

The Legend of Eureka: Riot or Revolution?

Amy Ma '23
Groton School
Massachusetts, USA

Abstract

The Eureka Stockade, a miners' rebellion that occurred on the Victorian goldfields on December 3rd, 1854, has long held a monumental role in Australian national identity. Inflated by politicians and labor movements as a "revolution" and "the birthplace of Australian democracy," this 20-minute confrontation between dissatisfied miners and British soldiers gradually evolved into a symbol against oppression. However, the debate surrounding the significance of Eureka has been controversial. A closer analysis of the motivations and effects of the incident finds the well-known titles buttressing the historical importance of Eureka to be largely unfounded. Not only were most miners motivated largely by expectations of short-term economic gain and, in some cases, desire for political representation, but the rebellion brought little impact outside of the gold fields. At most, it merely accelerated the inclination toward popular sovereignty and democracy, which had developed decades earlier in the British colonies. This essay examines the extent to which the Eureka Stockade directly influenced Australian politics and the reasons behind its enduring popularity in political discourse – both in rhetoric and imagery. By analyzing the causes, effects, and legacy of the uprising, this paper concludes that the legend of Eureka is alarmingly, yet predictably, overdramatized. The overall analysis renders that the proliferation of Eureka's Stockade in the political and social fabric of Australia accentuates the ability of sympathetic national legends to unite populations.

Background

It is often claimed that Australia's only revolution, the Eureka Stockade, lasted a total of fifteen minutes.¹ The year was 1854, almost four years since the Gold Rush began in the nascent Australian colony of Victoria. On the Ballarat goldfields, a group of rowdy miners fought a clumsy battle against the Victorian government, which they saw as oppressive and corrupt. The rebellion was quickly suppressed, with twenty-two diggers and six soldiers reportedly dying during the scuffle.² Despite paling in scale to the more grandiose French, American, and Russian Revolutions which surround it, Eureka has been regarded as a "revolution" and "a strike for liberty" by the likes of Karl Marx³ and Mark Twain.⁴ Australian politician Herbert Vere Evatt went as far as to deem it the "birthplace of Australian democracy."⁵ However, other historians have been more critical of the significance of Eureka, calling it an "incident, dressed up in borrowed robes, often given a ludicrously inflated importance."⁶

The Eureka Stockade, motivated by the miners' desire for financial welfare and less commonly, political representation, accelerated Australia's political development by promoting democratic ideas among the general population; however, contrary to popular narrative, it did not directly cause any immediate reform beyond the gold fields. While alarmingly exaggerated and misused, Eureka's allure as an emotive and adaptable story has solidified its symbolic position in Australian identity for years to come.

Origins of the Australian Gold Rush

Though scattered reports of gold in Southeastern Australia dated back to 1823, they were never met with great interest. Penal colonial governments suppressed these claims due to concerns that they would

¹ Russel Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations in Historical Perspective)* (Englewood Cliffs. Prentice-Hall1965), 57.

² Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 56.

³ Karl Marx, "News from Australia," *Die Neue-Oder Zeitung*, 7 March 1855. Quoted in Benjamin T. Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government: The Shaping of Democracy in Australia and Canada* (Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014), 351, digital file.

⁴ Mark Twain, "23," in *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925), digital file. Quoted in Frank Welsh, *Australia: A New History of the Great Southern Land* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006), 209.

⁵ Eric Petersen, "The Eureka Rebellion of 1854," *Politics and Culture*, no. 4 (2004): accessed May 1, 2021, <https://politicsandculture.org/2010/08/10/the-eureka-rebellion-of-1854-by-eric-petersen-2/>.

⁶ Welsh, *Australia: A New History*, 219.

encourage mutiny and destabilize the modest pastoral workforce.⁷ Neither was the general population particularly enthusiastic, for most lacked practical knowledge of mining skills.⁸ However, the success of the California Gold Rush in 1848 transformed the attitude of the colonies.⁹ The discovery of gold at the Loddon River, about 16 miles from Melbourne, on July 5th, 1851, kickstarted Victoria's Gold Rush – the colony's first period of rapid population growth and economic development.¹⁰ Ballarat, located in the central highlands, soon became one of the hotspots for gold.

Due to heavy dependence on luck and the nature of Ballarat's deep leads, mining was a financially stressful affair. The Eureka diggings in East Ballarat were particularly rich, but most of its gold lay a hundred or more feet underground in ancient riverbeds known as deep leads.¹¹ Miners often spent up to nine months just sinking their shafts before they could even know whether they had struck riches.¹² As more people flocked to the gold fields desperate for quick riches, alluvial surface gold became scarce. Capital and expensive machinery were increasingly necessary for success, which troubled the self-employed, "artisanal" miners that comprised the majority at goldfields like Ballarat.¹³ Out of these difficult circumstances emerged predictable frustration and financial stress for many who were less lucky, which made them furious when outrageous government taxation was implemented.

Causes of the Eureka Stockade

Objection towards the overpriced Miner's License was undoubtedly the primary motivation behind the Eureka Stockade. The Miner's License was a direct monthly tax of thirty shillings, worth at least a third of a shepherd's wage, required for every digger on the Victorian goldfields.¹⁴ Other than the lucky few who struck wild riches, most miners who won little to no gold found themselves with an increased financial burden. Bitter protests occurred regularly across mining

⁷ The Examiner, "Keep It Quiet! Anniversary of Gold Discovery," *The Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania, Australia), February 15, 1934, 6, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51857157>.

⁸ Geoffrey Serle, *Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861* (Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1977), 44, Apple Book.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Blainey, *A History of Victoria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43, digital file.

¹¹ Bob O'Brien and S. D. S. Huyghue, *Massacre at Eureka: The Untold Story*, rev. ed. (Ballarat, Vic.: Sovereign Hill Museums Association, 1998), 46.

¹² Blainey, *A History*, 49.

¹³ Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 56.

¹⁴ Ibid., 48.

communities, and the license was criticized by the local press as a “juggernaut tax [intended] to crush the poor” imposed by their “Victorian Czar.”¹⁵ The economic situation of late 1854 was especially difficult: compared to earlier months, overall gold production had dropped by 35 percent.¹⁶ Rationally, a time of financial hardship would be the last occasion to tighten taxation; but when Sir Charles Hotham replaced La Trobe as Governor of Victoria in May 1854, what greeted him was a severe budget deficiency of one million pounds caused by irresponsible management.¹⁷ In order to quickly relieve the debts, Governor Hotham (in hindsight erroneously) increased the inspection of licenses eightfold, which peaked discontent.

Hatred towards the license was further exacerbated by the violent, oppressive behavior of the police. In order to enforce the Miner’s License and monitor the miners’ behavior, a police force known as the Gold Commission patrolled the goldfields. Though clashes between miners, especially xenophobic attacks against Chinese immigrants, were certainly not uncommon, Governor Hotham and many contemporary historians acknowledge “the high level of self-discipline and responsibility among the diggers.”¹⁸ The attitude of the Gold Commission, however, did not match the peaceful behavior observed. The government paid little consideration to the suitability of policemen, leaving the positions plagued by poorly trained ex-convicts with histories of violence.¹⁹ J.B. Humffray, a prominent rebel leader, writes that “honest men [were] hunted like kangaroos... and treated as if they were felons.”²⁰ The nature of Eureka as a deep lead mine worsened the problem. Miners would climb over a hundred feet just to show the officers a piece of paper for ten seconds, delaying the operations in the deeper shafts by half an hour or more. Water in the deep shafts often damaged the licenses, and miners often misplaced their papers when they changed out of wet clothes.²¹ These difficulties were no excuse. Heavy beatings and monstrous fines often ensued following the failure to present a license, which unsurprisingly brought anger and grievances to the Ballarat mining communities. However, although this tax, and the brutality of the police in collecting it, served as the main motivation for Eureka, it would cause the least impact because it was such a local problem. Rather, the desire for political reform, which eventually arose

¹⁵ Serle, *Golden Age*, 54.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, line 4064.

¹⁷ Serle, *Golden Age*, 316.

¹⁸ Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 55.

¹⁹ Welsh, *Australia: A New History*, 211.

²⁰ O’Brien and Huyghue, *Massacre at Eureka*, 51.

²¹ Geoffrey Norman Blainey, *The Rush That Never Ended*, 3rd ed. (Carlton, VC, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1978), 50.

out of the hatred towards the government's taxation, proved to be far more influential on the colony.

Deepening injustice in the goldfields gradually ignited desires for democratic reform among some diggers. Increasingly violent license hunts and the unjust acquittal of murderer James Bentley made it clear to the Ballarat miners that the Victorian government was not an institution designed to protect them but to capitalize off them.²² Despite comprising a quarter of the colony, the miners held no representation in parliament.²³ Determined to improve their political and financial circumstances, some 10,000 men gathered on November 11th, 1854 to ratify the Ballarat Reform League Charter, a four-page ultimatum addressing the Victorian government.²⁴ The charter called for the immediate abolition of the Miner's License and the Gold Commission, but focused mostly on suffrage and political representation – ideological issues scaling far beyond the local level.²⁵ Considered “a marriage between liberalism and civic republicanism,” the Chartist-flavored ultimatum boldly promoted liberty, civic duty, and individual rights.²⁶ The fiery rebels also adopted the classic American protest outcry, that “taxation without representation is tyranny.”²⁷ It is important, though, to distinguish separatist republican sentiments from the League. The miners believed that “the principles they were fighting for, the rights of British subjects and the spirit of the constitution, were not in opposition to their monarch.”²⁸ Contrary to Marx's beliefs, the people of Ballarat did not want to *revolutionize* their government, they simply wanted to be represented within it.

Even then, most miners saw political involvement as a perk of their struggle for lower taxation rates. The miners of Victoria had a consistent record of favoring monetary interests over the political: previously, small-scale suffrage protests in 1853 were curbed by a reduction in taxation.²⁹ Despite the radical declarations of the Charter, very few likely believed in them to their fullest extent. Eyewitness Raffaello Carboni noted that among many miners gathered “there was no democratic feeling, but merely a spirit of resistance to the license

²² Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government*, 328.

²³ Marjorie Barnard, *A History of Australia* (London: Angus & Robertson, 1986), 262.

²⁴ Barnard, *A History*, 262

²⁵ Members of the Ballarat Reform League, “Ballarat Reform League Charter,” November 11, 1854, accessed December 10, 2020, <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/a-diverse-state/eureka-stories/ballar-at-reform-league-charter/>.

²⁶ Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government*, 335.

²⁷ Members of the Ballarat Reform League, “Ballarat Reform League Charter.”

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 343.

²⁹ Serle, *Golden Age*, 237.

fee.”³⁰ While most supported the reforms out of financial frustrations, only fifteen percent of those at Ballarat were willing to take up arms for the cause, demonstrating the lack of true commitment.³¹ Historian Geoffrey Sterle offers a plausible reason for this political indifference. He argues that “most diggers still regarded themselves as temporary visitors to the colony; hence they had no special interest in its government except as it immediately affected them.”³² This hypothesis explains why the cost of the Miner’s License, with monthly payments and biweekly police checks, was the central complaint rather than long-term political reform. Nevertheless, the Ballarat Reform League Charter would become the public representation of the miners’ goals, promoting democratic sentiments among the Melbourne public even if those ideologies were not as common on the goldfields.

When the miners presented their Charter to the Victorian government in late November, the demands within the charter were unfortunately dismissed immediately. Although Governor Hotham agreed to grant the miners suffrage, he refused to abolish the Miner’s License and ordered troop reinforcements to Ballarat.³³ Since the primary, economic objective was not fulfilled, troop crackdowns were received with great hostility. Having recognized the futility of political negotiation, the miners stoned the policemen and declared further violence as their last resort.³⁴ On November 29th, some 2000 men gathered at Beverly Hill where they made inflammatory speeches and took vows.³⁵ A Prussian blue flag adorned by a white Southern Cross was raised, under which the men, led by Peter Lalor, swore: “to stand truly by each other and fight to defend [their] rights and liberties.”³⁶ Afterward, the miners lit a giant bonfire in which they burnt all their Miner’s Licenses, symbolizing their defiance. Within a few days, they hastily built an acre-long stockade out of a paling fence and prepared for the inevitable battle.

The Battle

The Eureka Stockade was a battle the rebels were destined to lose. With no military commander, no training, and a lack of planning, the disorganized miners stood no chance against the professional British

³⁰ Raffaello Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade* (December 1855; repr., Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007), page 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 525.

³² *Ibid.*, 534.

³³ Barnard, *A History*, 212-213.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, 49.

soldiers³⁷ As Carboni describes, “orders [were] given by everybody, attended by nobody.”³⁸ The troops stormed the stockade in the early morning of December 3rd, a Sabbath day. By Sunday morning, only 120 men remained in the stockade in comparison to 2000 who originally gathered, cementing their inevitable defeat.³⁹ There are numerous explanations for the large exodus of men. Since rest on Sabbath was a common practice on the gold fields, many miners left the stockade on Saturday to spend the day with family.⁴⁰ The shortage of arms and ammunition also discouraged some miners from participating.⁴¹ Either way, the miners were outnumbered by 276 well-trained British soldiers and forced to surrender within fifteen minutes.⁴² Many more were injured and imprisoned. Loved ones lay smashed, tents burnt with fury, the Eureka flag was torn and trampled, and for a moment it seemed as if the fight against oppression had been lost.

Effects of the Eureka Stockade

Although the rebels lost the battle, the cruel bloodshed of the Eureka Stockade drew the necessary press and public support to elevate its political resonance to a state level. The early morning of December 3rd was devastating for diggers; yet in public perception, the miners’ cause had shifted from a mostly monetary local issue to one that concerned the value of human life. Public sympathy was encouraged by the British soldiers’ aimless slaughter during the Stockade. According to Carboni, the troops fired at the tents “indiscriminately,” even shooting a “mother with a baby in arms.”⁴³ Another witness described that “one man far from the scene in bed with his wife was dragged from her arms and murdered in his tent, which [the soldiers] afterward fired.”⁴⁴ In response, *The Ballarat Times* headlined the Stockade a “massacre”; *the Melbourne Herald* extensively detailed the awful sight of dead miners; *the Age* proclaimed that “[the people of Melbourne] do not sympathize with injustice and coercion.”⁴⁵ This dramatic increase in press coverage had significant effects: days after the rebellion, six thousand protestors

³⁷ Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, 61.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Fitz-Simons, *Eureka: The Unfinished*, line 7349.

⁴⁰ Timothy Willem Jones and Clare Wright, “The Goldfields’ Sabbath: A Postsecular Analysis of Social Cohesion and Social Control on the Ballarat Goldfields, 1854.” *Journal of Religious History*, December 2019, digital file.

⁴¹ Clarke, *History of Australia*, 58.

⁴² Barnard, *A History*, 262.

⁴³ Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, 75.

⁴⁴ Fyson, “Eyewitness at Eureka.”

⁴⁵ Fitz-Simons, *Eureka: The Unfinished*, line 8140.

gathered outside St Paul's Cathedral in Melbourne to protest.⁴⁶ Other mining communities from Geelong and Bendigo also petitioned the government. Public support for the miners was so favorable that all the arrested miners were "acquitted to loud cheers until their defense counsel no longer bothered to present a case."⁴⁷ It was ultimately the British soldiers' misdemeanors and the court of public opinion that saved the Ballarat Reform League from being forgotten in history as a minor strife. The miners' dissatisfaction was no longer a local insurgency but was now associated with the rights and liberties of every citizen within the colony. The quick endorsement of the Charter's tenets by the people of Victoria suggests both the popularity of the League and the existence of progressive sentiments before the Stockade. Eventually, the strength of public pressure, in combination with a fear of more violence, forced the Victorian government to comply with the miners' demands.

Eureka's positive impacts, which proved to be largely financial, were experienced most greatly in the goldfields. Finally recognizing the necessity of reform, Governor Hotham conceded that "although the principle of the license was right, the mode of working it was entirely wrong."⁴⁸ In addition to the acquittal of all rebels, the Victorian government initiated a series of reforms that drastically improved the political and financial circumstances of miners. The most important reform was the abolition of the police force and the monthly Miner's License, the latter replaced by a far cheaper annual tax in March 1855. Attached to this yearly license was the ability to vote, though perhaps unsurprisingly, very few miners exercised this privilege.⁴⁹ The lack of political inclination post-abolition again suggests that pure democratic sentiments were not the driving force behind Eureka, but simply a means of acquiring the desired financial welfare. Nevertheless, the miners gained greater political freedom, which they utilized to further improve their financial livelihoods. When Peter Lalor and other representatives were elected to the Victorian Parliament, they were able to advocate for better mining policies in the Mining Act of June 1855, which gave almost all local regulatory and judicial power to miner communities on the fields.⁵⁰ At least on the local level, Eureka was absolutely "a victory won by a lost battle," as Mark Twain declared.⁵¹ All of the miner's demands in the Charter were granted. However, the more controversial aspect of Eureka's impacts is the extent to which it affected

⁴⁶ *Riot or Revolution*.

⁴⁷ Welsh, *Australia: A New History*, 214.

⁴⁸ Serle, *Golden Age*, 78.

⁴⁹ Barnard, *A History*, 263.

⁵⁰ Welsh, *Australia: A New History*, 214.

⁵¹ Twain, *Following the Equator: A Journey Across the World*, 23.

the greater political development of Australia, and more specifically, the Colony of Victoria.

The adoption of democratic policies such as manhood suffrage during the 1850s was encouraged but not directly caused by the Eureka Stockade because it popularized pre-existing political sentiments. From manhood suffrage to the formation of the constitution, the 1850s were, in general, a time of great political advancement for the Australian colonies. The Gold Rush, along with a new wave of immigration, brought an influx of novel ideas which certainly nurtured the preexisting democratic movement.⁵² Yet it is exactly the volatility of the 1850s political climate that makes it difficult to definitively conclude the extent to which the Eureka Stockade guided these changes. Less than one year after the rebellion, the miners had representation in parliament. Within three years, the ability to vote was given to all male British citizens in Victoria over the age of twenty-one.⁵³ The proximity of these events suggests at least some degree of connection. Since the Eureka Stockade became so well-known among the Victorian population, it likely promoted democratic ideas. As a result, the political climate after the stockade became “overwhelmingly liberal,” which inevitably accelerated the adaptation of progressive policies.⁵⁴

However, one must be cautious of the *post hoc, propter hoc* fallacy, for Eureka was not the direct cause but at most a catalyst of these political developments. Manhood suffrage and civic republicanism were not novel ideas in Australia, and the course toward responsible government had been set decades before. By the 1830s, democratic demands already prevailed in Victorian society.⁵⁵ Calls for self-government dominated 1840s political rhetoric. Major newspapers such as *the Sydney Chronicle*, *the Guardian*, and *the Examiner* called for universal suffrage not “limited by any paltry property qualifications” as early as 1842.⁵⁶ The Colony of South Australia adopted voting rights a year before Victoria. Even within the Victorian colony itself, drafts of the constitution preceded the rebellion, and a bill to enfranchise diggers was sent to London in March 1854, eight months before the Stockade.⁵⁷

⁵² Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government*, 352.

⁵³ Mat McLachan, “The Eureka Stockade with Professor Frank Bongiorno,” December 1, 2019, in *Living History*, narrated by Frank Bongiorno, podcast, audio, 38:13, accessed December 9, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Zd0Io93QXg>.

⁵⁴ Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 63.

⁵⁵ Welsh, *Australia: A New History*, 210.

⁵⁶ James Normington-Rawling, “Before Eureka,” *Labour History*, no. 4 (May 1963): 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/27507716>.

⁵⁷ Serle, *Golden Age*, 236.

Eureka did not *give birth* to Australian democracy, as the famous myth popularized by Evatt suggests. The rebellion can instead be interpreted as a symptom of a long-established trend toward democratic reform. The goldfields simply inflamed passions for democracy and hastened the political reforms which were bound to come eventually.

In reality, the Eureka Stockade did not change the course of Australian history; rather, it was the demographic transition brought by the Gold Rush that contributed to the political, economic, and social climate of the time. Gold in Australia was fleeting. Within two decades almost all of the precious metal, both surface and underground, had vanished from Southeastern Australian soil. Nonetheless, the vast influx of free men accelerated Australia's political and economic development while leaving enduring cultural changes. Within ten years, the population of Victoria grew to more than 500,000 compared to the original 80,000.⁵⁸ Though thousands of migrants came from China, America, and other European countries, migrants from Britain nevertheless constituted the majority of immigrants.⁵⁹ The immigrants brought novel (and mostly Chartist) political ideas and new industrial skills⁶⁰; but the largest impact of the gold rush stems from its sociocultural effects: the concept of mateship, the blurring of convict identity, the growing middle-class culture, the construction of universities and churches, and the general increase in refinement and education were all nurtured by the free immigrants.⁶¹ Amid political change, Australian culture was also evolving; and as a new Australian identity develops, the search for lore and heroes led to the dramatization of Eureka and the persistence of its political legacy.

The Legacy of Eureka

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, many Australian political entities have sported Eureka as a symbol for their causes. From the storming of the New South Wales Parliament in 1878 to the Yarra Maritime Strike of 1890, to the Great Shearer's Strike of 1891⁶², to the Australian Labor Movement in the 20th century, it was the Eureka Flag,

⁵⁸ Clarke, *History of Australia*, 56.

⁵⁹ Blainey, *A History*, 44.

⁶⁰ Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 66.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶² Anne Beggs Sunter, "Birth of a Nation? Constructing and De-constructing the Eureka Legend" (doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002), 64, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/39407>.

with its white-starred southern cross, that they held high in the air.⁶³ Unsurprisingly, the Stockade has become synonymous with trade union movements, but other political identities have also woven the event into their historical narratives. Communist publications of the 1950s embraced Eureka because they regarded the uprising as an example of “the triumph of collective action.”⁶⁴ Likely an attempt to assimilate communist ideologies into Australian national rhetoric, the party even named its youth organization the Eureka Youth League. Eventually, the National Socialist Party of Australia (NSPA) donned the Eureka flag as an official emblem in 1968. On the other hand, white-Australia nationalists also praised Eureka for its patriotic spirit and xenophobic undertones, with the far-right Australia First Party controversially adopting the flag as their official party logo in 2016.⁶⁵ In both the anti-Chinese riots of the 1860s and the anti-immigration rallies of the 21st century, the Eureka Flag was used as a symbol of the white nationalist struggle.⁶⁶ Due to Eureka’s popularity on both sides of the political spectrum, interesting collaborations have occurred, such as the Centenary of the Rebellion in 1954 where communists and right-wing Roman Catholic politicians were forced to cooperate.⁶⁷ In the way that historian Dr. Anne Beggs Sunter suggests, “Eureka can be likened to Norman Lindsay’s magic pudding, capable of constantly being cut up, yet always able to renew and reinvent itself.”⁶⁸ Therefore, the popularity of the Eureka myth is best at illustrating how mutual belief in a mythical explanation of the past could be used as a centripetal force to foster interconnection and reinforce shared values. As Australians sought to rid themselves of their penal British past, Eureka became a natural point of interest in their search for national heroes. Having a common heritage is unifying, and for a country that is not rich in dramatic historical events, seekers of tradition were able to tailor the story of Eureka to justify and sanctify their desired ideological narratives. Yet, another notable reason for Eureka’s popular legacy is its ability to invoke public sympathy.

⁶³ Elizabeth Huf, “Great Shearers’ Strike of 1891,” *Queensland Historical Atlas*, 29 September 2010, <https://www.qhatlas.com.au/content/great-shearers%E2%80%99-strike-1891> (1 February 2020).

⁶⁴ Convict Creations (specific name unknown), “Australia in the Cold War,” *Convict Creations*, published date known, <http://convictcreations.com/history/coldwar.html> (1 February 2020).

⁶⁵ John Hood, “Eureka’s Spirit,” *Australia First Party*, published date unknown, <https://australiafirstparty.net/nationalism/the-nationalist-ethic/eurekas-spirit/> (1 February 2020).

⁶⁶ Sunter, *Birth of a Nation*, 67.

⁶⁷ Serle, *Golden Age*, 542.

⁶⁸ Sunter, “Contested Memories,” 29.

Eureka's resonance with so many political groups is also due to its ability to invoke sympathy. Rarely are the actual events of Eureka mentioned or praised (for they are frankly quite underwhelming), but rather, it is used as an emotive, colorful symbol and a token of national identity. The Stockade's popularity in the field of arts further bolstered its sympathetic appeal. The acclaimed *Ballad of Eureka* by Victor Daley, for example, framed the Eureka men as heroes who fought bravely against tyrants for the sake of freedom but inevitably fell before Fate.⁶⁹ Whether among the Melbourne population in 1854 or in modern Australian society, the legacy of Eureka persists precisely because it was so "lame": people could not resist supporting the emotive underdog narrative. Perhaps, this minute rebellion has received far too much attention for it truthfully was; but due to its ability to appeal to both mind and emotion, this fifteen-minute rebellion will likely continue to serve as a key symbol within Australian political rhetoric, regardless of the ongoing debate about its tangible impact.

However, from Eureka's exaggerated significance emerges problems surrounding the selective narration of history. The dangers of Eureka's overdramatization are easily visible in the gross simplifications and biased distortions that the event has weathered. One of the most common misconceptions popularized by media and even some historians proclaimed Eureka as the only battle occurring on Australian soil.⁷⁰ Yet, this claim blatantly overlooks critical periods of Australian history such as the Frontier Wars. The Australian Frontier Wars were a series of "state-sanctioned" battles and massacres lasting from 1788 to 1934 that resulted in the slaughter of more than 40,000 indigenous Australians. While some may point out the extended period as an explanation for its obscurity, concentrated massacres in Myall Creek (28 deaths) and the Tasmanian War (600 deaths) also receive little acknowledgment.⁷¹ To further illustrate Eureka's overinflated significance, it could be likened to another clash on the gold fields – the Lambing Flat riots. Occurring between 1860 and 1861, the racially motivated battles saw a mob of 3000 Caucasian miners brutally attack 2000 Chinese miners in addition to a police camp.⁷² Though Lambing Flat's battles were larger in both magnitude and duration, its dramatically smaller coverage in comparison to Eureka again sheds light on the way that Australian history had been recounted. As Lauren Harris describes,

⁶⁹ Serle, *Golden Age*, 542.

⁷⁰ Ward, *Australia (The Modern Nations)*, 57.

⁷¹ Jane Morrison, "Australian Frontier Conflicts 1788-1940s," Australian Frontier Conflicts, last modified 2020, accessed May 1, 2021, <https://australianfrontierconflicts.com.au/>.

⁷² Lauren Carroll Harris, "The Riots History Erased: Reckoning with the Racism of Lambing Flat," *The Guardian* (Kings Place, London), August 6, 2018.

undesired events, including the persecution of Aboriginal Australians and Chinese immigrants, may have been naturally or purposefully avoided, while comforting stories of heroic white uprisings endured. Thus, the success of Eureka's legacy could also serve as an interesting case study on the selection of history in adherence to potential ideological biases.

Conclusion

When the restored Eureka flag was unveiled at Ballarat on December 3, 1973, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam uttered that "the importance of a historical event lies not in what happened but in what later generations believe to have happened." This principle aligns with the tale of Eureka, which is most powerful in its "strength as a national tradition."⁷³ This paper has highlighted the overdramatization of the Eureka Legend. Unlike common mythology, the Eureka Stockade did not directly cause any major reforms beyond the goldfields, but rather only expedite political development and the formation of an Australian identity by popularizing democratic sentiments among the Victorian population. The common perception of Eureka as the birthplace of Australian democracy espoused by Marx, Twain, and Evatt exaggerates the effects of the uprising and overlooks key political developments initiated in the decades.

However, despite its lack of tangible impact, Eureka is a critical part of Australian culture. The rebellion, woven into the identities of many political ideologies, has become an event of great symbolic meaning to Victoria and Australia. Accordingly, Eureka survives in Australian political rhetoric not because of its magnitude or direct impact, but because of its ability to resonate with human sympathy and represent Australian identity. The latter where, just as Carboni describes, while standing under the Eureka Flag days before the battle, people "of all nations and colors came together irrespective of nationality, religion, or color to salute the Southern Cross as a refuge of all the oppressed from all countries on earth."⁷⁴ There are problems, though, which arise from the inflation of Eureka's worth. Misconceptions and the comfort of the Eureka legend led the event to overshadow other parts of Australian history that require more acknowledgment but are often forgotten or deliberately overlooked. Thus, the Eureka Stockade is an example of how events could adopt significance over time, and how history might impede the ability of populations to perceive their past objectively. Nevertheless, the modern legacy of Eureka is neither one of

⁷³ Ibid., 540.

⁷⁴ Carboni, *The Eureka Stockade*, 39.

glorious revolution nor chaotic riot, but a largely symbolic and overdramatized fight against oppression.

Bibliography

- Barnard, Marjorie. *A History of Australia*. London: Angus & Robertson, 1986.
- Blainey, Geoffrey. *A History of Victoria*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
- Blainey, Geoffrey. *The Rush That Never Ended: A History of Australian Mining*. 4th ed. Carlton, Vic, Melbourne University Press, 1994.
- Carboni, Raffaello. *The Eureka Stockade*. December 1855. Reprint, Middlesex: Echo Library, 2007.
- Charleston, Libby-Jane. "The Forgotten Rebels of the Eureka Stockade." *The Huffington Post*. 15 July 2016.
https://www.huffingtonpost.com/au/2015/12/11/australian-history-eureka_n_8734440.html (February 1, 2021)
- Clark, Manning. "Rewriting Australian History." 1954. in *The Oxford Book of Australian Essays*, by Imre Salusinszky, 129-38. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Clarke, Frank G. *The History of Australia*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002.
- Convict Creations. "Australia in the Cold War." *Convict Creations*.
<http://convictcreations.com/history/coldwar.html> (February 1, 2021)
- FitzSimons, Peter. *Eureka: The Unfinished Revolution*. North Sydney, N.S.W.: William Heinemann Australia, 2012.
- Harris, Lauren Carroll. "The Riots History Erased: Reckoning with the Racism of Lambing Flat." *The Guardian* (Kings Place, London), August 6, 2018. Accessed May 1, 2021.
<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2018/aug/07/the-riots-history-erased-reckoning-with-the-racism-of-lambing-flat>
- Hood, John. "Eureka's Spirit." *Australia First Party*.
<https://australiafirstparty.net/nationalism/the-nationalist-ethic/eureka-spirit/> (February 1, 2020)
- Huf, Elizabeth. "Great Shearers' Strike of 1891," *Queensland Historical Atlas*. 29 September 2010.

<https://www.ghatlas.com.au/content/great-shearers%E2%80%99-strike-1891> (February 1, 2021)

Jones, Benjamin T. *Republicanism and Responsible Government: The Shaping of Democracy in Australia and Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014.

Jones, Timothy Willem, and Clare Wright. "The Goldfields' Sabbath: A Postsecular Analysis of Social Cohesion and Social Control on the Ballarat Goldfields, 1854." *Journal of Religious History*, December 2019.

Marx, Karl. "News from Australia," *Die Neue-Oder Zeitung*, 7 March 1855. Quoted in Benjamin T. Jones, *Republicanism and Responsible Government: The Shaping of Democracy in Australia and Canada*. Montréal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2014. 351.

McLachlan, Mat. "The Eureka Stockade with Professor Frank Bongiorno." December 1, 2019. In *Living History*, narrated by Frank Bongiorno. Podcast, audio, 38:13. Accessed December 9, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Zd0Io93QXg>.

Members of the Ballarat Reform League. "Ballarat Reform League Charter." November 11, 1854. <https://cv.vic.gov.au/stories/a-diverse-state/eureka-stories/ballar-at-reform-league-charter/>.

Morrison, Jane. "Australian Frontier Conflicts 1788-1940s." Australian Frontier Conflicts. Last modified 2020. Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://australianfrontierconflicts.com.au/>

Normington-Rawling, James. "Before Eureka." *Labour History*, no. 4 (May 1963): 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27507716>.

O'Brien, Bob, and S. D. S Huyghue. *Massacre at Eureka: The Untold Story*. Rev. ed. Ballarat, Vic.: Sovereign Hill Museums Association, 1998.

Petersen, Eric. "The Eureka Rebellion of 1854." *Politics and Culture*, no. 4 (2004). Accessed May 1, 2021. <https://politicsandculture.org/issue/2004-issue-4/>.

Riot or Revolution - the Eureka Stockade. Produced by Rachael Blake. Aired on December 3, 2006, on Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tLH18EEIYak>.

Serle, Geoffrey. *Golden Age: A History of the Colony of Victoria, 1851-1861*. Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Melbourne University Press, 1977. Apple Book.

State Library of New South Wales. "Rush to Victoria." Discover Collections. Last modified May 24, 2012. Accessed March 13, 2021. https://web.archive.org/web/20130812215236/http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/discover_collections/history_nation/gold/victoria/index.html

Sunter, Anne Beggs. "Birth of a Nation? Constructing and Deconstructing the Eureka Legend." Doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 2002. Accessed March 17, 2021. <https://minerva-access.unimelb.edu.au/handle/11343/39407>

Sunter, Anne Beggs. "Contested Memories of Eureka: Museum Interpretations of the Eureka Stockade." *Labour History*, no. 85 (November 2003): 29-45. <https://doi.org/10.2307/27515926>.

The Examiner. "'Keep It Quiet!' Anniversary of Gold Discovery." *The Examiner* (Launceston, Tasmania, Australia), February 15, 1934, 6. Accessed March 17, 2021. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/51857157>.

Twain, Mark. "23." In *Following the Equator: A Journey around the World*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1925.

Ward, Russel. *Australia (The Modern Nations in Historical Perspective)*. Englewood Cliffs.: Prentice-Hall, 1965

Welsh, Frank. *Australia: A New History of the Great Southern Land*. Woodstock: Overlook Press, 2006.