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**Abhorrence and Approval: Exploring Public  
Receptions of Queensland's Native Police**

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## Abhorrence and Approval: Exploring Public Receptions of Queensland's Native Police Force 1859-1902.

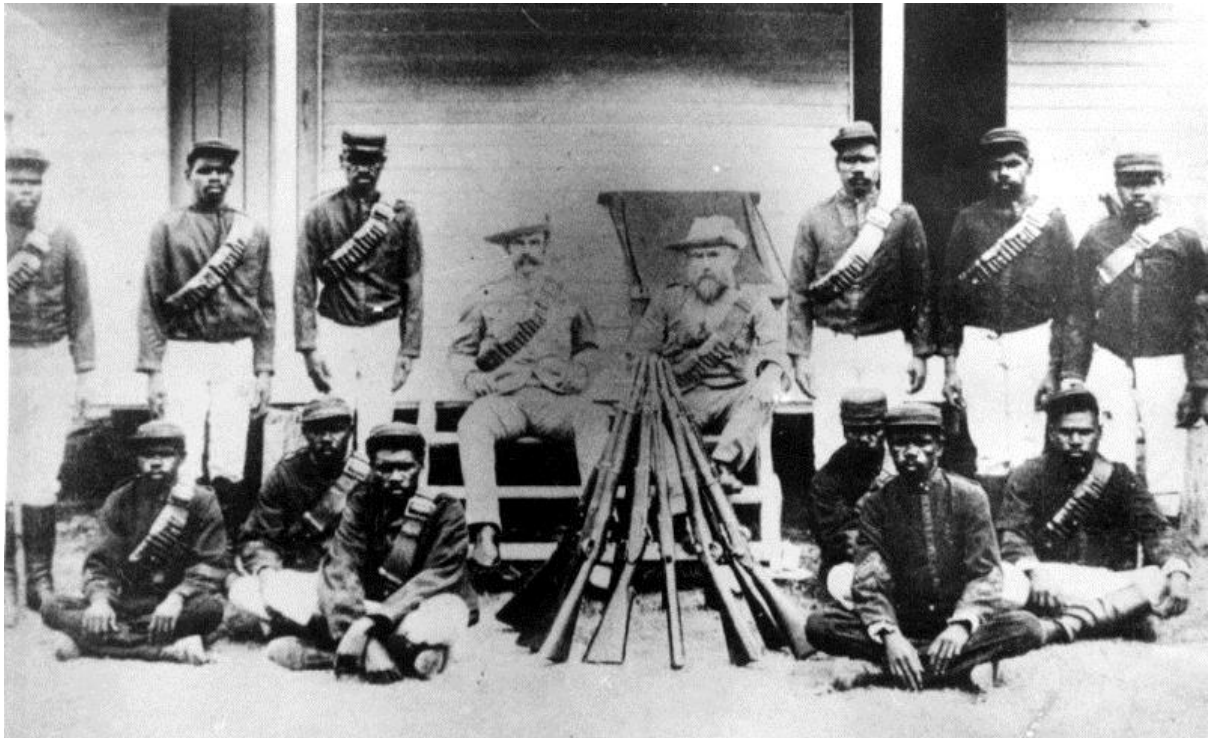


Image 1. *Native Mounted Police at Coen, North Queensland, 1896,*  
([oai:ehive.com:objects/553711PM0635](https://oai.ehive.com/objects/553711PM0635)).

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## List of Abbreviations

QNP-Queensland Native Police

NSW-New South Wales

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## Introduction

The treatment of aboriginal people on the Australian frontier has engendered significant contention in retrospective historical studies. While the likes of Keith Windschuttle have attempted to minimise estimated figures of aboriginal deaths, attributable to colonial violence, a contesting body of work has emerged to suggest the conduct of European settlers was analogous to genocide.<sup>1</sup> The intention of this current research is not to further this particular discussion, given the brevity of existing works on the subject and the problematic nature of genocide definitions (according to the commonly observed definition, clear evidence of government intention must be available)<sup>2</sup>. Alternatively, the object of this study is Queensland's Native Police; a government authorised institution responsible for countless deaths of aboriginals through a punitive process of 'dispersal'. The 'euphemistic word' dispersal essentially signifies the indiscriminate slaughter of aboriginals, purportedly to enact retribution for an alleged crime, and is pervasive throughout archival material.<sup>3</sup> As a mechanism of colonial oppression, the QNP epitomised aboriginal policy in general, in the eyes of the indigenous population, with its propensity for violence and its expansionism.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, the native police assume a greater significance, as a symbol of the colony's relationship with its original inhabitants, thus warranting further study.

As an institution the Native Police in Queensland proved considerably divisive throughout its existence, irrespective of its continued endorsement by the colonial government. While an assessment of justifications for the QNP helps illuminate the broader context of frontier settler life, awareness of public condemnation can also serve to challenge assumptions concerning the citizens of Queensland. Because of the inherent brutality of colonisation, when studying the methods dedicated to this process, the colonisers themselves become susceptible to demonization. The latent disregard for the lives of indigenous Australians, expressed by many settlers, are so sharply at odds with our contemporary values that wholesale condemnation appears the only natural response. However; comprehending how

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<sup>1</sup> A.D. Moses and R. Evans (eds), *Genocide and Settler Society: Frontier Violence and Stolen Indigenous Children in Australian History*, (USA, Berghahn Books, 2004), p150-155.

<sup>2</sup> J. Richards, *The Secret War: A True History of Queensland's Native Police*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2008), p201-208.

<sup>3</sup> 'White Versus Black', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 15 May 1880, p627.

<sup>4</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2008), p5-6.

an institution like Queensland's native police came to survive requires an understanding of the colonial zeitgeist. While in no way excusing the atrocities committed by the QNP, recognition of the specific fears and sentiments of the Queensland public can help explain justifications for its existence. However; to achieve a balanced analysis of public receptions, an acknowledgment of the extensive denunciations of the force is necessary. The examination of these criticisms, in conjunction with the public's fears and anxieties, enables the humanisation of these colonial characters. Hence, this research will encompass an exploration of contemporary public receptions, predominantly through the analysis of letters featured in public newspapers. The reason for this methodology will be elucidated later in the introduction.

This dissertation proposes that there was a prevailing contempt towards the native police among the Queensland public, but that this was tempered by a general reluctance to advocate its disbandment; a reluctance underpinned by specific colonial concerns. This study will examine what these concerns were, and how they served to alleviate civil pressure on the QNP. Answers will also be pursued as to why a discord in public opinion existed and how, despite persistent criticism, the QNP continued to operate until the early twentieth century. Among the research, evidence emerged of unabashed support for QNP activity, an advocacy often founded upon Social Darwinist principles. These principles permitted the indiscriminate slaughter of indigenous Australians, predicated on the belief that 'the race is doomed'.<sup>5</sup> Underlying discrepancies in public opinion is a dichotomy between settlers living on the frontier, who generally expounded the necessity of a native police presence, and the indignation of those residing in urban settlements.<sup>6</sup> Chapter One will investigate public justifications for the existence of a native police force on the frontier, examining the colonial insecurities that underlay these assertions. An understanding of these justifications serves to counterbalance succeeding criticisms, outlined in the following chapter. As these rationalisations often encompassed notions of racial supremacy, accordingly Chapter Two will identify how these assumptions prompted criticism of the force, specifically regarding its ethnic composition. This chapter also considers to what extent denunciations were directed at the indigenous troopers, or the officers employed to

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<sup>5</sup> 'White Versus Black', *The Queenslander*, 5 June 1880, p772.

<sup>6</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008), p201-208.

govern them. Following on from the receptions of these authority figures the public responses to the supervision and authorisation of these figures will be explored, incorporating concerns regarding the force's efficiency and legality. Chapter Three will then assess proposed solutions to the criticisms outlined in the preceding chapter. An analysis of solutions enables comprehension of those voices which fundamentally approved of the force, but opposed the way in which it was implemented. Before elucidating the value of this analysis and methodology selection, a brief outline of the subject is necessary.

### *Background*

The Native Police Force was initially established in the Northern region of New South Wales in August 1848. Conceptualised as a preventative force, deterring aboriginal hostility towards frontier settlers, the native police came under the jurisdiction of the Queensland government following its separation from NSW in 1859.<sup>7</sup> In 1864 the QNP was brought under the administration of a recently appointed commissioner of police, David Seymour.<sup>8</sup> According to the assertions of some colonial citizens the force's purpose evolved and developed from a 'retributive body' to a 'preventative force', during the years of its operation.<sup>9</sup> Despite persistent questions regarding its integrity, the QNP continued to function on the financial assistance of the Queensland government, throughout the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> The force was never officially disbanded, its activities fading into nonexistence at the beginning of the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup> The choice of time span for this dissertation is founded on the basis that 1902 represented the last official investigation into a police massacre, at Moreton following the deaths of four aboriginal men.<sup>12</sup> The regiment consisted of one to two white officers, accompanied by up to a dozen aboriginal troopers, ostensibly employed for their tracking abilities.<sup>13</sup> This dynamic represented a popular method within colonial policing practices and was replicated throughout the Australian

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<sup>7</sup> J. Richards, Native Police, <http://www.qhatlas.com.au/content/native-police> [Accessed, 06/12/2015].

<sup>8</sup> 'Queensland Police History 1864-1945', <https://www.police.qld.gov.au/aboutUs/history/6445.htm> [Accessed 12/01/2016].

<sup>9</sup> 'Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, 27 January 1877, p3.

<sup>10</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards, 'You'll Get Nothing Out of It? The Inquest Police and Aboriginal Deaths in Colonial Queensland', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, Issue 123 (2004) p91-104.

<sup>11</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008) p129-140.

<sup>12</sup> A.D. Moses and R. Evans, *Genocide and Settler Society*, (USA, Berghahn Books, 2004) p150-160.

<sup>13</sup> 'Queensland Native Police', *Warwick Argus and Tenterfield Chronicle*, 10 April 1879, p5.



colonies.<sup>14</sup> However; the decision to study its operation specifically in Queensland was driven by that force's particularly barbarous reputation for atrocities. Despite the transparency of police jurisdiction, reports of unlawful conduct are abundant, as these regulations were largely not adhered to.<sup>15</sup> Given the rich wealth of archival material available, narrowing the focus of this work to one colony became necessary, in order to achieve comprehensiveness and obtain requisite detail.

### *Methodology*

Approaching this topic through the prism of public receptions is integral to understanding a colonial climate that enabled the existence of an exceedingly violent force. Through bottom-up analysis individual and communal concerns can be scrutinised, to uncover justifications for QNP methods and reveal criticisms that demonstrate extensive opposition to these measures. This approach will predominantly encompass an examination of public correspondences with the colonial press, many of which retained anonymity. Cryle suggests that early pioneering publications like the *Moreton Bay Courier*, under the editorship of founder Arthur Sidney Lyon, played a 'decisive role in shaping racial attitudes'.<sup>16</sup> This raises questions as to what extent the public voice, represented in newspaper correspondences, was regulated to the discretion of the editor. The editor of *The Telegraph* exhibits a reluctance to accommodate criticisms of the QNP, claiming to have 'no intention' of 'allowing the matter to be again discussed' in the paper's correspondence columns.<sup>17</sup> Although this response implies a particular agenda, it could simply be a reaction to the volume of letters the publication had received on the issue. Numerous instances of published letters running counter to the previously expressed opinions of the paper, do suggest a degree of objectivity in their selection. Accordingly, Cryle asserts that the 'racial comments' of Editor Lyon were 'partially offset' by the opinions of correspondents.<sup>18</sup> A level of balanced correspondence serves the interests of the paper, as the discussion that subsequently ensues promotes a greater readership. These letters, although susceptible to

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<sup>14</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008) p201-208.

<sup>15</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards (eds), 'You'll Get Nothing Out of It?', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, Issue 123 (2004), p91-104.

<sup>16</sup> D. Cryle, *The Press in Colonial Queensland: A Social and Political History*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1989), p7-24.

<sup>17</sup> 'The Controversy of the Native Police', *The Telegraph*, Wednesday 30 June 1880, p2.

<sup>18</sup> D. Cryle, *The Press in Colonial Queensland*, (Queensland University Press, 1989) p7-24.

conjecture, also offer a necessary alternative to official narratives. Additionally, statistics and data pertaining to police activity are difficult to obtain given the aversion to records and tendency for legally questionable practice. The legal guidelines inherited from the NSW government denoted aboriginal people as British subjects, accordingly entitling them to British law and protection.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, the 'dispersals' of aboriginals, were highly illegal in practice, perhaps explaining the conspicuous scarcity of official figures.

### *Historiography*

Jonathan Richards has compiled a detailed history of the QNP, which employs various primary documents, including newspaper letters. He contends that although 'some settlers' were opposed to this form of colonial oppression, 'most of their contemporaries' approved of this method through a perception of necessity.<sup>20</sup> Though this accurately captures the approval of a significant proportion of settlers, it appears to marginalise the abundance of letters denouncing the force. Indeed, one such correspondent suggested that whenever an 'advocate' of the native police did vocalise their support an incident would arise to 'strengthen the universal feeling of condemnation with which that force was regarded'.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, this dissertation will propose particularly in Chapter Two, that the QNP were criticised extensively, but that this outrage never manifested in change due to the vociferous protestations of those on the frontier. As the author of a more general history, Richards also largely prioritises the mechanics of the force and its authorisation from the top, leaving room for a more concerted exploration of public receptions. Mark Finnane has also studied police conduct in colonial Queensland, with an emphasis on the futility of inquests into aboriginal deaths and the consequent legal immunity this granted officers.<sup>22</sup> This shall be referred to further during the examination of public perceptions of the force's effective impunity, presented in Chapter Two. Denis Cryle's study of the Queensland colonial press investigates the instruments that shaped public receptions and

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<sup>19</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards (eds), *Aboriginal Violence and State Response: Histories, Policies and Legacies in Queensland 1860-1940*, *Australia and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, (August, 2010) Vol. 43, No.2, p238-245.

<sup>20</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2008) p201-208.

<sup>21</sup> 'Native Police', *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay Burnett Advertiser*, Thursday 4 April 1861, p4.

<sup>22</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards (eds), 'You'll get nothing out of it?', *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, Issue. 123 (2004) p91-104.

simultaneously provided a platform for these voices.<sup>23</sup> Finally, Timothy Bottom's 'Conspiracy of Silence' provides an extensive insight into colonial violence on the Queensland frontier, thereby revealing the contextual framework of Native Police activity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> D. Cryle, *Press in Colonial Queensland*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 1989), p7-24.

<sup>24</sup> T. Bottoms and R. Evans (eds), *Conspiracy of Silence: Queensland's Frontier Killing Times*, (Sydney, 2013)

## Chapter 1: Justifications

'The existence of the force, such as it is, appears to be one of those inscrutable necessary evils.'<sup>25</sup>

Although the QNP were abhorred by many settlers for their apparent brutality, others were prepared to condone their actions through conviction in the force's 'cruel necessity'.<sup>26</sup> This position was driven by the conceptualisation of the native police as a preventative force, charged with the responsibility of protecting the lives and property of settlers. Consequently, many of the Queensland public engaged in a form of moral compromise whereby 'whatever its defects', the force were deemed permissible to 'protect life and property against the hostile savages'.<sup>27</sup> The threat of aboriginal violence was a reality for settlers on the frontier; the massacre of nineteen settlers at Cullin-la-ringo in October 1861 and the 1857 attack on Hornet Bank station, representing prime examples.<sup>28</sup> These incidents would have substantiated the apprehensions of European settlers. However; the rationalisation of native police actions was also determined largely by other concerns particular to the colonial conditions. A belief in the racial inferiority of indigenous Australians, informed by pseudo-scientific theories of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was fundamental to the excusal of atrocities. Additionally, a form of 'settler capitalism' emerged in Australia, lending to the perception of the aboriginal population as an 'impediment' to economic prosperity.<sup>29</sup> The specific conditions of settler society and how this determined public receptions of the QNP will be expanded upon later in the chapter.

### *Advocates of the Force*

A number of letters accentuating Native Police necessity, through their association with the force reveal a vested interest in diverting public hostility from the organisation. A correspondent to *The Brisbane Courier* in 1880, identifying themself as a sub-inspector of

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<sup>25</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 7 October 1876, p16.

<sup>26</sup> 'Native Police', *The Capricornian*, Saturday 6 November 1880, p3.

<sup>27</sup> 'White vs Black', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 5 June 1880, p772.

<sup>28</sup> R. Evans and A.D. Moses (eds), *Genocide and Settler Society*, (USA, Berghahn Books, 2004) p150-174.

<sup>29</sup> C. Lloyd and I. Keen (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economies: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, (ANU E Press, 2010) p23-41.

the QNP for ‘many years’, suggests the only solution to the ‘daring and warlike’ indigenous population is a ‘strong hand’.<sup>30</sup> Concordantly, Phillip Selheim, the brother in –law to three QNP officers, declared in the *Moreton Bay Courier* in 1861 that; ‘when the Native Police was disbanded’ murders committed by the indigenous population were of ‘frequent occurrence’.<sup>31</sup> While those implicated in the QNP provided a limited source of approval, support also emanated from those living on the periphery. Pastoral squatters, despite unlawfully occupying crown land, came to be influential in Australian settler society and constituted a significant proportion of those living on the periphery.<sup>32</sup> A meeting of squatters, convened in August 1865, exposes the fears expressed by those living on the edge of the frontier. During this session individuals alluded to the ‘threatening attitude’ of the indigenous population and demands for the advancement of Native Police powers were raised, which shall be explored further in Chapter Three.<sup>33</sup> Due to the high proportion of squatters in Queensland, they enjoyed significant representation in parliament, encouraging increased funding to the QNP.<sup>34</sup>

Status as a ‘frontier settler’ assumed considerable gravity in the debate regarding Native Police operations. Objections to the QNP were dismissed as the musings of ‘mere theorists’ residing in the larger towns of the South ‘who have never had experience of life on the frontiers’.<sup>35</sup> The disqualification of opposing voices, on the basis of their perceived lack of ‘frontier experience’, at times served to imbue the QNP with a degree of impunity. This is exemplified in the 1861 legislative assembly meeting, organised to discuss the QNP, in the wake of the wealth of public criticism they were receiving. Public responses to the force’s legal immunity, which become apparent during this meeting, shall be explored further in Chapter Two. The committee’s interview of coroner Dr. Challinor epitomises the attempts to disqualify negative appraisals of the QNP on the grounds of experience or locality. Chairman R.R. Mackenzie questions whether the doctor has travelled ‘fifty of sixty miles beyond

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<sup>30</sup> ‘Black vs White’, *The Brisbane Courier*, Monday 20 December 1880, p3.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Native Police’, *The Moreton Bay Courier*, Saturday 16 February 1861, p2.

<sup>32</sup> J.C. Weaver, *Beyond the Fatal Shore: Pastoral Squatting and the Occupation of Australia 1826 to 1852*, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 101, No. 4, (October 1996), p981-1007.

<sup>33</sup> ‘Meeting of Squatters’, *Northern Argus*, Saturday 5 August 1865, p2.

<sup>34</sup> T. Bottoms and R. Evans (eds), *Conspiracy of Silence*, (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2013), p46-59.

<sup>35</sup> *The Queenslander*, Saturday 13 May 1876, p16.

Ipswich' and if he considers himself 'competent to make any suggestions'.<sup>36</sup> This exchange demonstrates the representation of those living in towns as idealistic and unqualified to challenge frontier procedure. A letter to *The Queenslander* in 1867 typifies this assumption; referring to those 'fool-hardy men who live in towns' who are 'scarcely able to understand' how those living in the outlying districts 'are never safe from the attacks of the blacks'.<sup>37</sup> Evidently, there was a ubiquitous sense of fear shared by many on the periphery, enabling these settlers to condone native police violence. Although defence of the force's activities was largely predicated on the perceived threat of the indigenous population, it was reinforced by deeply ingrained beliefs, which shall be examined in the following paragraph.

### *Racial Theory*

The absolute approval of the QNP, expressed by some settlers, was based on a supposition of racial superiority. Timothy Bottoms traces this belief to the 'Great Chain of Being' concept, developed in the early nineteenth century, which positioned Europeans at the summit of a racial hierarchy.<sup>38</sup> However; while this served as perceived vindication of QNP brutality, it also resulted in the denouncement of the force on the basis of its troopers' ethnicity. This particular criticism of the force shall be assessed further in Chapter Two. One of the most prominent exhibitions of Social Darwinist ideology, applied to the Native Police discussion, appears from the correspondence of one R.Gray in the *Brisbane Courier* of July 1880. The writer postulates that; "a race which cannot progress in civilization must go backwards and die out."<sup>39</sup> This conclusion is suggestive of a stigmatising process emergent in colonial settler societies, classifying the indigenous population with the status of 'other'. Russel McGregor affirms the pervasiveness of a 'doomed race' theory in Australian settler society, positing that the fatal ramifications of dispossession were rationalised as a manifestation of the indigenous population's perceived 'destiny'.<sup>40</sup> It is evident from these correspondences that the fate of the aboriginal population was considered dependent on the activities of the settler community. A letter to the *The Queenslander* in September 1867

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<sup>36</sup> Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, *Select Committee on the Native Police Force and the Condition of the Aborigines Generally*, (Brisbane, 1861), p3.

<sup>37</sup> 'The Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 14 September 1867, p7.

<sup>38</sup> T. Bottoms and R. Evans (eds), *Conspiracy of Silence*, (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2013) p1-10.

<sup>39</sup> R. Gray, 'Black and Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 July 1880 p.5.

<sup>40</sup> R. McGregor, *Imagined Destinies: Aboriginal Australians and the Doomed Race Theory 1880-1939*, (Melbourne University Press, 1997), p1-18.

expresses support for the QNP through the assertion that; “To subdue the blacks is more humane than to exterminate them.”<sup>41</sup> This statement explicitly indicates the assumption of racial superiority and the denial of indigenous self-determination, influencing public sentiments. The prominence of these notions can be understood by the recently expounded ideas of Charles Darwin in his *Origins of Species*, published in 1859, and Herbert Spencer’s expansion upon these ideas in 1864’s *Principles of Biology*. A letter in *The Brisbane Courier* of May 1880 demonstrates an adoption of Spencerian values, applied to the issue of aboriginal law enforcement. Contesting a previous correspondent’s demand for QNP reform, the writer declares that unless a more practicable solution is proposed, then the matter should be ‘settled in the natural way’ through ‘survival of the fittest’.<sup>42</sup> However; this conviction in the racial superiority of the settler population could also manifest itself in a paternalistic compulsion towards the ‘protection of the weak against the oppression of the strong’.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, a belief in indigenous Australian primitiveness and ‘savagery’ seemingly served to justify the existence of a notoriously brutal force.

### *Economic Productivity*

The assumption of moral authority over the indigenous population was just one way in which the colonial climate fostered demand for a punitive force. The economic development of settler society could also be regarded as exacerbating insecurities towards Aboriginal people on the frontier. Christopher Lloyd and Ian Keen chart the emergence of ‘settler capitalism’ in Australia to the early decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a development facilitated by industrialisation in Europe and the consequent creation of a world market.<sup>44</sup> Humphrey McQueen posits that this prosperity was deeply entwined with the export of raw materials, particularly those of wool and gold.<sup>45</sup> An increased demand for these exports would have necessitated greater extraction and thus further expansion into the frontier. There are extensive reports of Native Police deployment for the protection of miners, particularly in the earlier years of its operation in Queensland. Alan Hillier notes the posting of a QNP detachment at the Woolgar goldfields, following its profitable resurgence in

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<sup>41</sup> ‘Native Police’, *The Queenslander*, Saturday 14 September 1867, p.7.

<sup>42</sup> ‘White and Black’, *The Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 15 May 1880, p3.

<sup>43</sup> ‘Native Police’, *The Capricornian*, Saturday 1 April 1876, p216.

<sup>44</sup> C. Lloyd and I. Keen (eds), *Indigenous Participation in Australian Economics*, (ANU E Press, 2010), p23-41.

<sup>45</sup> H. McQueen, *A New Britannia*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2004), p1-10.

1880.<sup>46</sup> The appointment of Native Police to mining localities indicates the Queensland government's prioritisation of its economic resources. However; this desire for QNP protection was, to an extent, reciprocated by the mining community itself. A letter featured in the *Queenslander* in April 1874, declared the Native Police were 'very much required' at the Palmer River goldfields after an absence of 'two months'.<sup>47</sup> Hillier presents a counterpoint to this assertion, suggesting that miners of the Irish immigrant population were often hostile to colonial authorities.<sup>48</sup>

The demand for a Native Police presence among mining communities was often concurrent with those in possession of pastoral resources. A correspondent to *The Courier* in 1861 alludes to the value attached to these resources, stating the need for an 'extraordinary outlay in the organisation of police' to prevent the massacre of cattle which 'constitute so large a portion of our national wealth'.<sup>49</sup> The strategic positioning of QNP camps in the 'centre of a pastoral or mining district', gives credence to the notion that the defence of economic resources was a pre-eminent governmental concern.<sup>50</sup> However; demand for the Native Police in these districts can also be attributed to their location on the frontier edge and the consequent likelihood of indigenous resistance. Indeed, these regions were identified, by a correspondent to the *Brisbane Courier* in 1877, as 'where the inhabitants suffer the most depredations of the aboriginal natives'.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, the value of raw materials to Queensland colonial society can help further elucidate the tolerance and even appreciation towards the QNP, exhibited by many settlers. Additionally, this realisation contributes to a greater understanding of the aforementioned schism between central settlers and those on the periphery. Naturally, it could be extrapolated that those living on the frontier-edge were inextricably bound to the exploitation of raw materials, which the existence of a supposedly preventative force served to facilitate. The specific functioning of 'settler capitalism', coupled with the previously acknowledged theories of race, produced conditions conducive to a violent and oppressive police force

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<sup>46</sup> A.J. Hillier, 'The Native Police Under Scrutiny', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Volume 15, Issue 6, (1994), p279-293.

<sup>47</sup> 'Palmer?', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 18 April 1874, p8

<sup>48</sup> A.J. Hillier, 'Native Police Under Scrutiny', *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Volume 15, Issue 6, (1994), p279-293.

<sup>49</sup> 'Native Police', *The Courier*, Saturday 28 December 1861, p2.

<sup>50</sup> 'Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 27 January 1877, p3.

<sup>51</sup> 'Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 27 January 1877, p3.



## Chapter 2-Condemnation

“I never believed really in a material hell till to-day, but now I’m sure there must be one for such cowardly devils as you are.”<sup>52</sup>

Despite justifications emanating from the periphery the native police encountered substantial criticism during the years of its operation. A lack of public faith, particularly in the employment of aboriginal troopers and the alleged misconduct of officers, was reflected in newspaper correspondences spanning the entirety of the force’s existence. New Zealand resident A.J. Vogan was responsible for perhaps the most damning account of QNP atrocities, releasing ‘The Black Police’ in 1890. Although the book assumed the façade of a fictional novel, this social commentary was intended, as Raymond Evans notes, ‘to arouse a groundswell of scandalised liberal consciences’.<sup>53</sup> However; this research focuses singularly on the receptions of those within the colony, as they alone possessed the autonomy to disband the force, thus as a body are complicit in its functioning. While moral misgivings appear the most conspicuous from the evidence, concerns pertaining to the force’s legal jurisdiction, discipline and efficiency are also notable for their prevalence. This conglomeration of criticisms both moralistic and methodical, challenge the depiction of a native police sustained by widespread approval.

### *Trooper Ethnicity*

As aforementioned, despite serving to condone the force’s activities, conceptions of racial hierarchy among the settler population also provoked opposition to its predominantly indigenous constitution. Questions surrounding the force’s legitimacy and efficiency stemmed from the perceived disadvantages of employing aboriginal troopers. The specific grievances expressed by Queensland citizens regarding the utilisation of these aboriginal troopers, encompassed concerns of efficiency, discipline and morality. From an examination of the archival material copious letters emerge portraying the indigenous troopers as animalistic and uncontrollable. A writer to the Queenslander epitomises this dehumanising characterisation of the ‘trained savages’ who are ‘let loose to gratify their thirst for blood

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<sup>52</sup> A.J. Vogan, *The Black Police: A Story of Modern Australia*, (Hutchinson, London, 1890), p113.

<sup>53</sup> R.Evans, *Fighting words: writing about race*,( Univ. of Queensland Press, 1999), p181.

and cruelty'.<sup>54</sup> When considering this representation the aversion to arming indigenous troopers can be comprehended. A correspondent to *The Courier* in 1861 describes the 'evil' of 'savages, armed in violation of the constitution', using these weapons to slaughter other aboriginal Australians.<sup>55</sup> Weapon supply to indigenous troopers intensified anxieties regarding discipline and the issue of desertion in particular, as it bolstered the aboriginal capacity for resistance.<sup>56</sup> This fear was exacerbated by the knowledge and expertise the troopers acquired from their time in the force; 'their old training having taught them caution and cunning that make them doubly dangerous.'<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the tendency for 'rob and plunder' among discharged troopers is raised in *The Queenslander* in May 1874, suggesting the longevity of trooper discipline was a distressing uncertainty for those in the outlying districts.<sup>58</sup>

### *Trooper Indiscipline*

Much of the doubt regarding native police effectiveness emanated from perceptions of trooper disloyalty and disobedience, the former evinced by high desertion rates. To counteract this trend the executive council, as of 1873, began approving remissions of sentences for prosecuted aboriginal men, in return for their service in the force.<sup>59</sup> This development accentuates the difficulties administrators faced in ensuring the loyalty of aboriginal troopers, as they were prepared to recruit from fairly disreputable circles; consequently vindicating those who suggested the native police were unreliable as a preventative force. Public disillusionment with the recruitment process will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

The characterisation of the troopers as disloyal was strengthened by the officers' tendency to ride behind their men, as opposed to the more traditional practice of leading from the front.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> 'White and Black', *The Queenslander*, Saturday May 8 1880, p592.

<sup>55</sup> 'Native Police', *The Courier*, Saturday 28 December 1861, p2.

<sup>56</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008), p119-129.

<sup>57</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 8 March 1879, p305.

<sup>58</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 23 May 1874, p9.

<sup>59</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008) p119-121.

<sup>60</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, Queensland University Press, 2008) p140-162.



Image 2-North Queensland Native Police Troopers Escorting Indigenous Murderers, 1899, (oaj:ehive.com:objects/553888PM0938).

This phenomenon (Image. 2) is emblematic of a prevailing lack of trust between officers and troopers. The reality of this fear is affirmed by the published account of a former officer who claims to 'have known instances where their own men have shot at them from behind.'<sup>61</sup> In a retrospective history of the QNP, it was claimed that this practice was not motivated by fear of treachery, but rather to provide the trackers with an unobstructed view of the terrain.<sup>62</sup> It is interesting to note this extract features in a rather flattering account of the native police, appearing as late as 1964. Its appearance over fifty years since the force's operations ceased, accentuates how deeply embedded justifications were. Despite prominent concerns pertaining to the unreliability of troopers, there were conflicting reports of rigid discipline among the force. Writer Julian Tenison-Woods, following a day spent with a division of native police under sub-inspector Carr describes the compliance of the troopers, assuring that 'not a word' was uttered 'as they obeyed the orders of their

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<sup>61</sup> 'The Native Police Officer. No. III.', *The Queenslander*, 10 February 1877, p21.

<sup>62</sup> A. J. Whittington, *The Queensland Native Mounted Police*, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Volume 7, Issue 3, (23 July 1964), p508-520.

officer'.<sup>63</sup> However; from the evidence to the contrary it can be inferred that trooper indiscipline featured heavily in the reservations of settlers towards the Native Police. Ultimately, QNP troopers were the recipients of considerable public outrage, regardless of the exhortations of government officials. However; the troopers, while inadvertently stoking the flames of this outrage, were not its only targets; officers and sub-inspectors also finding themselves at the centre of controversy. The succeeding paragraph will explore these controversies and the public sentiments towards commanders of the QNP.

### *Officer Jurisdiction*

Although the QNP officers seemingly enjoyed imperviousness to legal reprimands, as shall be elaborated later in the chapter, they were not immune to public condemnation. From the evidence a public scepticism towards the disposition of commanders emerges, purporting that men who are willing to take the lead of indigenous troopers are 'rare of such unblemished character or humane sympathies'.<sup>64</sup> As this statement implies, particular officers acquired a reputation for brutality and mercilessness.

Officer Frederick Wheeler, who was to be promoted to the rank of sub-inspector, emerges as an embodiment of public abhorrence towards the QNP in secondary works. The reprisals Wheeler led in response to aboriginal raids in the Broad Sound district resulted in the Fassifern Massacres of 1860.<sup>65</sup> The suspicious circumstances of this incident subsequently prompted the 1861 select committee to convene, as humanitarian Dr Challinor disputed the government coroner's report.<sup>66</sup> Wheeler's testimony before the committee admits to possessing no warrant or information regarding the identity of the supposed culprits, asserting that it was the duty of an officer to 'disperse' any 'large assemblages of blacks'.<sup>67</sup> This statement was identified as an indictment of the Native Police system by members of the public, as it was deduced Wheeler 'looks upon himself as a military officer' and considers the indigenous population to be 'under martial law'.<sup>68</sup> The subsequent acquittal of

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<sup>63</sup> J.E. Tenison-Woods, 'A Day with the Myalls', *Darling Downs Gazette*, 22 February 1882, p4.

<sup>64</sup> 'Native Police', *The Capricornian*, 16 August 1879, p3.

<sup>65</sup> A.J. Hillier, Native Police Under Scrutiny, *Journal of the Historical Society of Queensland*, volume 15, Issue 6, (1994), p279-290.

<sup>66</sup> A.J. Hillier, Native Police Under Scrutiny, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland*, Volume 15, Issue 6, (1994), p279-290.

<sup>67</sup> Frederick Wheeler, Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, 17 July 1861, p16-19.

<sup>68</sup> 'Ipswich', *The Courier*, 24 July 1861, p3.

Lieutenant Wheeler shall be investigated further in the examination of perceptions concerning police legality. Members of the public contradictorily demonstrated a willingness to defend native police officers, stressing the difficulty of identifying perpetrators in large groups and maintaining that a number of 'black sheep' should not discredit the entire force.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, a previously cited correspondent to *The Queenslander*, having portrayed the native police troopers as 'trained savages', claims that educated Europeans are capable of 'descending' when employed to oversee a massacre.<sup>70</sup> These examples demonstrate how officers were absolved of public accountability, often on the racially constructed assumptions of trooper barbarism. However; from public responses to QNP atrocities it would appear the apportioning of responsibility was a contentious issue. While the supposed 'savagery' of the indigenous troopers was frequently advanced as the fundamental catalyst for these actions, some alleged that brutality was encouraged by officers such as Frederick Wheeler. The aforementioned testimony of squatter Alfred Brown epitomises the tensions between these two characterisations, suggesting the aboriginal troopers should be replaced by Europeans, whilst also attributing the force's failings to the officer's 'intemperance' and lack of 'moral control'.<sup>71</sup>

Responses to the murder of Rockhampton resident Fanny Briggs in 1860, by a former trooper of the Native Police nicknamed Gulliver, exemplify how accountability could be deflected from officers and troopers alike, depending on the discretion of the commentator. The select committee of 1861 concluded that this incident 'in no way militates against the force'; instead portioning responsibility to the proximity of the barracks to Rockhampton and the consequent accessibility of alcohol.<sup>72</sup> However; there appears to be a disjunction between this government declaration and the contentions of members of the public, who recognised the Native Police authorities as; "anxious to shield the force from the opprobrium now so generously and so justly cast upon it".<sup>73</sup> Public condemnation was exacerbated by the escape of the accused perpetrator Gulliver from police custody, lending to a presumption of police 'indifference'.<sup>74</sup> It can be ascertained, from the Fanny Briggs

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<sup>69</sup> 'Blacks and Native Police', *The Brisbane Courier*, 14 July 1880, p5.

<sup>70</sup> 'White and Black', *The Queenslander*, 8 May 1880, p592.

<sup>71</sup> Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, (Brisbane, 1861), p114.

<sup>72</sup> Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, 17 July 1861, p1-5.

<sup>73</sup> 'The Late Murder at Rockhampton', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 24 January 1861, p2.

<sup>74</sup> 'Inutility of the Native Police', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, Thursday 17 January 1861, p3.

incident and the responses to Lieutenant Wheeler's implication in the Fassifern massacre, that the Queensland public were highly critical of the QNP, to the point of ignominy. This perspective is summarised by a correspondence to *The Cooktown Courier*, later printed in *The Queenslander* in 1880, which claims 'A true record of its proceedings would shame us before our fellow countrymen in every part of the British Empire'.<sup>75</sup> While these sentiments were often evoked by a racially motivated repugnance towards aboriginal troopers, belief in the immorality of certain officers was pervasive. This disillusionment with the Native Police authorities was compounded by legally questionable practice and administration, responses to which shall be investigated in the following chapter.

### *Legality*

Although the QNP operated with apparent impunity throughout much of its existence, a definitive set of regulations was published in the *Queensland Government Gazette* of 1866, undermining any suggestion that their official responsibilities were a clandestine matter.<sup>76</sup> However; these instructions are notable in their ambiguity, leaving room for manoeuvre in the realm of what was lawfully prohibited. The publication in *The Gazette* stresses that the officer's efforts should be 'principally directed towards the prevention of crime' rather than 'punishment of those who have violated the law'.<sup>77</sup> Contradictorily, the document later emphasises the need for 'retributive justice' to 'speedily follow the commission of crime'.<sup>78</sup> The virtual legal impunity the QNP enjoyed is typified by the 'dispersals' in which indigenous people were slaughtered, irrespective of identification or possession of a warrant. Theoretically, on directives from London, aboriginal Australians were to be treated as British subjects, and thus entitled to the same legal rights as European settlers.<sup>79</sup> Accordingly, the guidelines published in the government gazette assert that; 'the same law applies to blacks as to whites' and that officers who transgress 'do so at their own risk'.<sup>80</sup> However; in practice, the unlawful killing of indigenous Australians, by the QNP, garnered virtually no disciplinary action. Finnane notes that despite fifty inquests into the death of aborigines

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<sup>75</sup> 'The Way we Civilize', *The Queenslander*, 1 May 1880, p560.

<sup>76</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards (eds), 'You'll Get Nothing Out of It?' *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 35, Issue 123, (2004), P91-104.

<sup>77</sup> R.R. Mackenzie, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volume VII, March 2 1866, p258-261.

<sup>78</sup> R.R. Mackenzie, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volume VII, March 2 1866, p258-261.

<sup>79</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2008) p44-54.

<sup>80</sup> R.R. Mackenzie, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volume VII, March 2 1866, p258-261.

between 1860 and 1897, most of whom had been shot by the Native Police, there were only five known prosecutions, none of which were successful.<sup>81</sup>

The previously acknowledged acquittal of Frederick Wheeler, following the select committee's investigation into the Fassifern massacre of 1861, is symptomatic of this government reluctance to reprimand officers for misconduct. The conclusions drawn by the select committee evoked an outcry from Queensland citizens, embittered by the committee's alleged farcical bias towards the QNP. A correspondent to *The Courier* in August 1861 judges the committee, 'incompetent to elicit valuable evidence', with regards to the violations perpetrated by Lieutenant Wheeler.<sup>82</sup> Another correspondent to the *Courier*, in the same month, attacks the committee's exoneration of Lieutenant John O'Connell Bligh for his alleged culpability in the Maryborough massacre on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1860.<sup>83</sup> The writer discerns the ambivalence of the committee towards Bligh's failure to produce the arrest warrant, which constituted the motivation for which these aboriginal men were killed.<sup>84</sup> However; the regulations outlined in the *Queensland Government Gazette* of 1866 clearly state that if a felony has been committed and an officer has reasonable evidence to suspect the accused, their apprehension may be pursued without a warrant.<sup>85</sup> Lieutenant Bligh's legal immunity was further afforded by the ruling that officers were justified in 'using force if resisted'.<sup>86</sup> This instruction could be interpreted as deliberately ambiguous, leaving the necessary extent of this force to the discretion of the commander. However; this jurisdiction did not placate all citizens, some of whom were appalled by Bligh's apparent mercilessness and the unnecessary nature of the killings. A writer to the *Moreton Bay Courier* reprehended Bligh for the shooting of an indigenous man who had been 'constantly employed in the town', asserting from testimonies that; 'he could have been apprehended at any moment, had there been any desire or occasion'.<sup>87</sup> Conversely, the citizens of Maryborough, awarded the officer a sword to express their

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<sup>81</sup> M. Finnane and J. Richards (eds), You'll Get Nothing Out of It? *Australian Historical Studies*, Vol 35, Issue 123, (2004) p91-104.

<sup>82</sup> 'Native Police Report', *The Courier*, 5 August 1861, p2.

<sup>83</sup> 'Native Police Report', *The Courier*, 22 August 1861, p2.

<sup>84</sup> 'Native Police Report', *The Courier*, 22 August 1861, p2.

<sup>85</sup> R.R. Mackenzie, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volume VII, March 2 1866, p258-261.

<sup>86</sup> R.R. Mackenzie, *Queensland Government Gazette*, Volume VII, March 2 1866, p258-261.

<sup>87</sup> 'Lieutenant Bligh's Sword', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 25 April 1861, p2.

gratitude for his participation in the 'dispersal'.<sup>88</sup> Responses to this Maryborough incident epitomise the polarisation of public opinions towards the native police.

Once again this dissonance generally occurs between those living in areas of high police activity and those with little police intervention, the former expressing more approval in their judgments. The apparent legal impunity alluded to in these reports can perhaps be explained by the secondary legal status of indigenous Australians, who were prohibited from presenting evidence in court until 1884.<sup>89</sup> The lack of prosecutions resulting from the death of indigenous people has also been ascribed to their vulnerability while in police custody, the law stipulating that inspectors were entitled to shoot those who escaped, on sight.<sup>90</sup> Thus far, the public willingness to condone the QNP has been juxtaposed with firm denunciations. However; this position neglects the considerations of those who embraced the concept of a QNP, but contested its management in practice.

### *Inefficiency*

While the dubious legality of the QNP provoked public consternation through ostensibly moralistic concerns, citizens also expressed practical concerns relating to the force's efficiency. From the evidence presented thus far, Queenslanders were often prepared to tolerate a level of police brutality should it ensure the protection of settler life and property. However; when these strategies failed to procure the desired result, the QNP were confronted with a public backlash. A writer to *The Courier* in December 1861 questions whether one 'outrage' had been prevented for this 'heavy and wasteful expenditure', referring to the considerable cost of the force and its redundancy as a preventative organisation.<sup>91</sup> The author of a letter to the *Moreton Bay Courier* in January 1861 reports that the troopers are 'paid £100 a year each, laughed at by the natives, resented by the officers and despised by the settlers'.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, a correspondent to the *Capricornian* in 1876, alludes to a 'net saving of £15,000' in police expenses, which they infer as

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<sup>88</sup> 'Native Police Report', *The Courier*, 22 August 1861, p2.

<sup>89</sup> T. Bottoms and R. Evans (eds), *Conspiracy of Silence*, (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2013), p20-30.

<sup>90</sup> Finnane and Richards (eds), 'You'll Get Nothing Out of It?', *Australian Historical Studies*, Volume 35, Issue 123, (2004), p91-104.

<sup>91</sup> 'Native Police', *The Courier*, 28 December 1861, p2.

<sup>92</sup> 'Inutility of the Native Police', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 17 January 1861, p3.



representative of the 'excess' and 'waste' of previous years' expenditure.<sup>93</sup> The financial concerns, expressed by these citizens relate back to the colonial preoccupation with economic prosperity, addressed in Chapter One. However, despite these protestations the QNP was relatively cheap, compared with the expense of employing an equivalent 'white force', costing an annual sum of £14,000.<sup>94</sup> The proposition of an entirely European frontier police force will be assessed in the next chapter.

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<sup>93</sup> 'Native Police', *The Capricornian*, 16 August 1879, p3.

<sup>94</sup> J. Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, The Military and the Frontier 1788-1901, (United Kingdom, Cambridge University Press, 1999), p36.

### Chapter 3- Proposed Solutions

“With some slight alteration as to its composition, and a radical one as to its methods, it would be most suitable for the greater part of the country.”<sup>95</sup>

The newspaper correspondences examined in this study are permeated with Queensland citizens demanding reform for the native police. This corroborates the suggestion that the force was confronted with a groundswell of criticism, and indicates the public were invested in proposing a solution. Perhaps this interest can be attributed to a genuine sense of humanitarian obligation. However; the numerous proposals directed at improving the force’s efficiency, indicate that many were driven by previously outlined anxieties distinct to settler society.

#### *‘White force’*

The scepticism observed in Chapter Two, pertaining to the use of aboriginal troopers, generated demands for a greater proportion of white police. Alfred Brown, in the select committee interview of 1861, concluded that the force should consist principally of Europeans, with a supply of native troopers available in the event of an emergency.<sup>96</sup> A correspondent of the *Queenslander* in 1895 proposes the abolition of the QNP in favour of appointing a white force with one aboriginal tracker, on the assumption that ‘this would prevent atrocities, as a number of white men would not all be bad’.<sup>97</sup> The appearance of this letter towards the end of the nineteenth century is indicative of the sustained controversy the force continued to elicit, despite the relative infrequency of its activities. For those settlers concerned by the continual misconduct of officers, a number of white police would act as a ‘check upon one another’, thus discouraging further indiscretion.<sup>98</sup> However; suggestions of a ‘white force’ were consistently disregarded by the colonial authorities and citizens alike, premised on the tracking abilities of the indigenous troopers. The previously acknowledged committee of 1861, contesting the assertions of Alfred Brown, concluded that the substitution of aboriginal troopers with Europeans would ‘destroy’ the force’s

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<sup>95</sup> ‘Letters to the Editor’, *The Queenslander*, 19 June 1880, p786.

<sup>96</sup> Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, (Brisbane 1861), p114.

<sup>97</sup> ‘The Case of the Aborigines’, *The Queenslander*, 17 August 1895, p309.

<sup>98</sup> ‘Native Police’, *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser*, 3 September 1863, p2.

efficiency.<sup>99</sup> This is corroborated by the newspaper contributions of Queensland's citizens, which identify the deployment of a 'white' force as 'exceedingly nice on paper' but 'absurd' in its idealism.<sup>100</sup> Because of the alleged tracking prowess of the indigenous troopers, particularly when traversing scrubland, the force was deemed by many to only have supremacy when 'assisted by the eyesight of civilized blacks'.<sup>101</sup> The utilisation of the QNP troopers in the pursuit of the notorious Kelly gang in 1879 denotes the esteem with which these tracking abilities were regarded.<sup>102</sup> A suspicion raised in the *Queenslander* in 1880 implies the reluctance to employ European troopers ensures the absence of 'credible' witnesses to the force's atrocities.<sup>103</sup> This insinuation alludes to the public distrust concerning the Native Police's legal adherence, examined in Chapter Two. However; it appears more credible that aversion to this proposal was driven predominantly by the conviction that a 'purely white force' would be 'incapable of the fine tracking indispensable to the certainty of apprehending offenders'.<sup>104</sup>

### *Improved Recruitment*

While the contentions summarised above related to perceived systemic issues with the native police, others merely opposed the way in which this system was implemented. The force's propensity for gross misconduct was often accredited to misguided recruitment. Consequently, the public requested more meticulous selection of officers by the government. Accordingly, an abandonment of morality was deemed to be preventable through the appointment of a commander 'equally capable of governing himself'.<sup>105</sup> The actions of Lieutenants Wheeler and Bligh acknowledged in Chapter Two, may have served as the catalyst for these demands, as they gained public notoriety through the meeting of the select committee. Indeed, a writer to the *Queenslander* in 1880, contends that 'those only shall be placed in command in whose temper, judgment and ability reliance can be placed', evidently referring to the transgressions of past officers.<sup>106</sup> Citizens who defended the

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<sup>99</sup> Queensland Parliament Legislative Assembly, 17 July 1861, p1-5.

<sup>100</sup> 'White and Black', *The Brisbane Courier*, 15 May 1880, p3.

<sup>101</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 14 September 1867, p7.

<sup>102</sup> 'The Queensland Native Police', *Illustrated Australian News*, 12 April 1879, p10.

<sup>103</sup> 'White versus Black', *The Queenslander*, 15 May 1880, p627.

<sup>104</sup> 'The Aborigines and the Native Police. No.II', *The Queenslander*, 22 February 1868, p11.

<sup>105</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, 8 March 1879, p305.

<sup>106</sup> 'Black and Native Police', *The Queenslander*, 10 July 1880, p51.

necessity of the force, particularly in the Northern districts, called for the appointment of men with more experience than those currently occupying the position. From a letter to the *Queensland Figaro* in 1884, there emerges a cynical explanation for these appointments; suggesting that officers 'being friends with the commissioner of police, are shunted above the heads of deserving men...'<sup>107</sup> This erroneous recruitment was also observed in the selection of indigenous troopers, as the standard procedures were abandoned. Before the state's separation from Queensland, Frederick Walker never employed in a district, aboriginals who were either raised there, or were on 'friendly terms with its aboriginal tribes'.<sup>108</sup> However; the relaxing of these regulations under the Queensland administration were deemed to encourage trooper desertion and disobedience, as previously a native policeman 'could have little hope of saving his life if he ventured alone among the hostile tribes'.<sup>109</sup>

### *Expansion*

For those settlers who espoused the necessity of a QNP, but recognised its inefficiency, the solution of expansion was often promoted. This solution was predicated on the assumption that the 'growth' of the QNP had not 'kept pace with our extension of settlement'.<sup>110</sup> As this quotation suggests, there existed a pervading sense that the force had been stretched beyond its means, particularly towards the end of the nineteenth century. This same correspondent verifies their assertion by referring to the 'many letters' which the paper had received 'complaining of want of protection'.<sup>111</sup> In stark contrast to the financially driven criticisms expressed in chapter Two, some advocated the enhanced provision of resources to the native police. A letter to *The Queenslander* in 1871 dismisses these concerns as a fallacy; the writer assuring that the 'expense' of employing another division near the Robertson River in the north 'would be fully repaid by the prospecting for gold', as the Native Police presence would provide the miners with 'more confidence in their pursuits'.<sup>112</sup> Again the divergence of opinions on police expansion can be observed as a locational divide. At the squatters meeting referred to in Chapter One, the numerical reinforcement of the

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<sup>107</sup> 'The Northern Blacks and Our Native Police Force', *Queensland Figaro*, 22 November 1884, p15.

<sup>108</sup> 'Native Police', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 14 February 1861, p4.

<sup>109</sup> 'Native Police', *The Moreton Bay Courier*, 14 February 1861, p4.

<sup>110</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, Saturday 8 March 1879, p305.

<sup>111</sup> 'Native Police', *The Queenslander*, 8 March 1879, p305.

<sup>112</sup> 'Police Protection in the North', *The Queenslander*, 15 July 1871, p2.

native police is advanced to tackle what is considered to be a scarcity of protection in the outlying districts.<sup>113</sup> As depicted in Vogan's illustration (Image. 3), squatters had been known to take retributive matters into their own hands. Accordingly, the squatters convey a demand for increased judicial rights, to afford officers the capacity to temporarily utilise their assistance in punitive operations.<sup>114</sup>

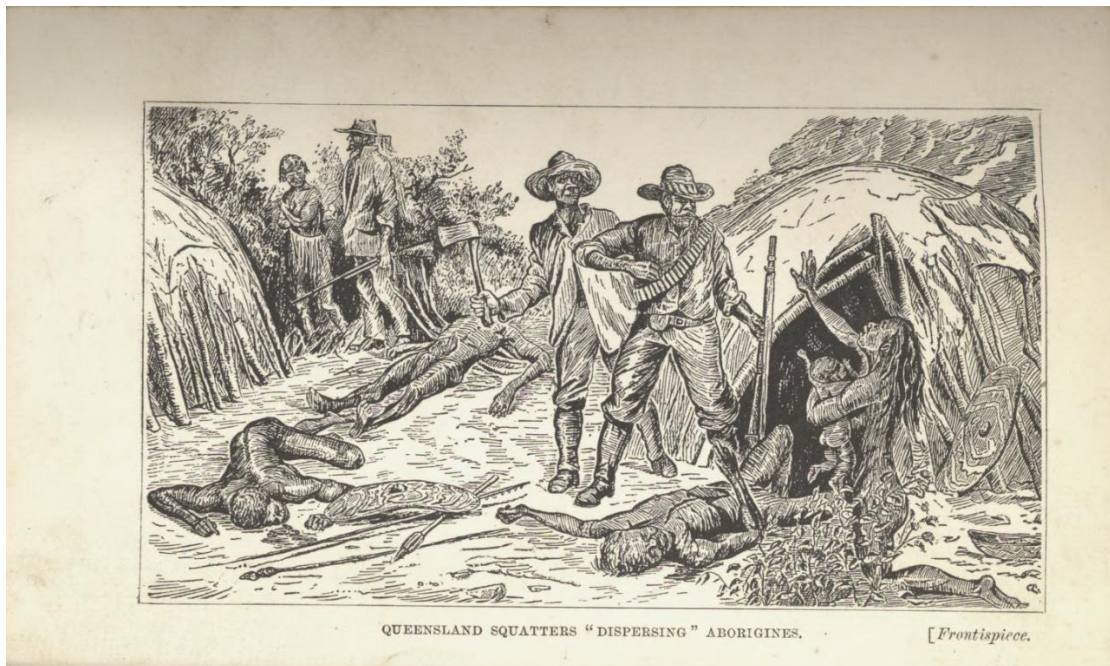


Image 3: A.J. Vogan, *Queensland Squatters "Dispersing" Aborigines, The Black Police*, (1890)

As acknowledged in Chapter one, demands for an increased police presence were most vocal among those, such as pastoralists and miners, with property or capital at stake. This qualification may explain how Queenslanders came to the conclusion that native police resources were insufficient and thus required reinforcement.

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<sup>113</sup> 'Meeting of Squatters', *Northern Argus*, 5 August 1865, p2.

<sup>114</sup> 'Meeting of Squatters', *Northern Argus*, 5 August 1865, p2.

## Conclusion

For many settlers the perceived threat of aboriginal resistance to colonial expansion necessitated a forceful deterrent. These settlers, often residing in the most remote regions of the colony, were confronted with a population, ultimately hostile to their presence. Hence, the native police was able to operate for over fifty years in Queensland, despite substantial public condemnation, largely because of the insistence of those in the outlying districts. For these citizens, the force was looked upon as a safety blanket, protecting life and livelihood on the frontier. Arguably, it was not with apathy they regarded oppression of the indigenous population, but rather with a sense of relief. This approval was seemingly intertwined with the devaluation of aboriginal life, based on the pseudoscientific belief in a racial hierarchy. For these defenders of the force, attacks on Cullin-la-Ringo and Hornet Bank, not only served to affirm their racial prejudices, but also served to justify the use of a para-military organisation on the frontier.

This fervent support for the native police, expressed by many in the outer regions, did not diminish the humanitarian resolve of others in the colony. While grievances regarding the employment of indigenous troopers were often derived from those pervasive racial prejudices, concerns with officers repeatedly assume a moral tone. Correspondences reflected the shame these figures of authority inflicted upon the colony, accusing them of plummeting to the depths of human depravity and identifying them as a 'disgrace to any Christian land'.<sup>115</sup> While this outrage served to provoke government inquests, officers remained largely immune to prosecution. The eventual conviction of Frederick Wheeler in 1876, for the whipping to death of an aboriginal boy, does not detract from a shocking lack of accountability.<sup>116</sup> If anything this incident merely confirms the callousness with which a number of commanders operated. Officer impunity was sustained by ambiguous legal guidelines and the government's dismissal of public testimonies. The latter is evident from the 1861 select committee, which in its disqualification of 'inexperienced' commentators lost any veneer of neutrality. Confronted with the suppression of dissenting voices in the

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<sup>115</sup> 'The Native Police in Queensland', *Maryborough Chronicle*, 17 February 1874, p4.

<sup>116</sup> A.J. Hillier, *Native Police Under Scrutiny*, *Journal of the Royal Historical Society Queensland*, Volume 15, Issue 6 (1994) p279-293.

assembly, the public turned to the press as an outlet 'to redeem the honour of the colony'.<sup>117</sup>

As aforementioned, the protests of the public did not always assume a moral dimension. Many settlers who advocated the ideas of the force did not regard its operations as sufficient to nullify the threat of aboriginal resistance on the frontier. The discipline of indigenous troopers and the ability of the officers governing them augmented this representation of incompetence. These assertions led some to question whether the expense of the force was defensible, particularly given Queensland's still developing economy. These misgivings encouraged some to propose various solutions, ranging from fairly drastic upheaval to increased funding. However; regardless of the incessancy of these public calls for reform, the organisation proved largely resistant to change. This resistance can perhaps be explained by the governmental influence of squatters and those formerly involved with the force. Nevertheless, the prevalence of these demands and their appearance over the course of the force's existence, indicate the considerable longevity of public disaffection. The abundance of public detractors, the extent of which is too great to be represented in this study alone, are a damning indictment of the force's administration. The scale of this criticism seemingly renders Richard's assertion that 'some settlers did not agree with the violence', as somewhat of an understatement.<sup>118</sup> In many respects, the correspondence of Queensland's citizens with their colonial press indicates an active denunciation of the force's activities and administration, rather than passive objection. However; the force's continued operation in spite of these protestations is suggestive of the approval of many settlers, an approval elicited by fear.

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<sup>117</sup> 'Native Police Report', *The Courier*, 5 August 1861, p2.

<sup>118</sup> J. Richards, *Secret War*, (Queensland, University of Queensland Press, 2008) p201-208.

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