Reporting on "Torturing a Negro": Challenging Prison Violence and Frameworks of Transnational White Supremacy in the *Tocsin*

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Following extensive negotiations with the American consulate, on February 11, 1916, William King was escorted to an American barquentine docked in Melbourne. The *Puako* was bound for British Colombia and would mark King's first return to North America since arriving in Melbourne as a young man in 1887. The *Puako*'s captain later reported that King tried to contribute to work on board during his voyage of repatriation, but ill health meant the former boxer could no longer stand up to the conditions brought on by strong winds and gales at sea. His ailments brought him little sympathy from the Australian press, which celebrated his departure and declared him to be one of the worst criminals to ever set foot in the Australian colony of Victoria. Their reports sneered at those whose "sympathetic hearts" had sought to highlight the violence, brutality, and injustices he had faced during years of imprisonment within the Victorian prison system.[1]

This article examines those sympathetic reports on William King's case published in the labour paper *Toscin*. Produced by a radical political collective in Melbourne between 1897 and 1906, the paper's political and editorial position meant it was prepared to publish articles critical of William King's prison experiences. Their reports of King's case appeared in 1898 and 1899, when "the influence of journalists had reached an unprecedented level."[2] For African Americans it was a time of high optimism in the potential of journalism. Newspapers were understood to have a key role in the making of just democratic institutions through their power to mould and guide public opinion. It was also a time when White supremacy was becoming embedded in the representation of Black people in the telling and circulation of news.[3] These different registers of transnational print cultures marked the life of William King, an African American man from South Carolina who migrated to Australia in the hope of finding freer spaces in which to live. Instead, racist limitations cast in the geographies of colonial Melbourne restricted his opportunities.

Drawing upon archive prison records and court proceedings as related in newspapers and digital periodical archives, this paper reflects upon how the *Tocsin* represented William King's confinement within the Melbourne prison system through reimaginings of and international geographical representations of Blackness. Focusing local geographies of the *Tocsin* offers a way to consider how one organisation reported the experience of an individual Black man in order to illustrate broader inequalities in the colony. However, the *Tocsin*'s primary concern with particular formations of White labour meant that those who sought to defend King's right to a life free from state-sanctioned violence struggled to reimagine the international and localised structures of White supremacy from which they wrote. The retelling of William King's story centres the reporting of racism and signals the importance of integrating migration geographies and diasporic Black histories within periodical studies.[4] In focusing on the case of William King, this paper does not take a comparative approach. It does not examine the way in which King's experiences were reported in different transnational periodical settings.[5] It takes William King as a transnational subject and considers how the violence and injustice he faced was understood in a transnational context of ideas that framed the telling of his story in one particular periodical.

As a warning, this paper contains language quoted from newspapers of the period that is racialised and racist, including words which were and remain gravely offensive.

The *Tocsin*

The *Tocsin* was founded in Melbourne as a penny weekly in 1897, and it ran until 1906 as a "watchdog for Victoria."[6] A tocsin is a warning bell or signal, and the paper's first cover design depicted a worker tolling a tocsin bell (figure 1). Established as a cooperative through shares owned by individuals, trade unions, labour leagues, and "Representative Men," a year's subscription cost 6s.[7] The first issue, published in October 1897, made clear its commitment to working people's concerns. It declared itself to be "The People's Penny Weekly Paper," produced in a newspaper office conducted strictly on union principles. The weekly was to be owned and maintained by workers and their unions, and its explicit goal was to serve their interests.[8] Its founders included trade unionist Tom Tunnecliffe, the poet and journalist Bernard Patrick O'Dowd, and John Percy Jones, who became secretary of the North Melbourne branch of the Political Labor Council in 1897.[9] Hugh Anderson argues these connections to the Labour Party did not make it a Labour Party paper, and he identifies it as one of the few papers making radical arguments against the particular model of Australian federation being voted for in the referendum in June 1898.[10]

The *Tocsin*'s platform of interests was vast, and the first issue listed over seventy issues of concern. These included the need for "One Adult One Vote" and for the question of the federation of Australia be put to a "referendum of the whole of the people of Australia."[11] William King's case would sit within *Tocsin*'s long held concerns with the criminal law system. The paper argued for wide-ranging prison reform, including compensation to be awarded to people accused, imprisoned, or condemned unjustly and for the abolition of capital punishment and flogging. It argued for state support for the unemployed, a universal minimum wage, factory reform, and the nationalisation of water frontages. Reviews and reports in the regular column "Stage, Study and Studio" reflected the paper's commitment to the arts.[12] The *Tocsin* demanded free railways, a free *Hansard*, and the nonrecognition of titles. It opposed discrimination against illegitimate children, though it did not support contraception.[13] It also advocated the abolition of all laws that placed women at a disadvantage compared to men and included a women's column from 1898.[14]

The first issue included an illustration by Lionel Lindsay of men hammering in a forge to accompany an essay by "Gavah the Blacksmith," though the *Tocsin*'s first editorial framed a broad definition of workers that strove to actively challenge social divisions: "We don't particularly care whether the labourer uses a shovel, or a theodolite, a tape measure or a violin bow, the reigns of the sanitary waggon or the pen of a poet, we are Labour's tocsin against Idleness, against Parasitism, against Caste, against Flunkeyism, against Expropriation."[15] The paper was primarily concerned with the cause of workers and democracy in Victoria. To support the development of its content, the editors appealed directly to union secretaries and editors for reports of meetings, statistics, and other items of news connected with the Labour Question. More broadly, they encouraged submissions of text, poems, short stories, quoted passages, newspaper clippings, extracts from letters, and short articles. They emphasised all submissions would be welcome and receive careful consideration—as long as they were brief. These contributions were key to the paper and the

editors greatly appreciated the efforts of those who sent material in with no reward other than "having done something to help along Victoria's only Labour Paper."[16]

Though there was a clearly framed editorial focus on Victoria, an international geography of workers' experiences was present from the outset. A column titled "The Working World" appeared in the first issue, informing readers of the new leader of the New York garment-makers, union decisions on wages by British seamen, the Polish Socialist party, and the costs of the state railways of Denmark as opposed to the private railways of England.[17] Over the years this section of the paper reported on events in New South Wales but also the growing membership of the Miner's Federation in Britain, a congress of German sailors being held in Hamburg, and the calculation of wages and dividends in Russia.[18] A one-page special supplement in the second issue carried a photographic portrait of Ben Tillett, the British socialist and leader of "new unionism."[19]

This working world was a White world. It is a representation of the international union of White labour coalescing at the end of the nineteenth century, as mapped by Marylin Lake and Henry Reynolds.[20] The concerns and campaigns of Black labourers were rarely reported and there was also little on the Black presence in Australia. The *Tocsin* did not present workers from Aboriginal nations, Africa, the Caribbean, or the United States as a part of the international labour movement it placed itself within. The paper acknowledged ill treatment and produced critical reflections on racial prejudice, but its stance while reporting it as "news" was complex.[21] Reports of lynchings of African Americans were not always clearly presented as a racialised injustice. These violent and sometimes barbaric killings were framed not as racist crimes undertaken by White citizens but rather as illustrations of the United States government's failed treatment of its White workers.[22] More broadly, reports of Black workers were usually framed through anti-Black narratives in which Black labour was depicted as being used to undercut the pay and conditions of White workers. Or in later issues, reports of lynchings were a way to criticise the "mixture of black and white" communities and resist the perceived attacks on labour conditions by those who supported the opening of Australia to labourers of colour.[23]

Thus the commitment to raise and clearly name the racialised violence William King faced was a disruptive narrative, challenging the politics of Whiteness in the colony and the narrative of concerns the *Tocsin* usually reported. But it took some time for King's ill treatment to be fully presented to the *Tocsin*'s readers. This could be because of a lack of concern for King, uncertainty over how to present the story, the time it took to identify a source, or some combination of all of these. Though the source is not identified, the content of the reports implies someone who had regular access to the prison and spoke to King on more than one occasion. In one account, the source notes that King's appearance on removal from solitary confinement reminded him of "the same wild stare" that he had seen "in the eyes of executed prisoners, and also in some suicides that are to be seen lying on the marble slabs of the morgue," which suggests the *Tocsin* had access to a long-serving employee.[24]

In an October 1898 column titled "Fair Comment," a short paragraph brought the case to readers' attention. King was not named, but the paper reported, "A black man in Pentridge is being treated most disgracefully."[25] This piece was framed through a criticism of the clergy, with the *Tocsin* reporting that King faced sanctions because as an atheist he had refused to attend church. He was being tormented and beaten and as such was being turned

by his jailors into another Weachuch—a Chinese Australian whose ill treatment the paper would reflect upon in more detail in a later issue. But despite the violence King faced, and knowing that Weachurch's life ended with his death by execution, a fuller report on the extent of King's mistreatment did not appear until over a year later.

An African American in Australia

Born in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1863, William A. Frazer, better known in the Australian press as William King, arrived in Melbourne in 1887. He is part of the little researched "Black Pacific," made up of people who in the mid- and late nineteenth century migrated from the Americas to the northern Pacific Asian regions as well to islands in Oceania.[26] As a migrant, King's route charted a journey similar to but not the same as Black transnational convicts who found themselves in Australia.[27] When King arrived in Australia, he could both read and write and was ostensively free, but he ended his life isolated and broken by the prison system in which he was incarcerated for many of the years he lived in the colony. During his earlier years in Melbourne, he had strived to make a name for himself as a boxer. He later worked also as a cook and stonemason.[28] Life in the colony was difficult for many workers, and King had no relatives to offer support. Melbourne Gaol was located amongst some of the poorest communities in the city, for whom life "remained precarious, with one foot in the street, one in the prison."[29] King was initially imprisoned for burglary and receiving stolen goods in 1888.[30] At a trial in 1908, he was declared a habitual criminal and sentenced to fifteen years in prison.

On his record sheet, King's complexion, hair, and eyes have been conflated into that of a "coloured man."[31] He stood five feet, ten inches, had long arms, and bore a scar on his left temple, perhaps a legacy from one of the boxing matches in which he had taken part. King may have been inspired to try and forge a boxing career in Australia by the success of Peter Jackson, touted in 1889 as "the Australian Champion Boxer who is scaring the Americans."[32] Born in St. Croix, Jackson emigrated to Australia with his parents as a child.[33] He began boxing in Sydney in 1882 and became a famous pugilist defeating the country's best fighters.[34] Travelling to San Francisco in the spring of 1888, Jackson hoped to compete for the world heavyweight title. He was celebrated by the Black community in the city, but segregation denied him the opportunity of a title fight.[35]

At his death in 1916, William King would be labelled only as one of the worst criminals in Victoria's history.[36] With convictions in 1889, 1890, 1900, and 1908, his prison record includes extensive notes on the punishments he received while serving his sentence. Their regularity gives a sense of the oppressive regime all prisoners endured. When its bluestone walls were erected in the mid-nineteenth century, Melbourne Gaol dominated the developing townscape.[37] Due to overcrowding, a stockade was built north of Melbourne near the village of Pentridge. This facility would later take all long-term prisoners, some of whom experienced the panopticon built to punish those labelled with an "insubordinate and dangerous nature."[38] King endured hundreds of days of solitary confinement here, with time added to his sentences for minor infringements of prison rules, such as "playing with dice" and "communicating with another prisoner."[39]

On release from prison in 1900, King found lodgings near the Town Hall in Prahran, a suburb of Melbourne, and began training for a return to pugilism. He was scheduled to fight a well-known boxer, Frederick Preston, on a Saturday night in late May, but before his highly

anticipated comeback could take place King was arrested once again for burglary.[41] He was charged with breaking into a home in St. Kilda, stealing jewellery and threatening a young woman with a knife.[42] The evidence against him seemed circumstantial and King pleaded innocent, but a jury found him guilty of the charges. He implored not to be sent to Pentridge, asking instead for the judge to grant him forty-eight hours to leave the colony rather than return him to a place where he was "not treated like a man at all."[43] The judge was unsympathetic, reportedly stating his only duty was to pass a severe sentence upon him. Though extra warders had been placed on duty in the court in "anticipation of a scene," King returned to prison quietly.[44]

On arrival he sought to defy the prison regime through small acts of resistance, such as singing and shouting in his cell, and these were harshly punished.[45] His refusal to conform to prison rules resulted in months being added to his sentence.[46] The reasons for these punishments were occasionally reported in Melbourne newspapers, embellishing King's reputation as "the most dangerous character" at Pentridge.[47] But in 1898 King's case became the focus of three questions raised in the Victorian Legislative Assembly. They were prompted by the first part of a lengthy report on King's case in the *Tocsin*. The first, published in December 1898, came under the headline "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," making clear the *Tocsin*'s departure from the usual reports on William King's treatment.[48]

Transnational Narratives of Blackness

Described in newspapers reports as "a coloured man," "a coloured pugilist," and a "negro," William King was subject to many representations as a Black man in the Australian press.[49] Narratives of Blackness circulated in the *Tocsin* itself from different social and cultural geographies. William King was situated locally within the politics of penal reforms to benefit Victorians who were imagined to be White. Commentaries on Black labour, though sometimes sympathetic to their exploitation, were presented in opposition to the prosperity and advancement of White labour. And though he was working class, King was not explicitly identified as a labourer within the reports. Other transnationally circulated stories placed King within a complex framework of Blackness that included artistic representations, popular minstrel shows, and theatre productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel was referenced in a couple of issues of the *Tocsin* from the 1890s in relation to Roman slavery systems and the nicknames of Australian cricketers. There is something of the suffering of Uncle Tom in the presentation of William King as a suffering and innocent negro in its reports.[50]

In early May 1900, before King's comeback fight had been thwarted by another arrest, the Melbourne *Herald* reported on King's presence in court. In this piece he was not a "notorious prisoner" but one of "two Othellos" fighting over their "one Desdemona."[51] The report came from the City Court, where King was charged with assaulting Harry Ali, "an Arab," both men being described "as black as the ace of spades."[52] Ali testified that his wife was living with King in the centre of Melbourne. Ali had come to take her away, and when he arrived an altercation with King took place. No witnesses to the assault could be produced and the bench dismissed the case as, according to the *Herald*, the proceedings "rapidly assumed the character of a Christy Minstrel entertainment."[53] This reference to two stage performances speaks to the *Herald*'s assumption that its readers would be familiar with Othello and minstrelsy. These were both transnational practices of performing Blackness, and

both roles had been performed by Black men in Australia. Though the *Herald* does not mention them by name, the report references two Black actors, Charles Lewis Jr. and Ira Aldridge, in its metaphors for Blackness in the space of a Melbourne city court.

Ira Aldridge, the London-born son of the celebrated African American actor with the same name, made his first Australian stage appearance at Melbourne's Theatre Royal in June 1867, playing the character Mungo, "a negro servant," in *The Padlock*.[54] The *Lorgnette* believed the only other "negro Tragedian" who appeared in Melbourne during the period was the American actor Hackett Coulthurst, who played Othello at the Haymarket Theatre in April 1867.[55] The *Argus*'s view of *The Padlock* was lukewarm, reporting that though Aldridge's performance was "tolerable," it fell "far removed from excellence."[56] When Aldridge pleaded to guilty on five counts of forgery in May 1872, the *Leader* described him as "the colored Tragedian," but the *Argus* sneeringly referred to him as "a half caste who is supposed to have some mysterious, but not easily defined, connexion with the theatrical profession."[57] Aldridge does not seem to have been able to find any more stage work, though in August 1880 Coulthurst was once again playing Othello, this time at the Queen's Theatre. On the advertising bill he appeared as: "Othello (a real African gentleman) Mr Hacket Coalthurst. The Ira Aldridge of Australia."[58]

Born in America in 1853, Charles Lewis Jr. arrived in Melbourne in 1872 where he worked for over seventeen years as a performer.[59] In 1890 he appeared as the plaintiff in a case against John F. Sheridan, claiming wrongful dismissal and the nonpayment of wages for the evenings he had already played in his role for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[60] Such productions were popular in Australia. In the late 1870s a group collaborated with a dramatic company to open a version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that ran for seventy-eight nights in Melbourne before transferring to Sydney and Adelaide.[61] The version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in which Lewis performed at Melbourne's Opera House included a number of American Fisk Jubilee melodies, forms of African American music that an *Argus* reporter believed readers would remember "were so popular some time ago."[62]

Richard Waterhouse explains that by the 1880s minstrel shows were moving towards vaudeville performances that contained more racist stereotypes than earlier Black-led productions. These were not American but rather a British form of minstrel show, with a style that "accentuated music more than humour" but also included "negro impersonations."[63] Waterhouse argues that the success of the Christy shows during the 1860s was significant in establishing minstrelsy in urban culture, particularly among the working classes of Australia. The *Herald*'s reporting of William King's trial in 1900 as a form of Christy Minstrel entertainment suggests that these shows remained in the popular memory decades later, directly framing how Black men's lives were understood and reported upon in the Melbourne press.

Reporting the Tortures of William King

The *Tocsin*'s political and editorial position inclined the paper to treat William King's prison experiences sympathetically. The report was presented over four issues, drawing its story from informants based inside Pentridge. Though the paper stated it had "received information from various sources" the report's narrative presents the evidence as first person testimony and it is not clear, if there is more than one author, who witnessed which particular aspects of King's mistreatment.[64] The insider testimony underpinned the *Tocsin*'s editorial

criticism that prison officials had "hushed up" the truth of William King's suffering to protect their own interests.[65] As the *Tocsin*'s headline suggested, the truth was that King had suffered racist discrimination, ill treatment, orchestrated violence and torture. The informants argued that King only became an increasingly dangerous prisoner because of "the way he is treated," including warders beating him in his cell at night and the prejudices of the judiciary and the prison's governor. In the view of the source, King had been persecuted relentlessly, physically and mentally, and the punishments he received were erroneous. On one occasion he simply asked for some leftover meat and potatoes, and on another he questioned why he could not write a letter when he had been given permission to do so.

Over four issues, the *Tocsin*'s source detailed the "tyranny" that King faced inside the prison: severe beatings by prison staff, hefty increases in his sentences for minor attacks on staff (throwing a stone at a warder added twelve months), and seemingly arbitrary placement in solitary confinement.[66] Solitary cells measured ten by six by nine and a half feet; they were lonely places to live and perhaps die, but as the *Tocsin*'s source reflected, "It is not an easy thing to commit suicide at Pentridge."[67] Instead, prisoners' thoughts turned to killing someone else, such as a warder or even Senior Chief Warder Patterson, who once urged his staff to attack King and "knock his b_____ black head off."[68] After one particularly violent attack, King was taken nearly dead to his cell, where he raved in anguish all night—for which he was charged with "misconducting himself."[69] The *Tocsin*'s source asserted that some of the warders in Pentridge were not fit to be retained in the government's service "except in the capacity of prisoners."[70] Warder Patterson's death, the source argued, "would be such a relief to the prisoners—one torturer removed from Hell," and through a court case for murder, King would be provided with an opportunity to speak publicly about the injustices faced inside the prison.[71] The source concluded that were King "not physically a splendidly-made man, as handsomely made a man and a negro as ever I saw, he would be dead or an idiot long ago."[72]

One of the *Tocsin*'s key points about King's case was not only that conditions in Pentridge prison were outrageous and unjust but that they passed without criticism from senior prison workers or society at large, even when "all the discharged prisoners are let loose upon society in a more dangerous condition than when they went in."[73] To illustrate this, in an additional one-page essay, the *Tocsin* compared King's case to that of John Weachurch, a Chinese Australian who years before "was driven mad in the same way," attacking warders in defensive desperation and then hanging for these offences.[74]

Born in 1829, John Weachurch was initially apprenticed in shoemaking but in 1850 was transported to Van Diemen's Land, marking the start of what the *Bacchus Marsh Express* described in 1875 as "30 years a professional thief."[75] Weachurch never committed murder but "his violence when under restraint . . . and the fact that his conduct was producing a very demoralising effect upon the prisoners at Pentridge meant, for the prison system, it became "necessary" he "be made an example of."[76] A writer who signed himself as "Paul M" had met Weachurch in the cells of Pentridge prison some twenty years earlier when as a young boy he had the run of Melbourne Gaol. He had been granted access to Weachurch's cell the day before he was hanged and wrote up his memories and reflections on the case for the *Tocsin* in 1899. For him, what had happened to Weachurch showed the "logical conclusion" of King's behaviour.[77] First imprisoned in Victoria for burglary in 1862, Weachurch, like King, had disputed the acts of the authorities against him, and his complaints

were similarly met with harsh punishments and an increase to his sentence. Weachurch struggled to gain a hearing into his unjust treatment through a campaign of disruptive acts, resulting in over one hundred breaches of Pentridge disciplinary rules including the burning of a workshop and two serious attacks on warders.[78] Following these events, Weachurch was placed in a specially built cage where he was to be confined "like a wild beast" in irons.[79] It was during the repair of these irons that Weachurch struck a warder and was tried a third time for attempted murder, for which he was given the death penalty. In a written speech composed before his execution, Weachurch wrote that he understood "the name of Weachurch has become a word for mothers and nursemaids to frighten children with," not unlike the "perverted, violent and terrifying criminal" William King was depicted as some thirty years later.[80]

In drawing together the experiences of Weachurch and King, the *Tocsin* powerfully showed that structural injustices in the prison system of the past continued in the present. In highlighting that King faced injustices because he was Black, the reports suggested that Weachurch, too, had been a victim of racial prejudice. These reports gave space to voices that saw the "racist underpinnings" of the White Australia policy, which aimed to bar non-European immigration to Australia, and as such, they challenge arguments that anti-Asian immigration can be understood as a reasonable response to "community tensions."[81] Still, support for White Australia was both overtly and indirectly discussed in the *Tocsin* through reports, republished quotations, and advertisements. These reflect the limits to the geographical imaginations of labour solidarity and the policing of the boundaries of Whiteness that occurred within the *Tocsin*.

Limits to Transnational Imaginaries

By drawing together the cases of Weachurch and King, the *Tocsin* had the potential to expand ideas of Australianness and create solidarities across ethnic groups within Australia, but it was unable to embrace fully the narratives of equality found in explicitly anti-racist journals, such as the British-based *Anti-Caste*, or the progressive newspapers produced by African Americans. For example, though the *Tocsin* argued against caste in its first editorial, that inaugural issue also demanded the "Exclusion of all Undesirable Immigrants and of Workmen under Contract" as part of the journal's platform.[82] In the January 1898 issue, along with the extensive examination of Weachurch and King's ill treatment, the *Tocsin* printed a report without critical comment on the racialised violence of the police, repeating that "an Asiatic ran amuck at Penrith, N.S.W., killing Police-Sergeant Beatty and seriously wounding another man."[83] The only mention of Indigenous people from Australia's first nations in this issue is a note that the "Aboriginal Team of Cricketers went [to] England" in 1868, as part of the paper's almanac on the following page.[84]

This uneven attention to the realities and language of racial prejudice is also evident in the reports on William King. Though the *Tocsin*'s anonymous source was outraged at King's treatment and sympathetic to his claims of innocence, they simultaneously claimed that King, an atheist, had asserted: "Niggers get their skins from god, and their tempers. I cannot control myself as the white men can."[85] Given the longstanding offensive nature of "the N word" within the Black diaspora, it seems highly unlikely that King referred to himself using the term, and it is not language that African American or radical White anti-racist campaigners of the time used.[86] The *Tocsin*'s source remained unreflective of their

own racist language and prejudices, referring to King as a "nigger" more than once throughout the reports, and the *Tocsin* did not edit this language.[87] It is not that the paper's staff did not edit language at all. When reporting on a beating of King, the shout to "knock his bastard black head off" and to knock his "bastard black brains out" appeared as to "knock his b_____ black head off" and "knock his b_____ black brains out."[88]

In using this racist language, both the source and the *Tocsin* reflect the intellectually limited reporting in White journalism as identified by the African American journalist Thomas Fortune. Speaking on the syndication of news at the Afro-American Press Convention in 1891, Fortune hailed the growth of the press as one of the most striking phenomena of the nineteenth century. But he was despairing of the racist prejudice that had become ingrained in the White press, from the editorial positions held by papers, editors, and owners, as well as the syndicated news those papers relied upon. Thus he identified unbalanced and racist coverage at every stage of reports on race related news.[89] Though Fortune's criticisms were directed particularly at the United States and the American press agencies, the attitudes he critiqued are present in the *Tocsin*. When it came to racial prejudice, White journalists and activists were limited by framing their critiques of inequality within racial hierarchies and linguistic prejudices they could not reimagine.

A Victorian Dreyfus Case

These limitations were further entrenched as the *Tocsin*'s source drew a direct transnational comparison between William King's treatment in Australia and the case of the Jewish artillery captain Alfred Dreyfus in France. Driven by anti-Semitism, the false accusation of selling French secrets to Germany saw Dreyfus convicted of treason and sentenced to life in prison in 1894.[90] In 1896, evidence arose that an army major was responsible for Dreyfus's alleged crimes. James Breenan argues that it was following this revelation that the case was most intensely debated in the press, principally between 1897 and 1899. In France, following Émile Zola's letter *J'accuse*, written to the president of the republic and published in *L'Aurore* in January 1898, intense international press attention was drawn to case.[91] Throughout Europe, nations drew on the case to reflect or deflect local political debates, with local geographies of anti-Semitism framing how the case was reported.[92] British newspapers were "besieged with thousands of letters from outraged citizens," the majority demanding justice for Dreyfus.[93] Robert Tombs argues that the British establishment and the press, as led by the *Times*, were early sympathizers with Alfred Dreyfus's case as it suited their conservative critiques of French political culture.[94] In Ireland few papers took a "Dreyfusian stance," but as Richard Barrett argues, this was because they viewed the case through the lens of a Nationalist Catholic position rather than an anti-Semitic one.[95]

Between 1897 and 1899 the *Tocsin* published thirty articles that discussed the Dreyfus case, some of which made direct links to William King. In one part of its report on King, the *Tocsin*'s source declared that if he was innocent of his crimes, "King, the negro, has no more right to be unjustly imprisoned [than] Dreyfus, the Jew in France."[96] The *Toscin* reflected that in Australia, the "Penal Department, like the French Military officers," considered it "bad form that anyone should let the public know of a Victorian Dreyfus case."[97] But there were limits to the solidarities suggested by this transnational connection. An example came in an October 1898 opinion piece supporting a Jewish boycott of French goods. In the column "Fair Comment," the paper supported discussions within Jewish communities for a boycott. It

reported that though Dr. Joseph Abrahams, rabbi of the Melbourne Jewish congregation, had been quick to disavow any intentions on the part of Jewish communities to boycott French goods, the *Tocsin* "would be inclined to think more of the Jews if they did boycott or do some other act."[98] This partial support for international solidarity in the Dreyfus case indicates where the limits of solidarity within whiteness would be drawn for the *Tocsin*. This comment also appeared in the same column that first drew attention to the case of William King, a year before the full report appeared.

By the time the *Toscin* was publishing its account of William King's imprisonment in December 1898 and January 1899, Zola had been placed on trial for slandering the French Army and the battle to return Dreyfus from his exile on Devil's Island was ongoing. Though the evidence against Dreyfus was falling apart, he was tried again in the summer of 1899 and again found guilty. The anti-Semitism driving those who could not bear to accept his innocence also surfaced in the *Tocsin*. For the whistleblower of King's case, the Dreyfus affair was a clear example of injustice, as was the treatment of William King. As such, the source declared to his readers that King was their "Victorian Dreyfus case."[99] The press needed to bring public attention to King's case, as attention had been brought to Dreyfus, for if the wider Victorian public could only be made aware of King's suffering, "they would demand justice."[100] But this call for action laid bare the impossibility of justice declared within frameworks of racial hierarchy. "Justice" was welded to anti-Blackness and anti-Semitism, as revealed in the latter part of the rallying cry. If the Victorian public only knew of William King's traumas, the author argued, "they would demand justice even to a nigger, as honourable Frenchman [*sic*] demand justice to-day even to a Jew."[101]

The *Tocsin*'s declaration that it stood against caste refers to the possibilities of transnational imaginations. The circulation of the term "caste" as a way to reimagine socially constructed racial prejudice in the United States had inspired the title of the British based anti-racist periodical *Anti-Caste*.[102] The *Tocsin*'s use of the term in its inaugural issue speaks to critical frameworks of oppression that the *Tocsin*'s editors and contributors could have drawn upon. *Anti-Caste* had ceased publication in 1895, so it would not have been circulating in Melbourne when the *Tocsin* was established. The paper's focus on contributions from Labour-affiliated news sources may have meant that the *Tocsin* missed contributions from anti-imperial or African American journalists who wrote with wider economic concerns. The Black voices writing about racism that *Anti-Caste* referenced, such as Ida B. Wells and Thomas Fortune, were not cited in the *Tocsin*.

The *Tocsin*'s ability to draw together transnational narratives through King and Dreyfus was also limited by its commitment to particular formations of Whiteness within working-class politics at local and international scales. This is hinted at in the privileging of Ben Tillett in the paper's second issue in October 1897. Tillett played a significant role in founding the modern British labour movement and would be celebrated for helping lead the London dock strike in 1889.[103] Yet, as Satnam Virdee reflects, though Tillett forged solidarities between English and Irish Catholic dockworkers in England, he "could not extend the hand of friendship to the newly arrived East European Jews."[104] He had described the arrival of working class Jewish communities in London in 1891 as an "immigration evil" that was "seriously affecting the well-being of the English working classes."[105] Tillett was warmly received by *Tocsin* readers, and in a letter written for the paper in July 1899 he sent

"love and luck to all the comrades who were so good to me" when he had visited Australia early that year.[106] In that letter he wrote of the beauty of London's parks and the "municipal spirit of Londoners," and he boasted that "the Socialists were the only folks that have saved France from the civil war over the Dreyfus case."[107] In the same letter he despaired at the impossibility of getting "anything like criticism in the English press" on Cecil Rhodes, whom he described as "the worst administrator for a white man who has ever disgraced the name of an English man."[108] His complaint was not about Rhodes's violent exploits but that he treated "even his own countrymen as badly as he does a negro wherever they are in subordinate positions."[109]

Though its limited intellectual and political framework meant the *Tocsin* was unable to meet its stated aim of challenging caste inequalities, its reports on William King did succeed in drawing attention to injustices in the Victorian prison system. On December 7, 1898, during the sitting of the Legislative Assembly, William Maloney, a representative of the Workingmen's Political League, asked the chief secretary, Alexander Peacock, if he had read the allegations of torture against William King, citing the *Tocsin*'s report.[110] Peacock replied he had not but was aware King's record was "a very bad one"; he acknowledged King had served long periods in solitary confinement but only expressed regret that visiting justices had no power to order prisoners to be flogged instead.[111] Regarded as a progressive, Peacock introduced a bill establishing the Victorian wages board system, bringing him "widespread popularity as a humane politician."[112] But the *Tocsin* was highly critical of his response to Maloney's question. It agreed that the lives of warders had to be protected but argued this should not be done by imposing punishments upon prisoners that were calculated to drive them "into desperation or madness."[113]

The restrictions in solitary cells forced men into complete silence. Prisoners could not communicate with each other in any way; they could never read aloud, sing, or whistle and no man could ever use his name in communicating with the officers placed over him.[114] The detrimental effects of these rules on prisoners were well known to staff. Giving evidence to a royal commission in 1870, Superintendent Robert Gardiner admitted that prisoners were known to feign sickness to get out of the panopticon and that solitary confinement adversely affected their health. The Pentridge medical officer, James Reed, acknowledged that men were known to die while in solitary confinement and that there was more mental illness in the panopticon "to a very marked degree" than in other divisions of Pentridge.[115] Still the practice continued, and the *Tocsin* argued there was little evidence that flogging offered a better alternative. They criticised Peacock for his failure to acknowledge that there were prisoners at Pentridge who had been flogged and were still "brutal," the most notorious case being that of John Weachurch.[116] It would be demanding too much from a minister of education, the editors mused, to expect him to have examined the literature on the subject.

Reporting the Final Journey of William King

The *Tocsin* did take seriously the injustice William King suffered, and the reports provided an opportunity for his story to be heard. King's plight exposed brutality and racism, and as the *Tocsin* dryly noted in 1898, even the *Argus* expressed surprise at the "extraordinary statement" when Peacock confirmed the months of solitary confinement allocated to King during his years in Pentridge.[117] But the *Tocsin*'s exposé of the violence King faced did not result in wider condemnations. The *Argus*'s reports were not critical of the prison system and

made kinder reading for the prison staff. It was an *Argus* column that was cut out from the paper and attached to King's prison records by an administrator; the reports in the *Tocsin* were not.[118]

Despite its relatively critical reporting, the *Tocsin* was unwilling or unable to give voice to King, and there is little evidence that their spotlighting upon the case had a positive impact on William King's life inside or outside prison. It would later be claimed that religious and philanthropic societies were successful in getting some remission on his sentences.[119] This perhaps occurred in 1908 when King received an order for freedom, but he was not able to remain outside the prison walls for long.[120] A few weeks after his release King was once again found guilty of burglary. He had been living in South Yarra and complained that the local police always came to "look him up" whenever something happened in the neighbourhood, but the witnesses King called to support his case did not provide the evidence he hoped for.[121] He received two further convictions for wounding with intent to do serious bodily harm and unlawfully wounding in 1909 and 1910, but as predicted by the *Tocsin*, these attacks were on warders while he was in prison. In 1909 King appeared undefended on the charge of wounding the warder William Sharp by cutting his cheek with a knife. The witnesses were all prison staff and King was found guilty after five minutes of deliberation by the jury.[122] Like Weachurch, he was confined to a padded cell and resorted to arson, setting fire to his prison blankets and furniture. King was reportedly unharmed, as a warder detected the smoke relatively quickly, but as his mental health deteriorated the prison authorities feared that King could suffer a complete mental breakdown if given no hope of release.[123]

Negotiations with the American consulate arranging for his deportation began in early 1916, but following an "outcry in the press" no captain could be found to transport him.[124] When King was finally released on February 11, 1916, the *Age* believed this showed "extraordinary leniency to the notorious criminal" and a desire of the prison system to be rid of "bad rubbish."[125] King boarded the American barquentine *Puako* bound for British Colombia, but he died during the journey and was buried at sea, as a mariner, on April 7, 1916.[127] The *Puako*'s captain sent a photograph of the funeral to the inspector general of penal institutions, including in his accompanying letter the reassurance that King would never "return to your Australia or any place in the British empire as I am sure his body is laying in 3456 fathoms of water."[128]

An article on King's deportation in the Sydney-based *Sun* appeared under the headline "Victoria's Greatest Crook / Notorious Negro King / Terror of the Warders" and began with a quote from a retired officer of the Criminal Investigation Branch: "He was the worst criminal that ever set foot in Victoria, not forgetting all the beauties that have had an interview with the public hangman."[129] In this telling, King's supposedly "sensational adventures" all occurred behind the walls of Pentridge, where he was not a victim of injustice but a brute, "the terror of the warders."[130] The paper took issue, too, with the "sympathetic hearts" who over the years had sought to gain a remission of part of his sentence, when King "in fact, served all that has fallen to him."[131] The report recalled the days when King "could mix it with the gloves" and his early arrests, but no mention was made of the lengthy periods he spent in solitary confinement.[132] Though dismissed, the decline in King's mental health

was still made public. Published along with information on his physical ailments, these were framed by the *Argus* as an "official excuse" given for his removal from prison.[133]

The injustices King faced while a prisoner and the inevitable effects these would have upon him, as outlined in the *Tocsin*, were long forgotten or ignored. The *Tocsin* had ceased publication a decade earlier, and though its contributors may have been among those intended to be attacked by the sneer in the Sydney *Sun*, the *Tocsin* may not have been so sympathetic had it still been in print. By 1905, the paper's editorial line was unable, or unwilling, to untangle ideas of labour equality from the politics and desires for White supremacy. In a column on "developing" Australia, a writer criticised the New South Wales Liberal League for its declaration that "coloured labourers, with their families should be admitted to tropical Australia for the development of its natural resources under adequate restrictions for the preservation of the purity of the white race."[134] The column did not criticise the goal of racial purity but rather the notion that segregated racialised communities could be maintained once labour restrictions were lifted. The columnist argued that "preserving race purity was not as easy as falling off a log," and if anyone wanted to see this proposed "policy of hybridism" in operation, the paper suggested they turn to the United States where "the displaced men, the outraged women [and] the negro roasting at the stake could afford all the answers to their questions."[135] An engaged reading of Ida B. Wells's analysis on the politics of lynching would have laid bar the erroneousness of such arguments.[136]

The transnational circulation of stories such as the Dreyfus affair opened new possibilities and solidarities on the pages of periodicals. In the detailed reporting of William King's ill treatment, the *Tocsin* took a transnational subject and made it local, showing that local problems could be usefully understood by framing them through international debates. The *Tocsin*'s final issues, published in 1906, still demonstrated an international imagination and the possibilities of international solidarity. There was sympathy for the people of the Philippines who found their citizenship being debated between the United States and Japan, but labour solidarities remained clearly framed around Whiteness.[137] In the paper's masthead, the tolling worker had been replaced by an illustration declaring "The Unity of Labour Is the Hope of the World," and the four workers depicted joining hands were all men and all White (figure 2).[138] When the *Tocsin*'s columns referred to ethnic diversity, these were usually reports of tensions and hostilities: resentment towards Japanese people who "complained so bitterly" about Australian legislation but refused to let Australian men patent rights in Japan; resentment that Indian workers were voicing criticism of the undermining of their production and practices of crafts; and "jokes" about Chinese men's views of the English, Irish, and Scottish on the Australian goldfields.[139] Of the Indigenous peoples of Australia's first nations—the individuals, families, and communities who faced the most violent, punitive, and exploitative conditions in the colony—there was no mention at all.

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NOTES

[1] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[2] Brennan, *Reflection of the Dreyfus Affair*, 481.
[3] Fortune, "On Syndicating News."
[4] Chatterjee, Christoff, and Wong, "Undisciplining Victorian Studies."
[5] Chapman, "Transnational Connections"; Korte and Lethbridge, "Introduction."

[6] Anderson, *Radical Arguments against Federation*, xi;
[7] Anderson, *Radical Arguments against Federation*, xi. *Tocsin*, October 2, 1897, 2.
[8] *Tocsin*, October 2, 1897, 2.
[9] Wallace-Crabbe, "O'Dowd."
[10] Anderson, *Radical Arguments against Federation*. On international debates and publications on "race" feeding into federalism, see Lake, "White Man under Siege," and "Shorter Reviews," 151.
[11] "Tocsin's Platform," 6.
[12] The column appeared from the inaugural issue, October 2, 1897, p8.
[13] "Tocsin's Platform," 6. On contraception, see Rich, "Meaning of Indecency."
[14] Nolan, "White Blouse Revolution."
[15] *Tocsin*, October 2, 1897, 6.
[16] "Topical Echoes," 1.
[17] "Working World," October 9, 1897, 5.
[18] For example, "Working World," January 5, 1899, 6.
[19] *Tocsin*, supplement, October 9, 1897, 1.
[20] Lake and Reynolds, *Drawing the Global Colour Line*.
[21] "Colour," 3.
[22] For example, "World's Windbags at Work," 3, and "Concerning Somebody," 8.
[23] *Tocsin*, March 31, 1904, 5.
[24] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 8, 1898, 3. It is also possible that one or more sources was a (former) prisoner.
[25] "Fair Comment," 2.
[26] On the Black Pacific, see Han, "Making a Black Pacific," 24; Shilliam, "*Black Pacific: Anti-Colonial Struggles*"; and Taketani, "Cartography of the Black Pacific."
[27] For examples on convicts, see Anderson, *Global History of Convicts*; Paton, "West Indian-Australian Transportation and the Politics of Race"; and Pybus, *Black Founders*.
[28] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888). On labouring Black migrants in Australia, see Bressey, "Surfacing Black and Brown Bodies."
[29] Meighen, "City of Women."
[30] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888).
[31] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888)
[32] "Peter Jackson," *Referee*, 1.
[33] His birth year is often given as 1861, but Petersen argues 1860 is correct; he also notes that sometimes Jackson was reported to have been born in Jamaica (Petersen, *Peter Jackson: A Biography*).
[34] "Peter Jackson," *Herald*, 1; "Our Picture," *Sportsman*, 1; Wiggins, "Peter Jackson".
[35] Wiggins, "Peter Jackson," 143-144.
[36] "Daring Robberies in Melbourne," 3.
[37] Katz, "City of Women," 341 and 345.
[38] Lyn and Armstrong, *From Pentonville to Pentridge*, 50**.**
[39] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888).
[41] *Kilmore Free Press* (Victoria), Thursday, May 24, 1900, 3; "Burglar and Pugilist," 43.
[42] "William King Pugilist and Burglar," 2.
[43] "Desperate Criminal," 6.
[44] "Desperate Criminal," 6.
[45] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888).
[46] "Negro Convict," *Argus*, September 28, 1900, 6.
[47] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[48] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[49] 'A colored pugilist in "Daring Robberies", August 16, 1890, 3; "The Negro Convict King", *Age*, February 9, 1909, 7.
[50] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[51] "Two Othellos," 2.
[52] "Two Othellos," 2.
[53] "Two Othellos," 2.
[54] "Advertising," *Argus*, 8.
[55] "Answers to Correspondents", *The Lorgnette*, 2.
[56] *Argus*, July 1, 1867, 5.
[57] "Criminal Sessions," 12; "Police," 7.
[58] "Advertising," *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, 4.
[59] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22293 (21845–22336, 1887–88)
[60] "Murder of AH Gay Ong," *Argus*, February 20, 1889, 11.
[61] Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*.
[62] "Opera House—Uncle Tom's Cabin," September 29, 1890, 6.
[63] Waterhouse, *From Minstrel Show to Vaudeville*, 40, 41.

[64] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[65] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[66] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3.
[67] For cell sizes, see Lyn and Armstrong, *From Pentonville to Pentridge*, p52.
[68] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 4.
[69] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 3.
[70] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 4.
[71] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 8, 1898, 3.
[72] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[73] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 4.
[74] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge, Why Weachurch Was Hanged," 2.
[75] "Execution of Weachurch," 4.
[76] "Execution of Weachurch," 4.
[77] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge, Why Weachurch Was Hanged," 2.
[78] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge, Why Weachurch Was Hanged," 2.
[79] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge, Why Weachurch Was Hanged," 2;
[80] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge, Why Weachurch Was Hanged," 2; "Friday 21 August," 4.
[81] Fitzgerald, *Big White Lie*, 5.
[82] *Tocsin*, October 2, 1897, 6.
[83] "Notable Events Not to be Forgotten," 5.
[84] "Tocsin Almanac," 3.
[85] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 1, 1898, 3.
[86] For example, this is not language contributors to *Anti-Caste* would have used (Bressey, *Politics of Anti-Caste*).
[87] On activists editing material, see Bressey, *Politics of Anti-Caste*.
[88] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 3.
[89] Fortune, T. Thomas. "On Syndicating News." *AME Church Review* 8 (1891): 231–42.
[90] Huch, "British Reaction."
[91] Brennan, *Reflection of the Dreyfus Affair*.
[92] Brennan, *Reflection of the Dreyfus Affair*.
[93] Huch, "British Reaction," 24.
[94] Tombs, "British Establishment and the Dreyfus Affair."
[95] Barrett, "Dreyfus Affair in the Irish Nationalist Press."
[96] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3. The original contains a typo: "King, the negro, has no more right to be unjustly imprisoned that is Dreyfus, the Jew in France."
[97] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3.
[98] "Fair Comment," 2. See also obituary for Rabbi Abrahams, *Argus*, August 19, 1938, 9.
[99] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3.
[100] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3.
[101] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 22, 1898, 3.
[102] Bressey, *Empire*, *Race*.
[103] Schneer, *Ben Tillett*.
[104] Virdee, "Socialist Antisemitism," 362.
[105] "Immigration evil" reported in *Skyrack Courier*, May 30, 1891, 4; "seriously effecting" reported in *Morning Post*, July 25, 1891, 2.
[106] "Ben Tillett to 'The Tocsin,'" 7.
[107] "Ben Tillett to 'The Tocsin,'" 7.
[108] "Ben Tillett to 'The Tocsin,'" 7.
[109] "Ben Tillett to 'The Tocsin,'" 7. On Black journalist Celestine Edwards, who was critical of Rhodes's colonial exploitations, see Bressey, *Politics of Anti-Caste*.
[110] "Parliament," 2.
[111] "Legislative Assembly," *Ballarat Star*, 4.
[112] Gregory, "Peacock, Sir Alexander."
[113] "126 Days' Solitary," 4.
[114] Lyn and Armstrong, *From Pentonville to Pentridge*, 195.
[115] Lyn and Armstrong, *From Pentonville to Pentridge*, 93.
[116] "Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 4.
[117] "Legislative Assembly," *Argus*, 5; Torturing a Negro at Pentridge," December 15, 1898, 4.
[118] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888)
[119] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[120] Central Register for Male Prisoners, no. 22573 (22337–22820, 1888)
[121] "Negro King Convicted," 10.
[122] "Negro Convict King," *Age*, 7.
[123] "Negro Convict King," *Argus*, 9.

[124] "Convict King Released," 4.
[125] "Convict William King," 10.
[127] "Convict William King," 10.
[128] "Negro Convict King Dies on Voyage to United States," 12.
[129] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[130] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[131] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[132] "Victoria's Greatest Crook," 5.
[133] "Convict William King," 10.
[134] *Tocsin*, November 30, 1905, 4.
[135] *Tocsin*, November 30, 1905, 4.
[136] Bressey, *Politics of Anti-Caste*; Wells, *Light of Truth*.
[137] "Compulsory Citizenship," 8.
[138] *Tocsin*, January 25, 1906, 3.
[139] "Random Readings," 2; *Tocsin*, Feb 1, 1906, 2–3.

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