of the Afrikaner Nationalist narrative in order to direct state resources and thereby uplift this constituency. Whether the number was accurate or not was irrelevant. This narrative included the need for strictly enforced segregation between whites and blacks. According to Davie, this was not what Malherbe would have wanted.²⁹⁵

Malherbe decided to use the British and South African Associations of Science meeting in Cape Town in 1929 to present his views on the poor white problem in an address entitled "Education and the Poor White." He was feted in the English language press, with the Cape Times describing his presentation as "brilliant." His fellow Afrikaners were highly critical of his opinions and accused him of saying that South Africa was producing "a nation of degenerates". Malherbe subsequently denied using those words. The Afrikaans newspaper, "Die Burger" considered Malherbe's address as "pure nonsense". Afrikaner public opinion, it turned out, was extremely sensitive to any suggestion that the poor whites had undergone a process of degradation to the point where they were permanently feeble-minded and inferior. Malherbe enjoyed a close relationship with Smuts and Hofmeyr which led to many Afrikaners questioning his loyalty to the "volk".²⁹⁶

In 1934 Malherbe convened a New Educational Conference with J.D. Rheinaldt Jones of the South African Institute of Race Relations. The occasion was attended by local and international luminaries and was hosted by Hertzog, Smuts and Hofmeyr. The role of education for blacks was hotly debated, often from opposing perspectives. On this occasion Malherbe was extremely cautious about expressing his views on race as a result of the hostile reaction he had experienced from his fellow Afrikaners. It is thus difficult to accept Davie's confident assumption regarding Malherbe's opinion on racial segregation above.

²⁹⁵G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, p. 91.

²⁹⁶S. Dubow: "Scientism, social research and the limits of South Africanism: The Case of Ernst Gideon Malherbe", *South African Historical Journal*, (44), May 2001, pp. 112-116.

In contrast Dubow expressed a different view. In footnote number 72, he states that Malherbe was a “paternalistic and instinctive supporter of white supremacy” and as a result, Malherbe would have assumed that blacks and whites required different educational systems. He considered that Malherbe regarded education as a science and therefore would not have agreed with the approach of the early liberal Christian pedagogues.²⁹⁷

In 1933 the DRC and the Afrikaans Women’s Union met to discuss the report of the Carnegie Commission. This was followed by the Volkskongress, as discussed above, which took place for the very purpose of white Afrikaner poverty upliftment. The chairman of the Volkskongress Continuation Committee was now Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, who used his prominent position to promote Afrikaner nationalism and develop his ties with the Afrikaans media. The Continuation Committee soon included influential members of the Broederbond. In 1936 Verwoerd became editor of *Die Transvaler*, the influential Afrikaner daily in the north of the country. He was replaced as chairman of the Continuation Committee by Prof. Geoff Cronje, a prominent racist and Professor of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Pretoria.

In the next few years the Afrikaans press became highly critical of the Fusion government’s “reluctance” to provide further assistance to the poor whites. Eventually in 1937, another of the Carnegie recommendations was implemented. A Department of Social Welfare was established with the mandate to end white poverty and dependency. Ironically, by this time the poor white problem was in decline. Nevertheless the rhetoric demanding solutions to the poor white problem continued with blame being laid on exploitation by Jews and competition from cheap African workers. Despite the strident racism of this narrative, Malherbe continued to urge the Continuation Committee to consider a more inclusive approach to benefit both the black and white poor.²⁹⁸

In 1938 Afrikaner nationalists prepared for the centenary of the Great Trek. On this occasion Verwoerd described the poor whites as the descendants of the brave Afrikaner frontiersmen. He urged the Afrikaners “to assume your rightful place in commerce and industry”. State-sponsored social welfare would be successful once dependency was replaced with hard work. The need for whites to enjoy a civilised standard of living was continuously promoted by the Afrikaner nationalist leaders.

²⁹⁷S. Dubow: “Scientism, social research and the limits of South Africanism: The Case of Ernst Gideon Malherbe”, *South African Historical Journal*, (44), May 2001, pp. 119-121.

²⁹⁸G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 92-94.

In certain quarters it was considered that Verwoerd's obsession with the need for racial segregation and the development of unique racial identities arose during his postdoctoral tour in Germany between 1925 and 1927 where he was exposed to Nazi ideology.²⁹⁹ Giliomee dismisses this viewpoint, stating that the Nazi party was only established well after Verwoerd's departure. In the class notes Verwoerd prepared following his return, he rejected biological differences amongst races and considered that the superior status of whites was due to differences in culture and historical experiences. When addressing the 1935 Wilcock's Commission on the coloured people, Verwoerd drew no distinction between poor whites and poor coloureds. He considered them to be an interrelated problem which would be solved together. Preferential employment policies should only be used as temporary measures to relieve poverty.³⁰⁰

New insights into Verwoerd's career as a student at Stellenbosch challenge this view. J.J. Froneman argues that Verwoerd accepted segregation as the only solution to South Africa's race problems. When chairman of the SRC, he requested that the Cape Town Symphony Orchestra no longer play "God Save The Queen" at Stellenbosch performances. Again, as SRC Chairman, he strongly urged students to contribute to the Helpmekaar Fund established to help Afrikaners convicted after the rebellion of 1914 to defray their fines.³⁰¹

Verwoerd's views on race and the poor whites were in stark contrast to those of William Macmillan who was born in Scotland and came to South Africa as a young child. Macmillan commenced his studies at the Victoria College in Stellenbosch and in 1903 was a recipient of one of the first Rhodes scholarships to Oxford. He studied modern history and graduated in 1906. He then studied divinity at the Free Church College in Aberdeen and Glasgow and remained committed to his faith for the rest of his life. While abroad he joined the Fabian Society and became familiar with Bernard Shaw, H.G. Wells and Beatrice and Sidney Webb. He spent an influential year studying economics in Germany under Gustav Scholler, a prominent statistician, reformer and supporter of German imperialism. He returned to South Africa in 1911 to join the Department of History and Economics at Grahamstown University. Macmillan has been credited with founding the liberal school of South African historiography.³⁰²

²⁹⁹G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, p. 95.

³⁰⁰H. Giliomee: *The Last Afrikaner Leaders*, pp. 25-26.

³⁰¹J.D. Froneman: "H.F. Verwoerd's student years - cradle of political career and thought," *Koers*, (65),(3), 2000, pp. 403-405.

³⁰²G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 66-67.

Soon after returning to South Africa, Macmillan became highly critical of the standard of economic research saying that it was “hardly even in its infancy”. He described the 1918 Department of Labour’s conclusion that there were exactly 106,518 poor whites as a “suspiciously exact” figure, saying that an intelligent estimate would have been far more plausible. In order to determine the extent of both white and black poverty, accurate sampling methods in defined districts would have to be conducted which had never been done in South Africa. Macmillan consistently refused to isolate white poverty from black poverty. He maintained that the transformation of the rural pastoral economy to capitalism affected whites as much as it did blacks. Given his liberal background, it was somewhat surprising to read the following:

“In almost every case where whites and blacks live side-by-side, the blacks are on the upgrade, living in the slums because there is no other place for them, clean and decent; but their children were growing up there learning civilisation from white neighbours, squalid and filthy, the very dregs of society. This is the peril.... So long as we allow selfish unregulated competition to govern wages even in a public service, so long do we go on with our unholy work of depressing our own race, making a healthy white South African impossible, and degrading the black himself in the process.”³⁰³

He later amended this view by saying that both poor whites and blacks needed protection from each other. Macmillan found support from a fellow economist, R.A. Lehfeldt, Chair of the Department of Economics and Statistics at the School of Mines and Technology. He agreed that white poverty could not be considered in isolation from black poverty. Keeping the native in a “semi-servile condition” would ultimately harm the economy. Whites’ claim to racial superiority was frequently not supported by greater efficiency and therefore higher rates of pay by the state could not be justified. He added that white people’s dependence on black labour was an unhealthy development. Lehfeldt agitated for reducing social barriers between racial groups and educating blacks to the same standard as whites. He predicted that one day South Africa would “belong to the people who do its work.”

³⁰³G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, pp. 67-68.

By 1917 Macmillan had been appointed chair of the Department of History at Wits. He remained in contact with prominent members of the Fabian Society, in particular the Webbs, and continued to find ways of applying Christian principles to social challenges. Whilst at Wits he was unable to separate white poverty from black. He became interested in the activities of the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union and thereby became critical of the “civilised labour policy” of the Pact government. By 1925 Macmillan began to criticise the government’s plans for black reserves, pointing out that they would never be economically viable. Prime Minister Hertzog later described Macmillan as a “comparative dabbler”. By this time Afrikaner nationalism was well into its stride and the future viability of the native reserves was not going to distract the Pact government from consolidating power. In 1930 Macmillan published “Complex South Africa”, in which he criticised the Pact government as follows:

“The political situation aggravates this distortion. While the natives are powerless, the poor whites as a class have great voting power. The poor white vote gives a strong bias to the policy of all parties alike, and the cries for defensive measures, from an industrial colour bar onwards, which can only, and do all too effectively, make the natives poorer still, and to that extent an ever more real menace.”³⁰⁴

By the 1930’s Macmillan was frustrated and disillusioned. He was unable to convince many of his liberal friends of the folly of Pact government policies. In 1933 he resigned from Wits and joined the British Colonial Office hoping that “British Africa would definitely turn away from the awful warning of the Union.”³⁰⁵

With hindsight Macmillan’s comment was remarkably prescient. He recognised that the poor white had a political influence which far exceeded that of blacks – the vote. This leverage was enhanced by the Afrikaner nationalist politicians’ desire to incorporate the white poor into white society in order to ensure the success of the nationalist project. The widely held perception that racial mixing would lead to degeneration drove the need for intensified segregation, which partially contributed through a complex process to the introduction of apartheid.

³⁰⁴ G. Davie: *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa*, p. 79.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

An Example of Poor White Agency and Entrepreneurship

The copious literature on the poor white problem in South Africa tends to present a stereotypical picture of the subject – degenerate, lazy, feeble-minded and without innovation or ambition. The discovery of gold in 1886 and the subsequent industrialisation of the Witwatersrand provided opportunities and threats for both blacks and whites who wished to avoid wage labour and subsequent proletarianisation. On a number of occasions, working class interests coalesced around an issue which affected a particular group of poor people. It will be shown that some poor whites were able to articulate their concerns and mobilise their collective will in order to challenge authority and resist unfavourable legislation.

Poor White Class Mobilisation on the Lichtenburg Diggings 1926 – 1929

In Chapter 4, reference is made to the activities of the poor whites on the Lichtenburg alluvial diamond diggings by both Grosskopf and Wilcocks. Their comments fall within the generally held stereotype of the poor white. A paper published by Tim Clynick in 1992 challenges this view. In 1926 alluvial diamonds were discovered in the Western Transvaal on a section of dry, rocky earth called the Klipveld, literally meaning “stony veld”. Within the first year, over 1 million carats of diamonds had been mined and by the following year, that number had doubled. In the early years it supported a population of 150,000 people. The diggers were mainly Western Transvaal farmers who comprised some 70% of the total population in the area. The rest were the poor unemployed whites from the Witwatersrand and other parts of the Transvaal. Professional diggers comprised the smallest number at Lichtenburg. Within a year, a town had been established on the farm Elandsputte which included cafes, dance halls, shops and a cinema. On the diggings, work started at sunrise and ended at sunset from Monday to Friday. The digging was largely unmechanised. The farm owners generated their income in the form of rentals and royalties from the diggers, the sale of drinking water and the use of pasturage. Following the public proclamation of the property, the state would grant the farm owner a further benefit in the form of reserve claims. One digger was heard to say that “the owner of a proclaimed farm, the nearest hotel, the storekeepers, and the diamond buyers, in about that order named, are the only sure profit makers from the gamble of diamond digging.”³⁰⁶

³⁰⁶T. Clynick: “Digging away into the working class: unemployment and consciousness amongst the Afrikaner poor on the Lichtenburg alluvial diamond diggings, 1926-1929” in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 75-79.

Unsurprisingly it was not long before capitalist investors started buying farms and groups of claims. A number of these farms were owned by Isaac Lewis and Sammy Marks via a company called the African and European Investment Company Limited (A&E). At that stage the law allowed a maximum of 235 claims per farm. It was not long before the mining entrepreneurs had subdivided the farms, from which each portion could then be allocated a further 235 claims. The A&E farms became the richest producers of alluvial diamonds in the area. Some claims were sold for up to 5,000 pounds each. The reserve claims received by the farm owners upon proclamation were considered to be company land and public diggers operated on claims which they had managed to peg following proclamation. The farm owners and mining companies were able to employ professional diggers and, assisted by machinery, were able to extract many more carats of diamonds than those on the public diggings, which tended to be chaotic and overcrowded.³⁰⁷

Within a short time the substantial wealth of the diggings was accruing to farm owners, mining companies and the proprietors of shops, hotels and bars. By the second year on the public diggings, poverty had set in. By 1927 most of the shallow and easily accessible claims had been exhausted of diamonds. Resentment began to grow towards the landowners and mining companies. The Pact government was inadvertently being drawn into this conflict between capital and the working class. The monopoly on the reserve claims owned by the mining companies was challenged by the state with the threat of expropriation. The truth was somewhat different. Hertzog and his government were being put under pressure by Sir Ernest Oppenheimer and Solly Joel of the Diamond Syndicate to limit the number of diamonds coming onto the market in order to maintain the price. Furthermore, the government generated substantial revenue through the Diamond Control Act which was passed in 1925. With the depletion of the number of diamonds being extracted from public claims, the poor white diggers became desperate and began illegally occupying the reserve claims owned by the companies. Two of their leaders were A.H. Ireton and W.P.Thom who were instrumental in the formation of the Diggers Union of South Africa (DU). By the end of 1927 there was a real concern on the part of the South African Police that class warfare between the diggers on one hand and the mining companies on the other would break out.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁷T. Clynick: "Digging away into the working class: unemployment and consciousness amongst the Afrikaner poor on the Lichtenburg alluvial diamond diggings, 1926-1929" in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 80-85.

³⁰⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 85-89.

The passage of the Precious Stones Act in December 1927 was designed to protect the small diggers, mostly poor white Afrikaners. One of the unintended consequences of the Act was that it prohibited companies from working individual claims. This resulted in them closing down their mining activities, which again resulted in massive unemployment for the workers. Many small independent diggers had entered into partnership and financing arrangements with diamond dealers in order to provide working capital for the mechanisation of their claims. The new Act outlawed this as well, resulting in further layoffs and unemployment. The Act had little impact on the professional digger who owned his own claim. Eventually the Pact government would have to revise a number of provisions of the Act in order to allow unemployed diggers access to claims. It was estimated that up to 25,000 white diggers and their dependents were unemployed and facing starvation. Some assistance was provided by the DU, the Mines Department and the Lichtenburg Magistrate.³⁰⁹ The passage of a revised Precious Stones Act rejuvenated the activities of the DU. A new president was appointed, a certain F.J.Rheeders, who was a prominent member of the National Party as well as a successful farmer and digger.

The determination of the new president to approach the Minister of Mines as a representative body of all the diggers was widely supported by the members. Their demands included access to the recently established and lucrative Namaqualand diamond fields. Cleverly the DU established a Poor Whites Relief Committee in order to negotiate for more diamond containing ground from the government. The Pact government was now being attacked by poor white Afrikaners supported by members of the National party. Hertzog and his colleagues were now facing a dilemma. Were they to allow uncontrolled prospecting in Namaqualand, the price of diamonds would collapse, resulting in more poverty and suffering for the diggers generally and the poor whites in particular. The DU continued to place the government under pressure to allow access to the Namaqualand diggings. Finally the Pact government decided that these diggings would be state owned and managed for the benefit of the whole country. A preferential policy of white employment would be adopted. By 1928 support for the Pact government by the Afrikaner diggers had evaporated.

³⁰⁹T. Clynick: "Digging away into the working class: unemployment and consciousness amongst the Afrikaner poor on the Lichtenburg alluvial diamond diggings, 1926-1929" in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 90-92.

A number of the DU executives resolved to stand against the local member of Parliament and Cabinet member, Tielman Roos in the forthcoming election. Sensing that his political career was under threat, Roos agreed to meet the local members of the National Party in August. He was presented by the DU with a list of 13 demands, all of which he agreed to implement.

The scepticism of the executive of the DU was justified. By the end of the year the promises made by Roos remained unfulfilled. In desperation the diggers planned to occupy the diamond fields in Namaqualand illegally. Police reinforcements were very soon deployed to Port Nolloth to prevent such an insurrection.³¹⁰

The Approach to Welfare by the State from 1924 to 1939

The South African Party under the leadership of Gen. Smuts did not seem to have been particularly concerned about the plight of the poor whites. When Smuts was at Cambridge University he was strongly influenced by Alfred Marshall's "Principles of Economics", published in 1890. Marshall was one of the earliest economists who argued for minimal government involvement in the economy. Government alone could not eliminate poverty without the support of a free-market economy. According to this theory, the best government could do to eliminate poverty was to educate the children of the poor.³¹¹

Following union in 1910 the three colonial railway services were merged into one organisation called the South African Railways (SAR). This development allowed for the employment of some 3,400 poor whites. The following year wages were increased on the grounds that a better class employee could be attracted in this way. With the assistance of magistrates, DRC ministers and members of Parliament, an effort was made by the SAR to recruit men of "good character". By 1916 these white labourers had been promoted to more skilled positions on the railways, making way for the employment of more poor whites to fill their previous positions. Soon it became evident that these white railway workers required training in arithmetic, reading and writing. Of the 425 white labourers attending these schools, 175 passed the examination and were promoted to more senior and responsible positions in the SAR. Overall the program was moderately successful.³¹²

³¹⁰T. Clynick: "Digging away into the working class: unemployment and consciousness amongst the Afrikaner poor on the Lichtenburg alluvial diamond diggings, 1926-1929" in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 93-100.

³¹¹J. Fourie: "The South African poor white problem in the early 20th century," *Management Decision*, (45) (8), 2007, p. 1283.

³¹²G. Pirie: "White Railway Labour in South Africa, 1837-1924" in R. Morrell: *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 108-110.

The 1922 miners strike forced Smuts, the Prime Minister, to re-evaluate his position on the poor white problem. He was reluctant to extend the colour bar in the mining industry, but considered better and more extensive training for whites as being a more sustainable alternative. The Minister of Mines and Industry, F. S. Malan, addressed Parliament in 1923 as follows:

“It was degrading to the white man to say that he should be artificially protected against the native and coloured man... The reason why a number of white miners were in danger today was that so many were not efficient miners.”³¹³

Smuts was not prepared to give the blacks the vote and was anxious to place whites in an advantageous situation. Under pressure from his Cabinet, he agreed to the passage of the Industrial Conciliation Act in 1924, which allowed the formation of white and, to some extent, coloured trade unions and agreements with industrial councils. Blacks were excluded from union membership. This legislation provided white employees with beneficial access to training and wage negotiations.³¹⁴

Early in the 20th century labour policy was being driven by conflicting demands. On the one hand there was pressure from the mining industry to ensure an adequate supply of cheap black labour as the gold price was pegged at \$35 an ounce. On the other, there were increasing demands to reverse the growing poor white problem through various measures, including preferential employment policies. Racial segregation was considered to be a means of reconciling these two obviously antagonistic demands. The repressive legislation preceding segregation was largely passed by the South African Party up to 1924. Thereafter, the Pact Government passed most of the discriminatory legislation designed to assist the poor white.³¹⁵

By the 1920's the position of the urbanised black worker had become increasingly precarious. The chamber of mines operated a highly effective recruiting system, attracting workers from the Eastern Cape, Natal, Transvaal, Lesotho and Malawi. These recruits were contracted for a term of at least one year and were accommodated in large single sex compounds. The Native Labour Regulation Act of 1911 made a breach by the worker of his contract, a criminal offence. As a result of the same legislation, striking became illegal. These financial arrangements were only possible because of the grinding poverty in the black reserves.

³¹³ H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 335.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 335-336.

³¹⁵ J. Fourie: “The South African poor white problem in the early 20th century,” *Management Decision*, (45) (8), 2007, pp. 1282-1283.

After the passage of the 1913 Land Act and restrictive pass laws, blacks would be more confined to the reserves, unless they had bona fide employment in urban areas. With the increase in the population and the limits imposed by the Land Act on grazing areas, the population of the reserves became more and more impoverished. The majority of blacks were unable to maintain an adequate level of nutrition from stock and agrarian farming in the reserves. By 1936 the death rate in the reserves had climbed by 40% in comparison to 1921, mostly due to malnutrition. By 1943 the Chamber of Mines led gratuitous evidence to the Mine Wages Committee and lauded “the attractive and healthy individual existence of the native and his family in the reserves.” They went on to propose that “the natives’ independent position as peasant farmer and stockholder assured him of his prolonged holiday at home.” The harsh reality was that there was no alternative but to work on the mines and in the cities for minimal wages. It was thus hardly surprising that white politicians were outraged by the ability of the blacks to undercut the wages of the poor whites. Little did they acknowledge that the wages which blacks were forced to accept were essential for their survival.³¹⁶

The Pact Government, which assumed power in 1924, was essentially a coalition between the Afrikaner republican nationalists and the socialist, yet pro-British, Labour Party. The support base of the former was rural and the latter, proletarianised white workers on the Witwatersrand. The Prime Minister was Hertzog, who like Smuts, was an ex-Boer war general. Over the next 10 years his government would introduce legislation increasing employment and welfare benefits for whites and promoting racial segregation.

The labour unrest of 1913, 1914 and 1922 eventually forced the leaders of the Pact government and the mining industry to ensure the integration of the poor white into “civilised” society. The National Party leaders of the coalition were astonished to find that many of their members sympathised with their partners, the pro-British Labour Party. As early as the 1914 provincial elections in the Transvaal, the Labour Party produced a pamphlet written in Afrikaans stressing the “mutual interests of the small landowner and white worker as against those of the capitalists”.³¹⁷

³¹⁶C. Bundy: *Poverty in South Africa*, pp. 60-62.

³¹⁷H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 370.

The risk of collaboration between the black and white proletariats to the hegemony of the ruling classes was unthinkable. According to Davie, the crowning achievement of the Pact Government was the “political capitulation of the white labour movement”. By working through the trade unions, whites were guaranteed a civilised standard of living at the expense of blacks. In this way, they were co-opted to defend white privilege and hegemony. Social and residential segregation based on the eugenic arguments of race degeneration would enhance the belief in white superiority.³¹⁸

Following the investigations of a multi-party committee, the 1928 Old Age Pensions Act was passed. As a result, pensions were paid to the elderly and disabled, subject to a means test and such pensions were non-contributory. It is important to note that the passage of this act preceded the publication of the Carnegie Commission’s Report in 1932.³¹⁹

The Pact Government rapidly implemented a number of pieces of related legislation favouring the employment of what was euphemistically considered to be “civilised labour.” This legislation was supplemented by the Wages Act of 1925 which brought a Wage Board into existence. The purpose of this Board was to regulate remuneration for certain categories of work, irrespective of the race of the workers. Some years before, an attempt had been made by the South African Party to pass the Mines and Works Act of 1911, which was later invalidated by the courts as being ultra vires. Its incarnation was called the Colour Bar Act, which was passed in 1926 and protected skilled white workers from competition from natives and Indians. The enabling legislation for the founding of Iscor and Eskom (see below) was drafted in 1928. In years to come, both companies would employ thousands of previously poor whites. In 1930 white women were finally enfranchised. Coloureds, Indians and blacks were not included.³²⁰

Nevertheless, coloured people were exempt from the discriminatory provisions of the Act as Hertzog saw in them future allies in Afrikanerdom. He expressed his views of coloureds as follows: “He has his origins and existence in our midst. He knows no other civilization than that of the white man. However often he may fall short of it, his outlook is essentially that of the whites and not that of the natives, and his mother tongue is that of the white man”.³²¹

³¹⁸J. Seekings: “Workers and the Beginnings of Welfare State - Building in Argentina and South Africa”, *African Studies*, August-December 2007, pp. 262-263.

³¹⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 517-518.

³²⁰R. Davenport: *South Africa, A Modern History*, pp. 286-287.

³²¹O. Pirow: *Hertzog*, p. 128.

Perusal of the report of the Controller and Auditor General for the financial year 1929 to 1930 highlights the extent of financial support provided to white indigents by the authorities. An amount of 2.786 million pounds was provided during that financial year in the form of old age pensions, agricultural and trade schools, child welfare, drought relief, maternity grants, unemployment expenditure, additional expenditure due to employment of civilised labour, irrigation and tenant farmers schemes. It soon became evident that this level of support was unaffordable. From about 1925 the government insisted that the South African Railways and Harbours followed a policy of the preferential employment of whites throughout the union. From 31st March 1924 to 31st December 1928 white labourers on the railways increased from 4,760 to 15,878.³²²

The Pact Government was determined to protect and develop local industry as a means of providing employment to poor whites. In 1929 the Iron and Steel Industry Act was passed by Parliament in order to establish a facility to process locally mined iron ore into steel. The business was known as Iscor and became operational in Pretoria in 1933. This was followed by a national electricity producer and distributor known as Escom. A review of the policy of import substitution by the Pact government in 1932 found that work had been provided for thousands of poor whites and was “a potent means of bringing about their economic rehabilitation.”³²³

The conceptualisation of Iscor, Escom and later Sasol (a producer of synthetic fuel from coal) can be attributed to brilliant young Afrikaners who had been groomed for these positions by Smuts and the leaders of the South African Party. They were H.J. van der Byl of Iscor, H.J. van Eck of the Industrial Development Corporation and Etienne Rousseau of Sasol. Rousseau later described van der Byl as doing more “for the economic insertion of the Afrikaans speaker than what we are doing at Federale Volksbeleggings”.³²⁴ The economic rationale behind Escom was primarily as a source of reliable and cheap power to develop secondary industry, whilst the political rationale was white employment. In both respects it succeeded. Whilst the bulk of the skilled workers were white, all unskilled work was performed by blacks. Whites were paid substantially more than blacks to the extent that in 1954 9,000 white employees earned a total of 50 million pounds, whilst 11.5 thousand blacks earned 13 million pounds.

³²²J.F.W. Grosskopf: *Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus*, pp. 24-28.

³²³H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 341.

³²⁴W. Freund: “White people Fit for a New South Africa? State Planning, Policy and Social Response in the Parastatal Cities of the Vaal”, 1940 – 1990, p. 3. (Unpublished)

By the 1970's the company began experiencing a shortage of skilled labour and started recruiting artisans from overseas. Both Iscor and Escom offered their own in-house training facilities which were so successful that other employers were eager to engage their graduates. Soon it was necessary to employ white, coloured and Indian woman to assist with the administration of the vast factories. Women were never allowed to be trained as artisans.³²⁵

Until 1924, the provision of welfare to the poor white was primarily carried out by the DRC and Afrikaner charitable organisations such as the Afrikaans Christian Women's Association. (Afrikaanse Christelike Vroue Vereeniging or ACVV). Much of this assistance was given as food or blankets, and seldom in cash. The Pact Government's approach was primarily political. In their view it was not possible to build a racially segregated state when a large proportion of the ruling hierarchy consisted of a poor, illiterate and largely unskilled white proletariat. The DRC was heavily influenced by the Final Report and Recommendations of the Carnegie Commission regarding the cause of poor whiteism, but differed dramatically from the government regarding its solution. From perusing the reports of Wilcocks, Malherbe and Albertyn, one can be in no doubt that they did not favour cash support for the poor whites without some contribution in return. In the longer term they considered the solution to be educational and not charitable. The poor whites should be rehabilitated by teaching them "thrift, self-help, temperance, solidarity and racial self-respect."³²⁶

By 1934 the ACVV had changed its strategy from charitable work to social work. This change in policy arose from a Federal Women's Congress, which was held in Bloemfontein in 1933. The conference promoted the unique role of women in understanding and promoting "scientifically correct social welfare". Needless to say, this approach placed it in conflict with the DRC, who at the time were organising the 1934 Volkskongres on the poor white problem (see above). Behind closed doors, the DRC wished to minimise the role of Verwoerd (Professor of Sociology and Social work at the University of Stellenbosch) and his protégé Erica Theron, a leader of the ACVV. The church leaders were concerned that Verwoerd was attempting to undermine church doctrine with sociological concepts.

At the time, Verwoerd was convinced that only the state had the resources to solve the poor white problem, with the assistance of trained social workers.³²⁷ By the end of the 1934

³²⁵W. Freund: "White People Fit for a New South Africa? State Planning, Policy and Social Response in the Parastatal Cities of the Vaal," 1940-1990, (Unpublished), pp. 4-8.

³²⁶J. Seekings: "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa 1931-1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2008, pp. 519-521.

³²⁷J. Seekings: "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa

conference, Verwoerd had emerged in a strong position as vice-chairman, and later chairman, of the Continuation Committee. A number of the resolutions passed at the conference supported the training and deployment of greater numbers of social workers. Over the next few years the DRC and the ACVV jostled for influence with government. In 1935 a new Social Welfare section of the Department of Labour was established, with a prominent member of the church as the Commissioner. In 1936, Verwoerd agitated for greater involvement on the part of the ACVV. In 1937 a new Department of Social Welfare was created, headed by G.A.C.Kuschke, who seemed to favour the welfare model proposed by the ACVV. Around this time the church/state scheme was terminated.

The government was now financially in a position to expand the range of welfare programs offered to white and, to some extent, coloured citizens. In 1937, a new Blind Person's Act was promulgated, as well as an Invalidity Grant associated with the earlier Pensions Act. In the same year, the Children's Act was passed in order to protect the children of poor white parents. This program was funded and managed by government, who employed professional social workers to implement policy. The DRC was largely excluded. Elements of the resolutions of the 1934 conference resonated within this legislation. In the first instance provision was made for delinquent children and their rehabilitation. In order to promote sustainable home life, financial assistance was available for families having delinquent children. The programs would be administered by probation officers and social workers. They were to be assisted by registered child welfare organisations such as those operated by the ACVV. By this stage, Kuschke and the staff of the Department of Social Welfare had become convinced that Verwoerd and his collaborators at the ACVV were a better option than the proposals of Carnegie and the DRC. By the end of the decade, the initiative had passed to the state.³²⁸

By 1934, there existed in South Africa a proliferation of expensive welfare programs including old age pensions, disabled or blind support, support for families with poor children, unemployment insurance, assistance for agriculture and a range of public works programs in order to provide white employment. During the parliamentary elections of that year, Hertzog claimed that his Pact Government had solved the poor white problem through its generous welfare programs. In stark contrast, the employment statistics did not support the Prime

J Seekings: "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa, 1931-1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2008, pp. 527-528.

³²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 529-533.

Minister's claims. White men working on road and railway construction projects increased from 5,000 in January 1932 to 25,000 by July of the same year.

Undaunted, the new Fusion government was busy developing forestation programs, large irrigation schemes, anti-soil erosion measures and the large-scale clearance of foreign vegetation. Fortunately, by this time, South Africa had abandoned the gold standard and money was flowing into the fiscus at an unprecedented rate, sufficient to fund the government's largesse. By using the 1934 Volkskongres as a springboard, Verwoerd and the ACVV had gained the upper hand over the DRC and the supporters of the Carnegie Commission. The formation of the Fusion Government led to an unintended consequence – the Purified National Party was now in opposition. They lost no time in campaigning vociferously for an end to the poor white problem, particularly when Verwoerd left Stellenbosch and became editor of the *Transvaaler* in 1936. The poor white question was once again being used as a means to promote Afrikaner nationalism in the face of rampant imperial mining capitalism. By the beginning of the Second World War, the United Party and the Purified National Party opposition were locked in a conflict for the future electoral support of the poor whites.³²⁹

³²⁹J. Seekings: "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash against Welfare State Building in South Africa 1931-1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, September 2008, pp. 536-537.

The State, the DRC and Segregation

In 1903 Lord Milner appointed the South African Native Affairs Commission (SANAC) to develop a native policy for the future union of South Africa. During its investigations it became concerned that some 130,000 blacks had purchased farms in white farming areas. Furthermore the demand for black labour in these areas was becoming more intense. Essentially the commission recommended that the state demarcate defined residential areas for Africans adjacent to industry and the mines. SANAC also rejected the Cape's non-racial qualified franchise. With the introduction of self government in 1907 the Botha and Smuts Administration adopted the general principles proposed by SANAC. The Union of South Africa followed some years later in 1910. Soon thereafter, in 1913 the Natives Land Act was passed, restricting landownership in what was considered to be white South Africa. Blacks were to be permitted to live in locations whilst working in white South Africa. Their permanent place of residence was meant to be the native reserves. These policies gradually became known as segregation.³³⁰

During the 1920's the DRC began grappling with the concept of extending segregation within schools and churches into society and the workplace at large. An influential figure in the DRC was Johannes du Plessis, who was concerned that segregation within the church could be used by politicians to extend discrimination further afield. The DRC had been criticised by the Rector of Fort Hare College, D.D.T Jabavu as being an anti-native church. In 1921 Du Plessis and 10 other leading theologians prepared a response to Jabavu's concerns and admitted that the DRC could have done more for blacks, but were restrained by limited funding. In many respects, the theologians' response took up the cudgels on behalf of educated blacks who should be exempt from pass laws. Furthermore, black workers should be afforded the right to strike and black artisans should be allowed to compete with whites. Secondary education for blacks should be extended. Du Plessis went further and arranged a conference of some 50 church leaders, drawn from black and white communities. There was general agreement that each race should develop differently and total segregation was rejected. Despite opposition from conservative quarters within the DRC, the spirit of cooperation and the need for black education prevailed until 1932.³³¹

³³⁰H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 300-302.

³³¹*Ibid.*, pp. 457-458.

D.F. Malan again revised his views on the morality of racial segregation. Segregation would be acceptable, providing that blacks were educated and civilised in order that they could learn a living in their own areas. Such education would have to include agricultural skills in order to make agrarian activities viable in the reserves. In his view, educated blacks constituted a great threat to white civilisation in South Africa:

“...the Kafir (Sic) as such is not the enemy of the white man and his civilisation. Neither are his education and civilisation the enemy, in so far as he is capable of appropriating it to himself. To the contrary it is precisely his lack of civilisation, and as a result, his limited needs and his Kaffir (Sic) wage that is impoverishing, degrading and driving the white man away.”³³²

The relevant question at this stage is whether Malan considered segregation a temporary or permanent phenomenon. At the time, it seems that he was sincere in promoting education for the black people as a means to reduce competition between the races, providing that races were segregated into their own areas. Control would have to be exercised over the number of blacks in white areas and vice a versa. In his early writings, miscegenation was not mentioned. From a practical perspective Malan did not envisage insurmountable problems with introducing segregationist legislation. The existing colour bar on the mines could be extended to provide further advantages for white employment. The risk of whites competing with blacks in the reserves was negligible, simply because very few whites lived in those areas. He did however promote an extension to the Urban Areas Act of 1923 which would legislate that white employers would require a licence for blacks to work in a particular vocation.³³³

In the early 1920's the Johannesburg City Council had become concerned about mixed race slums developing around the metropole. The matter was investigated by the Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Porter, who recommended that blacks in these areas should be removed to alternative residential sites. In 1923 the Native (Urban Areas) Act was passed and made applicable to Johannesburg. By 1927 some 30,000 black people had been relocated to Sofiatown, Newclare and Martindale. The homes vacated by the relocated blacks were reoccupied by colourerds or new arrivals in the city. Little in the way of segregation between whites and blacks had been achieved.

³³²L. Koorts: “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912 – 1939,” *South African Historical Journal*, (65), (4), pp. 567-568.

³³³*Ibid.*, pp. 568-569.

From 1916 to 1933 poor whites in Johannesburg had increased from 6,000 to 300,000. The civilised labour policy of the Pact Government led to some unintended consequences. The cost of building homes had increased because of the higher wages being paid to whites. Furthermore, preferential employment policies on the railways significantly increased the number of whites employed in Johannesburg leading to a further demand for housing. Matters were not assisted by the depression of 1929 to 1932.³³⁴

Following the 1934 Volkskongress, the relationship between poor whites and blacks was once again in sharp focus. Racial mixing in the Johannesburg slums had become commonplace. Coloureds could now be added to the threats facing the poor white as a result of competition in the workplace. Hertzog had spent years trying to have new legislation passed by Parliament in order to place blacks on a separate voter's roll, separate representation in Parliament and a Natives Representative Council. There was also an intention to purchase additional land in order to make the native reserves more viable. Following Fusion, these bills were finally passed in 1936, but had been watered down because of opposition from the SAP members of the new government. This approach was not sufficient for Malan and his new Purified National Party. As a new general election, due in 1938, loomed on the horizon, Malan became more intransigent on matters of race.

According to their election manifesto, the Purified National Party would terminate Jewish immigration, abolish African representation in Parliament, no longer purchase additional land for the reserves and implement total segregation between all whites and non-whites. Separate residential areas and workplaces would be essential. The Immorality Act would have to be extended to outlaw sexual activity between whites and all other races, not only blacks as was the case at the time. The election led to some nasty racial overtones. The Transvaal branch of Malan's party published a poster of a poor white woman and her black husband watching their mixed race children at play. Segregation and the dangers of miscegenation became an open political contest.³³⁵

³³⁴S. Parnell: "Slums, Segregation and Poor Whites in Johannesburg, 1920-1934," in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 120-122.

³³⁵L. Koorts: "The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912 – 1939," *South African Historical Journal*, (65), (4), pp. 569-571.

During the 1930's the city slums had become a significant health problem and a "fertile field for subversive propaganda". These concerns led to the formation of the Johannesburg Housing Utility Company in 1933. At the time, slums were common in most major cities of the world, but in South Africa there existed the overarching need for racial segregation. The removal of black people and the construction of exclusive black housing was criticised by whites as being discriminatory. Whites were receiving the benefit of the civilised labour policy, but were still living under slum conditions with racial integration. By 1930 white females were enfranchised. The white poor had now become even more politically important. The Johannesburg Council initiated a program of sub-economic loans for white residential development. Preferential interest rates of 1.5% per annum were levied. The passage of the Slums Act in 1934 provided local authorities with the means to expropriate large areas of the city for white accommodation.³³⁶

Bundy sees matters very differently. He argues that the process of the urbanisation of South African cities was very similar to that in the rest of the world. Characteristically, one of the consequences of such urbanisation was the formation of slums in and around city centres. In South Africa, these slums were occupied by a polyglot of races from all over southern Africa, including whites. The consistent response of the authorities was to enforce segregation between whites and non-whites, with different approaches being followed in different areas. The rationale of this segregation was, of course, racial degeneration due to miscegenation. By the 1940's, the ingress of blacks into urban areas had become uncontrollable. The National Party campaigned against the "oorstroming" of whites in urban areas. In Bundy's opinion this was the major cause of the National Party victory in 1948 and which subsequently led to the policies of apartheid.³³⁷

Lindie Koorts describes the flexible nature of Malan's views on race and segregation, which changed from his days as a cleric, to when he became a politician and finally as the National Party leader. Yet on the issue of the poor whites and Afrikaner nationalism, he was remarkably consistent. By the 1930's the National Party was hungry for power and the 1938 Great Trek Centenary provided the ideal opportunity to promote their views on miscegenation and the critical importance of uplifting the poor white.

³³⁶S. Parnell: "Slums, Segregation and Poor Whites in Johannesburg, 1920-1934," in R. Morrell (ed.): *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 126-129.

³³⁷ C. Bundy: *Poverty in South Africa*, p. 74.

It is important to note that the 1938 election manifesto of the National Party was opposed to mixed marriages, miscegenation, residential mixing and racial interactions in the workplace.³³⁸

By 1943 it was clear that the Allies were gaining the upper hand in World War Two and Smuts thought it was opportune to call an election. The United Party defeated the National Party with a majority of seats of 89 to 43. By this time the antagonism towards Smuts and the United Party began to elide. Malan realised that the National Party would have to capitalize on Smuts' ambivalence toward the urban black. Within the United Party there were members who remained as racist as any of the National Party supporters and an opposing group of liberals who supported the Deputy Prime Minister, Hofmeyr. In order to exploit this opportunity, the National Party appointed Malan's colleague from the Cape, Paul Sauer, to lead a Colour Question Commission in order to set out future National Party policy in unambiguous terms. The report of this commission was publicised in March 1948, at much the same time as the Fagan commission, appointed by Smuts, had completed its work. The Report of the Native Laws Commission (H.A.Fagan) declared that "the idea of total segregation is utterly impracticable; secondly, that the movement from country to town has a background of economic necessity – that it may... be guided and regulated, and may perhaps also be limited, but that it cannot be stopped or turned in the opposite direction, and thirdly, that in our urban areas there are not only native migrant labourers, but there is also a settled permanent native population."³³⁹

Fagan's report was in stark contrast to that of Sauer, who was adamant that racial equality was out of the question as it would lead to the "eventual destruction of the white race as an independent and ruling race". Opportunities for miscegenation had to be totally eliminated. Non-white groupings must maintain their own identities and develop separately with their own abilities and education until they became self-sufficient. The weak point of the Sauer commission was the future of urban blacks, many of whom had lived permanently in cities for many years. Furthermore, white urban dwellers relied heavily on the labour provided for their benefit in the cities. At best Sauer was indulging in wishful thinking regarding the future of

³³⁸L. Koorts: "The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: DF Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912-1939," *South African Historical Journal*, (65), (4), pp. 574-576.

³³⁹D. Welsh: *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, p 19.

urban blacks, at worst he was mendacious. Fagan was at least realistic and with hindsight proven correct.³⁴⁰

Volkskapitalisme between 1902 and 1948

Giliomee goes to great lengths to explain the feeling of inferiority experienced by the Afrikaans middle-class at the beginning of the 20th century. He points out that English was the language of business and commerce. The bulk of Afrikaans speaking children in rural areas spent a maximum of 4 to 5 years at school and left without being able to write a letter in English or Dutch. These views were propagated by Tobie Muller, a person of substantial intellect, who had studied theology at Stellenbosch University, but died prematurely in 1918. He considered the Afrikaans language as being the very basis for self-identity and therefore recommended that it should be used in schools as the means of mother tongue education. According to Muller, the numerous poor whites were considered by the English as confirmation that the Afrikaners were “penurious bunglers”. At this time Hertzog was struggling to build the National Party which he had formed in 1914. Muller’s views were like manna from heaven. Those Afrikaners who spoke English in public had no self-respect, nor respect for their ancestors. By speaking English to civil servants they deprived Afrikaners from the opportunity of employment. Much the same argument applied to the use of English in business or commerce.³⁴¹

Despite their poor education and lack of business experience, Afrikaners were determined to establish commercial enterprises for their own benefit in the second half of the 19th century. Many of these businesses did not survive, but a notable exception was the District Bank of Stellenbosch. Furthermore, a number of Afrikaner trust companies and boards of executors were established in the Western Cape following the Anglo Boer War in order to administer the estates of the Volk.³⁴²

By 1914 a prominent and influential Cape lawyer, W.A. (Willie) Hofmeyr, decided to support Hertzog and his new party. Hofmeyr gathered support from like-minded men in the Cape and collectively they agreed that for Afrikaner nationalism to succeed, a foothold in the business world would be essential. Within a short time this influential group established a new company called Die Nasionale Pers with the purpose of publishing an Afrikaner and Dutch daily newspaper in Cape Town, Die Burger. It was not long before this group had formed a

³⁴⁰D. Welsh: *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, pp. 17-20.

³⁴¹H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners*, pp. 371-372.

³⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 372.

National Party of the Cape. Hofmeyr was able to persuade the prominent DRC prelate, D.F. Malan, to accept the position of editor of the newspaper and leader of the Cape party.

These events occurred soon after the collapse of the Helpmekaar rebellion by Afrikaners opposed to South Africa's involvement in the First World War against Germany. Many of the participants had been fined or were incarcerated by the Union government. Die Burger was instrumental in establishing a Mutual Aid Association to financially assist the rebels. Within six weeks almost a quarter of 1 million pounds had been collected, much of it contributed by the wealthy Cape farming community. This demonstration of mutual assistance across class lines acted as a powerful ethnic mobilising stimulus. The feeling then was that anything was possible if Afrikaners were able to unite. For the first time in the 20th century the DRC was able to contemplate a possible solution to the poor white problem thanks to the financial assistance from the Helpmekaar Mutual Aid Association.³⁴³

Die Burger, with D.F. Malan as editor, published editorials and leader page articles promoting the independence of Afrikaners and their rights to participation in the national economy. Malan was a highly respected theologian and intellectual and contributed greatly to the standing of Afrikaners in the national economic debate. Soon the holding company, Die Nasionale Pers, appointed J.J. Smith as the editor of its family magazine, Die Huisgenoot. This magazine soon became known as the "people's university", the intention being to ensure that their readers became educated and familiar with the political and economic issues confronting them. In this respect it was remarkably successful. Smith's successor, H.G. Viljoen, subscribed to this formula and continued using the magazine as a means of education.³⁴⁴

As chairman of Helpmekaar, Hofmeyr had realised that Afrikaners were capable of supporting projects for their own upliftment. In 1918 he formed the South African National Trust Company, later known as Santam, again with funding from affluent Cape farmers. Soon the directors recognised the need for a specialist life assurance service for Afrikaners and established a subsidiary known as Sanlam in 1919. In the same year African Homes Trust and Assurance Company was acquired by the group. The three companies were able to offer short-term, life and funeral insurance respectively by pooling often small investments from Afrikaners all over the country. Competition from the established British dominated business world was ruthless. Potential investors were advised that "the Afrikaner is no businessman

³⁴³D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, pp. 96-97.

³⁴⁴H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 374-375.

and could accomplish nothing in the business world”. Many such critics ignored the growing confidence of Afrikaner nationalism which was gaining momentum in the country.

In 1921 the chairman’s report read as follows:

“Sanlam is an authentic institution of the Afrikaner volk in the widest sense of the word. As an Afrikaner, you will naturally give preference to an Afrikaner institution. I would just remind policyholders that we are busy furnishing employment to young Afrikaners, and training them in the assurance field. We hereby intend to provide a great service to South Africa. If we want to become economically self-reliant then we must support our own institutions. To that end, Sanlam offers you the opportunity.”³⁴⁵

Whilst many Afrikaners contributed relatively small amounts, the major source of funding was from Cape-based agriculture. Between 1919 and 1937 there occurred an accumulation of capital in this region completely out of proportion to the rest of the country. Whilst data to support this claim is in short supply, a number of surrogate economic indicators are supportive of this view. For example, over this period the number of tractors used by farmers had increased by 1100% along with a 130% increase in the labour force. The driving force behind the establishment of these Afrikaner business institutions was Hofmeyr, who was also the person who had established the Cape National Party and Nationale Pers which controlled its mouthpiece – Die Burger newspaper. It was now time to expand the economic base of Afrikaner business by tapping into the Nationalist project in the north.³⁴⁶

In 1918 a small group of Afrikaners decided to establish an organisation to promote the interests of their own people which soon became known as the Afrikaner Broederbond (the Bond). Membership was restricted to Afrikaans speaking Protestant white men who openly promoted the Afrikaans language, history, religion and traditions. By 1928 the Broeders (as the members were known) had established 13 branches with a total of 263 members throughout the Transvaal. The following year branches were established in the Free State. In 1929 the Bond organised a conference to plan the establishment of an Afrikaner cultural

³⁴⁵D. O’Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, p. 98.

³⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 99-101.

organization which led to the formation of the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations (FAK).³⁴⁷

By the 1930's, the Bond had turned its attention to banking. At the Economic Bond Congress held in 1931 it was decided that foreign capital had too much influence over local commercial banks and thus there was a need for a bank to assist Afrikaners. In 1934 sixty members of the Bond put up the capital to establish Volkskas, meaning literally "people's bank". The chairman, the board of directors and senior management were all members of the Bond. The new bank faced stiff competition from the established commercial banks. Once again, rural Afrikaners were lobbied for their support and within five years Volkskas had established 18 branches and total assets had increased from 13,100 to 572,000 pounds. The success of the banking venture prompted the Bond to decide that further business ventures should be the responsibility of the Afrikaans private sector, and not the Bond itself.

Following the establishment of the Fusion government, the Bond arranged an Economic Congress of the Volk in 1936 to review the progress made and to identify further opportunities for Afrikaans business. The conference resolved that the financially strained position of the Afrikaners was due to profiteers within the credit system which prevented their development into successful entrepreneurs. Furthermore banks should lend to Afrikaners in order to fulfil national requirements, rather than profiteering. The state should furthermore ensure strict segregation between the races and the Bond should promote a "buy Afrikaans" campaign. A highly respected DRC prelate, Rev.J.D.Kestel, urged Afrikaners to work together and help each other in order to assist the poor whites to return to the land.³⁴⁸

The Great Depression had adversely affected the agricultural sector, in particular exports. Herzog's stubborn insistence on maintaining the gold standard in 1930 severely constrained the profitability of the mining industry and thereby tax collection by government. When the government finally abandoned the gold standard in 1932 the gold price increased from 4.31 pounds to 7.10 pounds per fine ounce which had a dramatic effect on the South African economy. By this time the farmers had recovered from the Great Depression and generally living standards were rising. In the two years following 1933, gross domestic product grew from -7% to +15%.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁷H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 400-401.

³⁴⁸D. O'Meara: *Volkskapitalisme*, pp. 102-104.

³⁴⁹J. Fourie: "The South African poor white problem in the early 20th century," *Management Decision*, (45) (8), 2007, p. 1287.

The improvement in the economic circumstances of South Africa certainly benefited the Afrikaners. By 1939 it was estimated that the accumulated Afrikaner savings were about a hundred million pounds and their purchasing power a very similar figure. The agricultural sector had organised co-operative societies throughout the country through which farmers could acquire equipment, material and seed at competitive prices. The Fusion Government had also established a number of marketing boards which facilitated agricultural exports. In 1939 senior executives at Sanlam proposed the establishment of a finance house in collaboration with the Afrikaner Broederbond. In order to launch this venture the Bond arranged a First Economic Congress of the People which was attended by prominent Afrikaner politicians, including Verwoerd and Dönges, academics and entrepreneurs. The poor white problem was not a main point of discussion.

In the words of C.G.W. Schumann, a professor of economics at Stellenbosch University, the challenge for Afrikaners was to strengthen the healthier components of the volk, rather than the weaker. The only way forward was to take on the challenges of private enterprise. This approach was not universally acceptable amongst the Afrikaners. Many considered capitalism as exploitative and not benefiting the community as a whole. This resistance was eventually broken down by coining the phrase *Volkskapitalisme*, or People's Capitalism. A result of this Congress was the establishment of the finance house, *Federale Volksbeleggings*, the quasi charitable *Reddingsdaadbond* (RDB) and a business association called the *Afrikaner Handelsinstituut*.³⁵⁰

The Poor White and Afrikaner Nationalism

The formation of the Fusion government in 1934 led to the breakaway of a more radical and nationalistic group of parliamentarians under the leadership of D.F. Malan. The so-called Purified Nationalist party were now in opposition and once again the poor white vote would become crucial in gaining power. Competition for the poor white vote now intensified. Malan was determined to remain close to the poor white. Around this time, church and political leaders were preparing for the centenary celebration of the Great Trek, which took place in 1938. As it turned out, rural and urban Afrikaners eagerly identified with the symbolism and mythology evoked by this carefully stage-managed event. The organisers never expected the boost which the centenary provided to the overall Afrikaner nationalist project. Some

³⁵⁰H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, pp. 436-439.

historians consider the centenary celebrations as being crucial for the victory of the National party in 1948.³⁵¹

During the Great Trek centenary in 1938 Malan's speech extolled poor white inclusion in Afrikanerdom. From a modern perspective, the Great Trek centenary of 1938 can be considered a masterpiece of ethnic mobilisation and chauvinistic nationalism. The celebrations commenced with two ox-wagons leaving the statue of Jan Van Riebeck in Cape Town en route to Pretoria. The wagons were met by 20,000 enthusiastic Afrikaners at Goodwood, a brief distance from the departure point. Within a short while, a total of nine ox-wagons were involved in the celebrations and visited many of the small towns and villages en route. Along the way they were met with unbridled enthusiasm and emotion. Children were baptised with names such as Ossewania, Kakebenia and Eeufesia. The one destination was Blood River in Natal, the site of the famous victory over Dingaan and the Zulus and the other was Monumentkoppie in Pretoria. The High Commissioner of South Africa, W. H. Clarke described the situation as:

“The Voortrekker celebrations evoked a degree of emotion throughout Afrikanerdom which is almost alarming in its intensity. It penetrated all classes and in certain of its manifestations resembled something akin to mass hysteria.”³⁵²

In contrast to the Economic Conference of the People which took place a year later, the successful incorporation of the poor white into the unified Afrikaner volk was very much at the forefront of the celebrations. The assembled masses were called upon to rescue the poor. The Voortrekkers had been able to maintain their “pure blood” and thus it was incumbent upon their successors to avoid miscegenation. The celebrations prompted Malan, the leader of the Purified National Party to arrange a conference to discuss the preservation of the Afrikaner race. He was quoted as saying: “We have gathered here with one great aim in mind, and it is to safeguard South Africa for the white race and preserve the white race, pure and conscious of its calling, for South Africa.”³⁵³

³⁵¹H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 438.

³⁵²A. Grundlingh & H. Sapire: “From feverish Festival to Repetitive Ritual? The changing fortunes of Great Trek Mythology in an Industrialising South Africa 1938-1988”, *South African Historical Journal*, (21), 1989, pp. 19-21.

³⁵³L. Koorts : “ The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: D. F. Malan's Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre- Apartheid era, 1912 - 1939, *South African Historical Journal* , (65),(4), p.573.

This conference was a rallying call for Afrikaner nationalism, which, Malan argued, was being threatened by large numbers of uncivilised blacks. For the first time in his public life, he no longer supported black education, as it would represent a threat to the white minority.³⁵⁴ Soon after gaining power in 1948, Malan again stood on Monumentkoppie, on this occasion for the inauguration of the Voortrekker Monument. He described the Voortrekkers as the “van of white civilisation in a greater South Africa” and went on to say that their descendants were responsible for “the inexorable demand on the one hand to act as guardians over the non-European races, but on the other hand to see to the maintenance of their own white paramountcy and of their white race purity.”³⁵⁵

The irony of Malan’s speech was that by 1948 the poor white problem had been solved. Yet the enduring nature of prejudice which had facilitated the manipulation of many aspects of race theory would remain part of South African culture for many years to come. The cost of uplifting the poor white, arguably 300,000 people, was largely born by the fiscus, mostly at the expense of the black poor.³⁵⁶

Conclusion

The policies of segregation which commenced in 1903 continued with greater intensity as the century progressed. The demand for black labour by mining, industry and agriculture was certainly one of the drivers of this process. Simultaneously the political leaders concerns about racial degeneration due to social and sexual mixing, the demise of racial purity and the erosion of the superior position of whites was a further stimulus for the passage of stricter segregationist legislation. Against this background were the fears of co-operation between black and white proletariats leading to socialist type unrest. One is tempted to speculate which of these motives were dominant in the cause and effect paradigm. Was the race based rhetoric a smokescreen for implementing segregation as a means for securing plentiful cheap labour? Alternatively were the politicians genuinely alarmed about the grinding poverty of the poor white or was it their vote that was more important? It seems the evidence in this case favours the latter.

³⁵⁴L. Koorts: “The Black Peril would not exist if it were not for a White Peril that is a hundred times greater: D.F. Malan’s Fluidity on Poor Whiteism and Race in the Pre-Apartheid era, 1912 – 1939,” *South African Historical Journal*, (65), (4), pp. 572-573.

³⁵⁵M. Morris: “Voortrekker Stad: The end of a commemorative trek,” *Weekend Argus*, 16 December 2017, p.16.

³⁵⁶H. Giliomee: *The Afrikaners*, p. 410.

The resources and political commitment applied to solving the poor white problem gradually began to succeed. By 1936 the Department of Labour and Social Welfare proudly advised that there were no longer queues of poor whites waiting for employment. By 1942 full employment for white South Africans had been achieved. A consequence of the poor white rescue programmes was the exclusion of black workers from the formal economy. It was said that African mineworkers who demonstrated an aptitude for skilled work, would not be employed in order to prevent them demonstrating that they were capable of meeting the standards. Black workers were not allowed membership of recognised trade unions and denied access to the apprenticeship system. White prosperity and supremacy became sustainable through institutionalised discrimination against the majority.³⁵⁷

David Yudelman argues that the doubling of the gold price in 1933 was able to finance the state intervention described above. Without this source of funding such upliftment would not have been possible. By 1939 the Department of Labour reported that there was full employment for unskilled and semi skilled poor whites. Soon thereafter further industrialisation of the economy during the Second World War created massive demand for black and white labour.³⁵⁸ A measure of the increasing wealth of the Afrikaners could be assessed by the assets managed by their financial institutions. In 1939 their savings totalled 27 million pounds and within 10 years had increased to 74.4 million pounds.

A second economic Congress was held under the aegis of the FAK and RDB in 1950. The chairman of the Congress, L.J. du Plessis, stated that “the poor white problem no longer exists and Afrikanerdom is now established in the most important strategic points in urban commerce.”³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ C. Bundy: *Poverty in South Africa*, p. 53.

³⁵⁸ E.J. Bottomley, *Poor White*, p. 135.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

CHAPTER 8

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Urbanisation was a response by the poor white to structural changes in the South African economy resulting from poor farming methods, the mining revolution and subsequent industrialisation. The educational shortcomings of the poor whites and their inability to adapt to these changes in their environment have been described in some detail in this thesis. The initial reaction to urbanisation by the DRC, the politicians and society generally was negative. This view arose from a nostalgic memory of the pastoral lifestyle of rural Afrikaners far removed from British influence, the evils of the cities, and of course poverty. One is also tempted to speculate how much more convenient it would have been if the poor white was out of sight and mind in the small villages and farms of the country areas. Whilst unintended, the reality was that urbanisation provided the means to uplift and incorporate the poor white into Afrikanerdom far more readily than if they had remained in rural areas.

Urbanisation made segregation a practical and achievable strategy. The enforcement of effective racial segregation in the work place, home or social arena would have been practically impossible in the country side. In the urban environment it was viable because large, geographically defined areas could be policed to ensure racial compliance. This sealing off of white residential suburbs was supported by restrictions on black ingress through pass laws. By allowing squatting in black areas, the slum problem was moved out of white consciousness. In this way the poor whites were encouraged to indentify with the middle class rather than the proliterate. From 1909 white residential areas in Vredesdorp and Fordsburg included schools which taught pupils in Afrikaans. DRC prelates spoke the “taal” from the pulpit. Segregation allowed the Afrikaner nationalist leaders preferential access to poor whites allowing them to propagate the various racial myths described extensively in previous chapters. By emphasising the need to avoid racial degeneration through racial mixing, the poor white became complicit in the segregation narrative and thereby the need to maintain “racial purity”.

Education was never a priority of the poor white in the early years, with subsequent generations being able to survive without it. Subsistence and pastoral farming required minimal education, if any. Pastoral farming had continued in South Africa for 200 years, providing the settlers with a means of subsistence for which education was irrelevant.

All this changed with the mineral revolution, leading as it did, to the urbanisation described above. One of the other unintended consequences was the need for the education of the poor white, particularly technical and vocational. With hindsight, Malherbe's analysis of the poor white problem was remarkably prescient. In Chapter 4, evidence is presented which demonstrates the paucity of educational facilities available for most white South Africans in rural areas. With preference being given to the teaching of English at school level and the dominance of English speakers in commerce and the professions, rural whites had as little chance of a good education as rural blacks. Malherbe's passion for education would resonate with what the great Mandela would later say about the subject:

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another".³⁶⁰

Whilst adapting to city life must have been challenging for the poor whites there is evidence that some could see the benefits. Children could be educated and there was access to health care and other services without cost.³⁶¹ The attitude of the poor white indicates a degree of dependency on the state for benefits they were not prepared to pay for themselves - very much contrary to what Mandela had in mind.

Despite the generally poor level of education amongst poor white rural Afrikaners it is worth mentioning that many of their leaders had excelled academically. Many of these individuals had rural origins, but spent their working careers in urbanised South Africa. Gen. Botha had received a smattering of education, but Smuts had qualified as a lawyer at Cambridge University. In doing so he became the first person to pass both parts of the Law Tripos examination on the same occasion, being awarded a distinction in both.³⁶²

Following Smuts, a number of lawyers became Prime Ministers – Hertzog, Vorster and F.W. de Klerk. Malan was a theologian and Verwoerd a professor of sociology. With the exception of de Klerk, all graduated from Stellenbosch University. Furthermore, the role of intellectuals

³⁶⁰Nelson Mandela in T. Steenkamp: "Study buddy mom jets in to help daughter," *Sunday Times*, 1 April 2018, p. 5.

³⁶¹A.M. Grundlingh: "Gone to the Dogs": The Cultural Politics of Gambling – The Rise and Fall of British Greyhound Racing on the Witwatersrand, 1932-1949. *South African Historical Journal* 48 (May 2003), p 182.

³⁶²R. Steyn: *Unafraid of Greatness*, p. 15.

in the growth and leadership of the Afrikaner Broederbond should not be underestimated. Many of the “Broeders” were drawn from the Afrikaner middle-class, being members of the clergy, schoolteachers, university lecturers, lawyers and doctors. Of the ten chairmen of the Broederbond between 1918 and 1968, five were university professors.³⁶³

Grouping poor whites into defined residential areas made it easier for access to good education at an affordable rate because of economies of scale. Effectively the state could prioritise white education at the expense of others through local, regional and national agencies with a dedicated purpose. Staffing with good teachers was easier as many preferred to live in cities and towns. The cost of specialised management, inspection and control was more affordable when expenses were amortised over larger school units which would not have been possible with thousands of small schools on farms and in villages.

Much the same argument could be applied to the mission of the DRC. Reference is made to the popularity of church attendance in the poor white suburbs of Johannesburg. The protestant religions had been a feature of Afrikaner life since the early Cape colony. Being able to readily attend familiar places of worship led by university educated prelates became an effective means of incorporating the poor white into the Afrikaner volk. There were however certain limits to the tolerance of the poor white to DRC prescription. The one such example is the disapproval of the “dominees” to Afrikaner working class participation in dog racing on the Witwatersrand. Publicly the DRC considered dog racing a frivolous waste of money for poorly paid working class people. Privately, the church was soon supported by politicians concerned with promoting Afrikaner culture as part of a broader process of the ethnic mobilisation of the white working classes. The obsession with dog racing did not conform to Calvinist standards of acceptable leisure activities for the volk, particularly as its origins were British. Ultimately they were successful in having dog racing banned by 1949, but not without some resistance from their working class congregations.³⁶⁴

When considering the cultural factors impeding educational achievement, the poor whites were exposed to the full spectrum of negativity. There were doubts about their intelligence due to malnutrition, disease, isolation and intermarrying. Furthermore, isolation, reduced access to educational facilities and limited intellectual stimulation were additional factors limiting the development of acceptable levels of intelligence. The prevalence and interaction

³⁶³D. Welsh: *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, p. 14.

³⁶⁴A.M. Grundlingh: “Gone to the Dogs”: The Cultural Politics of Gambling – The Rise and Fall of British Greyhound Racing on the Witwatersrand, 1932-1949. *South African Historical Journal* 48 (May 2003), pp.182-185.

of these vectors were very certain to produce a class of people who were intellectually impaired, but not due to major genomic differences. The mechanisms of biological inheritance and the influence of culture are often impossible to separate.

From the evidence presented in Chapter 7, the surplus accruing to the state arising from the abolishment of the gold standard and the employment generated during the Second World War provided the means to end white poverty. Yet in the absence of urbanisation, the poor white, irrespective of all the preferential employment advantages they enjoyed, would not have benefited from industrialisation. Iscor, Escom and the factories producing war material would not have been built in Willowmore, Steytlerville or Oudsthoorn but rather in the big cities on the reef.

The pathways to understanding the poor white problem intersect at different times in the first half of the 20th century often due to factors beyond human control – be they politicians, prelates or the poor themselves. The response of politicians to random events, such as droughts, the gold price, locust invasions and disease epidemics has usually been reactive and South Africa was no exception. The major structural changes in the economy could not have been predicted before the mineral revolution and subsequent industrialisation. The relationship between the gold price, exchange rates and the gold standard was poorly understood by most politicians and economists and in South Africa initially resisted because of anti-imperial prejudice. The pathway to the cities was an uncertain journey with unpredictable outcomes. The causes and consequences of the two world wars in the 20th century were totally beyond the influence of local politicians, including Smuts. The social and economic outcomes of war are notoriously difficult to predict. Only through hindsight is it possible to understand how urbanisation allowed the white and black working classes to benefit from the industrialisation arising from the manufacture of products important for the war effort. As a result of the United Party government's support for the Second World War black urbanisation was tolerated. In the end Smuts had to deal, reactively, with the consequences – rampant Afrikaner nationalism and a permanent black population in the cities. The actions taken by the Pact government to uplift the poor white were proactive in the sense that their political support was needed for Afrikaner survival. One cannot ignore however that the preferential employment policies implemented between 1924 and 1934 were planned for poor white subsistence, not skills development. In many respects they are similar to the affirmative action programmes currently in operation in South Africa. Further intersecting pathways include the poor whites incorporation in the Afrikaner nationalist project through

the propagation of race theories confirming their superiority over people of colour. Yet another pathway leads to the eugenic measures and segregationist agenda aimed at maintaining racial purity.

Whilst urbanisation was considered negatively by the church and Afrikaner nationalist politicians, it proved to be the ultimate solution to white poverty. The incorporation of the poor white into the Afrikaner middle class must be seen as an unintended consequence of urbanisation. The presence of large numbers of poor whites concentrated in the cities forced politicians to take cognisance of their needs. By meeting those needs ethnic loyalties were re-kindled. The nationalist project finally embraced the poor whites by identifying with their Afrikaner language, history, religion and hatreds – imperialism, capitalism and blacks. In the cities and towns the poor whites benefited from educational opportunities, social interactions, benevolent welfare programmes, residential segregation, protection from black competition and ultimately membership of the Afrikaner volk. Their racial provenance may have been in doubt, but armed with their vote, their admission to white privilege and opportunity was assured. The ultimate irony is that the war their leaders did not want, led to the poor whites redemption from poverty.

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