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On 1 April 1885 the Protestant missionary Daniel Matthews, of the Maloga Mission on the Murray River in New South Wales, expressed his views of Aboriginal people’s fitness for work in his annual mission report. While he had not, he wrote, witnessed the ‘growth of industry’ which he had anticipated would accompany Aboriginal people’s ‘improved life and religious experience’ on the mission, this was not altogether surprising, as ‘the present race of aborigines [sic]’ were ‘a degenerated people’ lacking in the ‘power of endurance, hardihood, and nerve’. Indeed, Matthews continued in the next year’s report, the missionaries of Maloga had ‘probably expect[ed] too much from a people who for many generations have been strangers to the toil, thrift, and plodding energy, so characteristic of our race’.

In this statement, the missionary pitted one race’s vigour and persistence against the absence of these characteristics in the other. And, while his ‘admission’ that he had ‘probably expected too much’ of the mission’s Aboriginal residents served many immediate purposes—not the

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1 This chapter presents work which is further developed in my ‘Settlers on a mission: faith, power and subjectivity in the lives of Daniel and Janet Matthews’ (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2008).
least of which was to justify the slow progress he had made in making the mission self-sufficient—his observations were grounded in an understanding of race which held sway far beyond the mission field. In this schema whiteness—or the white ‘race’—was placed at the apex of an evolutionary hierarchy which was thought to determine a person’s ability to perform a range of functions including work, cognition and worship. And for Daniel Matthews, as for many other Protestant missionaries, work was the most important of these. These missionaries’ definition of ‘whiteness’, this chapter contends, was in fact linked inextricably with assumptions about an individual’s ability to labour, an attribute which in turn was imbued with significant moral status.

Despite the fact that the idea of racial fixity was not consonant with the evangelical concept of universal salvation, the pages of Matthews’ reports, diaries and letters, and those of others like him, were characterised by their uneasy juxtaposition of these parallel discourses of inclusion and exclusion.4 And, although it was unusual for Matthews to compare the two ‘races’ explicitly, the comparison was most explicit in his discussions of Aboriginal labour. Aboriginal people, though ‘of one blood’ with the rest of humanity, were according to Matthews both physically and culturally incapable of hard work.5 Yet despite the supposed intransigence of their elders, Matthews believed, ‘we have everything to encourage us in the young, who are being trained and educated in those

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4 Matthews was not unusual in his ability to reconcile evolutionary and evangelical thought. For discussions of evangelical attitudes to racial classification and Darwin’s theory of evolution see David N. Livingstone, *Darwin’s forgotten defenders: the encounter between evangelical theology and evolutionary thought* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1987); and David N. Livingstone, D.G. Hart and Mark A. Noll, eds., *Evangelicals and science in historical perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

qualities which we believe will make them good citizens and industrious members of the community’. With the right instruction in the right environment, it seemed, productivity could be taught regardless of race.  

However, the promise of change for future generations was in practice rarely, if ever, realised, the discursive constitution of Aboriginal peoples as children in a ‘family of man’ in reality signalling an ‘endless deferral’ of their rights.  

Taking this observation as its starting point, this chapter uses discussions of work on Maloga Mission as a window into the ways in which whiteness, race, and labour were linked in the minds of Christian missionaries and settler society more broadly in the south east of Australia in the late 19th century. Though disparate and often contradictory, missionaries’ observations can tell us much about the material, social, and spiritual economies of Christian missions during this period, while also casting light upon the complicated role of whiteness in determining the position of Aboriginal workers in the settler-colonial economy as a whole. As such, the chapter moves from a general discussion of whiteness and labour in the south east of Australia to the more specific formulations espoused by the missionaries of Maloga Mission.

**Whiteness, race and labour in the settler-colonial mission field**

In the 19th century, as Angela Woollacott has noted, whiteness was part of ‘a racial lexicon forged in multiple colonial sites, especially the

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6 Matthews, Eleventh report, 5.

confrontational and violent sites of settler colonialism. It shaped conceptions of racial hierarchy, and in settler colonies like Australia was used to justify Indigenous dispossession, colonial rule and violence. But while there is a small but growing body of work on whiteness in the settler-colonial context, there is little historical work dealing specifically with whiteness in the complex but critical context of Christian missions. Furthermore, the relationship between whiteness and labour in the mission field has barely been touched upon. This is perhaps surprising, given United States whiteness studies’ early grounding in labour relations, represented most famously in David Roediger’s 1991 book *The wages of whiteness*. Yet, while clearly ripe for exploration, the question of whiteness and labour in 19th-century missions is not without its pitfalls.

One potential problem with using whiteness as a category of analysis during this period has been identified by Leigh Boucher, who suggests that historical treatments of whiteness have been plagued by a lack of definitional clarity between whiteness as ‘the operation of power via racialised exclusions’, and whiteness as an explicit empirical designation. This is particularly pertinent to the late 19th century, when ‘whiteness’, rather than ‘British’ or ‘Anglo-Saxon’, was only just beginning to emerge

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as a racial category. On Christian missions such as Maloga this was certainly the case, with missionaries—who generally referred to their Aboriginal charges as ‘blacks’—only infrequently identifying themselves or other non-Aboriginal people on their mission explicitly as ‘white’.\textsuperscript{12} For this reason, the moments at which ‘whiteness’ did emerge specifically as a designation in missionary texts during this period are particularly important, as they suggest shifts and developments in missionaries’ awareness of racialised selves in relation to racialised others.

If the idealisation of white labour was one of the economic and ideological foundations of the white Australian settler colony, it was an equally seductive, if more problematic, notion for missionaries whose material investments in settler colonialism sat often uncomfortably alongside their ‘higher’ spiritual goals. Premised on the notion that the Australian continent before European occupation could be classified as \textit{waste lands}, Australian settler colonialism relied upon the furphy that Aboriginal people lacked the skills and the perseverance to render land productive.\textsuperscript{13} Aboriginal ‘idleness’ enabled them to be discursively proscribed associations with work, despite the fact that their labour, paid and unpaid, was integral to the success of many colonial industries, including Christian missions.\textsuperscript{14} In this way, Ann Curthoys and Clive Moore have argued, settler colonialism rendered Indigenous labour simultaneously desirable and undesirable: ‘desirable because available and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Claire McLisky, ‘All of one blood?’, 408–15.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
exploitable, and undesirable because Indigenous cultural and material life was at odds with the colonisers. Furthermore, the very presence of Indigenous labourers acted as a reminder of their continuing claims to the land. Perhaps for this reason, white employers continued to insist that Aboriginal people were poor workers, though they used them nonetheless as cheap labour.

From an Aboriginal perspective, labour was seen in quite a different light. Richard Broome has claimed that ‘Aboriginal people saw little point in regular daily work, as it was not how their traditional economy operated’. And, though this explanation has less applicability in the late 19th century when many Aboriginal people had already lived for years on missions or pastoral stations and were at least to some extent reliant upon regular work from white employers, Broome’s observation that ‘Aboriginal workers also placed Aboriginal business before white needs, leaving when it suited them and not their bosses’, was a continuing factor in colonial labour relations.

While labour was central to Protestant missionaries’ vision for the future of the Aboriginal ‘race’, there was enormous disagreement between sects, and even between individual missionaries within sects, as to how labour fitted into the ‘civilising’ project. Whatever their persuasion,

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17 Broome, *Aboriginal Australians*, 57.
18 Ibid. 62–3.
19 Some, such as the Moravian missionary Friedrich Hagenauer of the Victorian mission Ramahyuck, imagined that while ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal people were inevitably destined to ‘die out’, those of mixed heritage could—and should—become quickly assimilated into a Christian working class, by any means necessary. For analysis of Hagenauer’s views see
however, all Christian missionaries were reliant on Aboriginal labour for the existence of their missions, and when Aboriginal residents resisted work most missionaries showed no reluctance to use compulsion.\textsuperscript{20} Because of the comparative lack of external regulation of missions during this period (especially in New South Wales, where the Board for the Protection of the Aborigines was formed only in 1883), mission managers and superintendents exercised an enormous degree of power in allocating, and enforcing, labour regimes. For this reason the sort of labour that was imagined for, and foisted upon, Aboriginal mission residents depended upon arbitrary and shifting factors, including the mission's financial status, the missionary's state of mind, and his or her views on the theoretical ‘benefits’ of labour to the future of the Aboriginal ‘race’. Perhaps most importantly, however, missionaries were themselves personally invested in establishing a link between whiteness and productivity. Convinced of the importance of labour for salvation, they strove to represent themselves as ‘God’s willing workers’, the faithful few battling the Devil amongst a sea of heathen. The backdrop of settler

\textsuperscript{20} For an example of the erratic behaviour of mission managers regarding Aboriginal work see Penny Brock, \textit{Outback ghettos: Aborigines, institutionalisation and survival} (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37.

depravity and Indigenous idleness made missionary work appear even more virtuous.

The case of Maloga

Though it existed for only 14 years (between 1874 and 1888), Maloga Mission looms large in the history of 19th-century Australian missions for several reasons. In its time the largest mission to Aboriginal people in Australia, the mission housed over 200 residents during the 1880s, many of whom converted to Christianity in 1883 in what was at that time the largest revival experienced on an Aboriginal mission. Positioned on the border of New South Wales and Victoria, Maloga was also the site of some controversy as local Aboriginal people moved back and forth across the Murray River to escape oppressive regimes in both colonies, and became a refuge for many after the notorious 1886 Aborigines Protection Act, which decreed that Aboriginal people of mixed descent could no longer live on Victorian missions.21 As the first, and largest, ‘second-wave’ Aboriginal mission in New South Wales, Maloga and its founders Daniel Matthews (a Methodist) and his wife Janet (a Baptist) were chief instigators in the push for the formation of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board, an organisation which ironically was eventually responsible for the mission’s demise.22 Even after its closure the legacy of Maloga—where many Aboriginal people learned to read and write, were encouraged and supported materially in their petitions for land, and where young Aboriginal men and women became politicised

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22 Nancy Cato, Mister Maloga (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1993); Bain Attwood, Rights for Aborigines (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2003).
through the missionaries’ universalist Christian worldviews—continued into the 20th century.\textsuperscript{23}

As a privately owned mission run along non-denominational lines, Maloga Mission was both more and less secure than other Church-run missions in the south east. Because the land on which the mission was built was owned by Daniel Matthews and his brother William, the missionaries had relatively better land security than most of their equivalents, who were employed by colonial churches or missionary societies which relied on government land grants to continue operating. Yet for this very reason, their motives for employing Aboriginal labour were the subject of constant speculation amongst the mission’s enemies, who claimed that the Matthews were using the mission as a pretext to exploit Aboriginal labour to run their own farm.\textsuperscript{24} Indeed, though their wrongdoing was never substantiated, doubts about this issue were cited as the official justification for the New South Wales colonial Government’s 1888 decision to move the mission from Maloga to the adjacent Aboriginal reserve, Cummeragunja, hence effectively closing the Matthews’ mission.

Over the course of Maloga’s existence changes of fortune, and mentality, changed the way in which labour—whether Aboriginal or ‘white’—was seen on the mission. As the mission became reliant on public funding during the early years of the 1880s, it became more and more difficult for the missionaries to gainsay either government policy or

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\textsuperscript{24} This conundrum had been commented upon in a report commissioned by the New South Wales Government in 1883, in which it found that ‘great difficulty has been found in obtaining suitable work for those [residents of Maloga] who are willing and competent to labour, as, were Mr. Matthews to employ them on his own property his motives would be liable to misconstruction’. ‘Protection of the Aborigines (Minutes of the Colonial Secretary, together with reports)’, New South Wales Legislative Assembly, 2 March 1883. Both Nancy Cato and Richard Broome comment on the pressure under which this placed the missionaries. See Cato, \textit{Mister Maloga}; Broome, \textit{Aboriginal Australians}, 80.
private interests. The expansion of agriculture and pastoralism was inescapable—settler society was slowly, but surely, working its way towards an imagined ‘end-point’ of total settler domination. In this context, all the missionaries could do was ameliorate the condition of those Aboriginal people displaced by colonial expansion, and attempt to mould them into ‘good Christian workers’.

In directing and controlling the types of labour that Aboriginal people performed on the mission, the Matthews were attempting to effect a transformation in the work culture of Aboriginal people. Labour they considered redemptive; the Protestant values of faith, work and family formed the core of their mission ideology, and were a key aspect of the message they communicated to Aboriginal converts. The Matthews’ ideas about Aboriginal labour were also, however, formulated in a climate of multiple racial and cultural conflicts. For all their professed idealism, the Maloga missionaries needed to sustain the mission as a private enterprise in a secular state, to feed, clothe and shelter mission inmates, and to ensure the continuation of their own roles as missionaries. They relied upon the labour of Aboriginal people to do all these things. Aboriginal labour was deployed in establishing an orchard and vegetable garden, from which the mission was fed and which occasionally brought in a profit. During periods when the mission could not sustain them, Aboriginal men were sent out to work on sheep and cattle stations, the missionaries exhorting them to provide for their families with the wages they earned. It is important to note, however, that productivity was not just a matter of pragmatism for the missionaries. It was also an article of faith, and in this context the mission’s failure to become self-sustainable was a particular source of ire to them.

25 The historical and denominational peculiarity of this approach to work was first analysed by Max Weber in his ground-breaking work, *The Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism*, first published in German in 1905 but later translated by Talcott Parsons (London: Unwin University Books, 1930).
Mission life was thus organised around labour. During the day the mission’s activities were clearly delineated along gender lines, with Aboriginal men working in the garden, building houses, and from 1883 fencing in the Aboriginal Reserve (later to become Cummeragunja), while Aboriginal women cooked, baked, cleaned and sewed. However, the ‘work’ done on the mission was not just of a material nature. In the evenings mission residents of both sexes gathered for singing and prayer. Weekly Bible lessons were ‘much appreciated by some of the men and women’; Matthews took care to make the lessons ‘of a special character for those more advanced in intelligence and religious experiences’.26 These nightly meetings were in fact the most regular and reliable activities on the mission, drawing a considerable crowd even during times of trouble and discord.

By emphasising spiritual training to this degree, Matthews was going against the opinion of the New South Wales Protector of Aborigines George Thornton, who believed that Aboriginal people were incapable of benefiting from religious instruction. Thornton contended that, since Aboriginal people had been proven capable of reading, writing and ‘the use of figures’, they should be ‘taught trades’, and made ‘useful and sometimes clever mechanics’.27 The ‘females’, for their part, ‘should be taught how to be useful and valuable as domestic servants’. Thornton did not discuss the reasoning behind these suggestions, but his opinion was ultimately shaped by what he called his ‘knowledge of the painful fact’ that ‘the black aboriginals are fast disappearing—destined soon to be extinct’.28 It is clear that he envisaged that the Aboriginal people trained on mission stations such as Maloga and Warangesda (run by Matthews’ friend John Gribble) would contribute to the lowest sector of the colonial economy. By defying the advice of Thornton and others involved with the

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26 Matthews, Eleventh report, 16 May 1884, 10.
28 Ibid.
Aborigines’ Protection Association and the Aborigines’ Protection Board (both of New South Wales), Matthews adhered to his long-stated belief that Aboriginal people were not a dying race. Further, in encouraging men on the mission to become preachers and spiritual teachers to the white shearers and drovers with whom they worked, he demonstrated that his aspirations for Aboriginal people went far beyond their ‘usefulness’ to colonial society. Rather, Matthews was interested in Aboriginal peoples’ usefulness to God, and to his own evangelising project. This vision, of course, was no less an imposition on Aboriginal people than Thornton’s vision of a labouring underclass, but it was one which had significantly different outcomes.

The tension between spiritual and menial work on the mission was ironic considering that the very ethic by which the missionaries lived—that of piety, diligence and productivity—had been ‘intended to end the false dichotomy between the highly privileged vocation of religious work and the lesser esteemed life of toil in the everyday world’.29 As Joan Martin has explained, early Protestant reformers such as Martin Luther and John Calvin ‘gave Western thought and Christianity the first interpretation of work as a positive social act applicable to all persons in every socio-economic, political, and occupational status’. This interpretation was ‘intended to end what the Reformers saw as a false dichotomy between the highly privileged vocation and calling of the religious life and the lesser esteemed life of toil in the everyday world prevalent in Roman Catholic thought’.30 Yet Protestant missions to Aboriginal people, despite their ‘broad church’ approach, fostered an unequal relationship between spiritual work—most often done by the ‘white’ mission residents, or the missionaries—and menial work, assigned to those lacking in ‘whiteness’.

30 Ibid.
Unsurprisingly, a tension between spiritual and secular work was also evident within the Aboriginal community at Maloga. Once members of the community became involved in proselytisation, those ‘chosen’ for spiritual work were privileged by the missionaries above others. The gendered nature of mission life, furthermore, meant that some converts had far greater access to the privilege of this kind of ‘work’ than others.31 For the Aboriginal men of Maloga, opportunities to teach outside the mission meant greater respect and autonomy within the mission; women on the other hand were generally limited in their proselytisation to within the mission grounds. In April 1884 Matthews reported that even when the Aboriginal men were forced to leave the mission to seek employment such as rabbiting for local squatters, they were ‘full of determination to preach the gospel while they are away’.32 And, though according to the missionary they were ‘exposed to fierce temptations, the more so because of their Christian profession’, most were reported to return with their Christian honour intact. In this formulation, Matthews represented the ‘work’ entailed by evangelisation as equally, if not more, important than the physical work undertaken by these men on their travels. In a climate of sin and obduracy on the part of surrounding settlers, Matthews considered maintaining the faith to be hard work for the Aboriginal residents; certainly not the easy option.

It was during this period that Matthews first reported the mission’s Mauritian-born school teacher, Thomas Shadrach James, taking Aboriginal men with him on Sundays to ‘assist in preaching the Gospel of Salvation to the settlers on the Victorian side of the Murray’.33 For the first time in the mission’s history, the Aboriginal people of Maloga—

31 There is much to be said on the gendered nature of work at Maloga Mission, and the degree to which even residents’ conversion testimonies seem to have reflected a gendered socialisation around working activities. See Claire McLisky, ‘The location of faith? Power, agency and spirituality on Maloga Mission, 1874–1888’, paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Australian Historical Association, Melbourne University, 9 July 2008.
32 Matthews, Eleventh report, 21 April 1884, 7.
33 Ibid. 2 June 1884, 11.
notably the men—were being given credit for a very different kind of work from the fencing, building, shearing and cropping previously mentioned. Moreover, they appeared to seek and organise this work independently of the white missionaries who were clearly ‘in charge’ of other forms of work on the mission. In this case, Matthews’ comments about the execution and results of their work were overwhelmingly positive. Yet at other times, especially when Matthews was feeling the pressure from Maloga’s governing bodies, even his most favoured protégés were pressured to undertake hard physical labour, often resulting in acts of fierce resistance.

The question of authority came to a head when the missionary encountered resistance amongst some Aboriginal men with whom he had made a ‘contract’ to fence in the recently granted ‘Aboriginal Reserve’. Disappointed that ‘the men do not take an interest in what is for their welfare’, Matthews decided to replace the men with hired white labour.\textsuperscript{34} Four days later he reported that the reserve fence was ‘going on rapidly, and satisfactorily in the hands of the white men’, and could not resist comparing their work to that of the Aboriginal men.\textsuperscript{35} He longed, he wrote:

\begin{quote}

\begin{itemize}
  \item to see our men work with the same vigour and persistency. Some day I may do so. If they could direct their energies in this way, and go on in the path we indicate, they would soon become a self-supporting and thrifty community. Presuming they were people of this character, they would soon take their place in society, and there would be no need for Mission Stations.\textsuperscript{36}
\end{itemize}
\end{quote}

While Matthews here attempted to align himself with what he called ‘his men’, who in his opinion had nothing to lose in embracing a more vigorous work ethic, he had in effect aligned himself with the white workers whose persistence he so admired. What held the missionary and

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. 1 and 21 September 1885, 15.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid. 25 September 1885, 16.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid. 16.
his white workers together, in this discursive construction, was the productivity (understood through the colour) of their working bodies and their commitment to capitalism, which also defined the boundary between coloniser and colonised in the settler colony as a whole.37

It is perhaps ironic to note that these workers belonged to the same general class of settler colonists that Matthews often disparaged elsewhere as ‘wicked white men’, a degenerate influence on the Aboriginal people of the region. In these instances the missionary constructed himself as benevolent white protector battling off the evils of other men who, he implied, also held power over Aboriginal people. In the act of asserting his own managerial right—a right anchored in white Christian virtue and British middle-class culture—over the irreligious working-class whites whom he perceived as a moral and physical danger to potential converts, the missionary in effect broadcast the message that it was whiteness, and white men more specifically, who held the power in colonial society. And power, in this conception, was intrinsically related to productivity. Since the 16th century, as Anne McClintock has observed, idleness had long been associated with corruption and poverty. In this construction responsibility for the condition of Aboriginal people on the mission was easily displaced from the missionaries on to unruly Aboriginal bodies, apparently too undisciplined to take advantages of the opportunities offered them.

Despite these characterisations of Aboriginal people as resistant to work, the lack of industriousness on the mission was often in fact the result of the missionaries’ inability to provide workers with labour, tools, or remuneration. Indeed, in April 1885 Matthews wrote in his diary that

37 While the discourse of Aboriginal ‘idleness’ remained (and continues to remain) a constant across time and geography, it does need to be acknowledged that, especially during the later years of the 19th century, whiteness was not always equated with fitness for work in the north of the continent. For a detailed exposition of this idea see Warwick Anderson, The cultivation of whiteness: science, health and racial destiny in Australia (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002).
the ‘industrious men’ were ‘annoyed & dissatisfied’, and wanted to go away to work for money.³⁸ Unrest on the mission over these issues was not limited to the men; in the same diary entry Matthews reported that Liz Barber had ‘threatened to pack up and leave the place “because you don’t give us money to buy jam, and extras”’. Matthews’ solution to the latter complaint was to enlist the help of Janet—‘Mrs M.’, he wrote in his diary, ‘is to make jam’. Procuring work for the men was not so easy, and Matthews was forced to send a letter to two neighbouring pastoralists with whom the missionary had uneasy relationships in order to solve this problem. Never, Matthews wrote, had he experienced ‘more care & anxiety in the work than now’, observing that Miss Booth, a visitor from Melbourne ‘says I’m like Moses’.³⁹ This was not the first time the missionary had compared himself to a biblical figure.

Ignoring for the moment Matthews’ concern with his own trials, the Aboriginal men’s expressions of desire for work turn on its head the missionary’s claim, cited at the beginning of this paper, that he had expected ‘too much’ from the Aboriginal workers. Rather, it seems, the workers had expected ‘too much’ from him. When they wanted full-time, challenging work with adequate remuneration, all he could provide them with was odd jobs around the mission, in exchange for rations or occasionally wages if the work was part of a contract.

Conclusion

Writing in the North American context, David Roediger has suggested that idealising white labour was one way for white Americans to make peace with their complicity in the slave labour of African Americans at the same time that it gave them a psychological reassurance that helped to compensate for their own oppression.⁴⁰ Racial dynamics in Australia, a settler colony materially reliant upon Aboriginal labour and yet

³⁹ Ibid.
⁴⁰ Roediger, 13.
discursively reliant upon its denial, developed in a completely different context, with the relationships between settlers and Aboriginal workers differing radically to those which developed between white settlers and African Americans in the United States. Indeed, the position of Australian Aboriginal workers, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson and Patrick Wolfe have suggested, was much more similar to that of Native Americans, although much work remains to be done on any such comparison, particular in the mission context. Yet despite the vast differences between the Australian and North American contexts, Roediger’s comment on the psychological function of linking labour with whiteness remains useful. Indeed, while Daniel Matthews could not be said to have ‘made peace’ with Aboriginal exploitation as such, his attempts to denigrate the abilities of Aboriginal labourers in his Tenth and Eleventh reports similarly suggest an acute awareness of the need to delineate imagined boundaries between the ‘races’ in order to protect his own position. It is also possible that the self-designation of virtuous white worker gave missionaries like the Matthews a psychological reassurance which, like that of the white American workers of which Roediger wrote, compensated somewhat for the social ridicule they faced in their own positions as marginalised whites.

In this context, the utility of mission histories in revealing relationships between race, labour and whiteness becomes clear. While missionaries like Matthews invested their own uprightness in their status

41 For an overview see Curthoys and Moore, ‘Working for the white people.’
43 For a discussion of the complexity of liminal whiteness see Matt Wray’s Not quite white: white trash and the boundaries of whiteness (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). For a discussion of the specific fragility of missionary claims to white privilege, see Joanna Cruickshank’s chapter in this collection.
as ‘God’s Willing Workers’, the settler-colonial missionary enterprise relied implicitly on notions such as ‘blackness’ and ‘whiteness’ for its constructions of virtue. Justified by the evangelical imperative to convert souls, missionaries assumed their authority not just on the basis of their race and class, but also on their assumed superior ‘productivity’. Indeed, it is possible to argue that for a whole generation of Christian missionaries, race and class were simply understood through productivity, a scenario which left little room for the Aboriginal people who found themselves defined as not just unproductive, but also on this basis as incapable of owning land or securing self-determination. Paradoxically, the evangelical emphasis on spiritual labour was malleable enough to give many residents the opportunity to move, and work, outside the mission sphere. This they did in spite, and not because, of the oppressive associations between whiteness and productivity so emphasised by Christian missionaries.