masses (and some minorities) was ever-present. That fear helps to explain how universal male suffrage ‘inverted the political dynamics of arguments about secret voting’ (19) and led to the adoption of what would become known as the Australian ballot. Widely emulated around the world, it was celebrated for turning ‘voting into a well-mannered civic ritual’ (25). The story of who gets to participate in this civic ritual, the practicalities of that participation, and how that vote is counted, provides Brett with a broad palette with which to paint a rich and sometimes difficult picture of Australia. Central to this difficulty is the contradiction between the expansion of the franchise for the white majority on the one hand, and its contraction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-white minorities, on the other. While the former gave some legitimacy to the boast of Australia as a ‘democratic laboratory’, the latter complicates (and I would argue, prevents) favourable foundation narratives of settler-colonial societies.

In navigating this path, Brett addresses head-on the attempt to disfranchise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the passage of the Commonwealth Franchise Act (1902). She draws attention to the fact that this exclusion was not part of the original bill; its insertion the result of ‘political calculation and racism’ (66). In the end just five parliamentarians voted against the bill (Deakin was absent from the chamber): James Ronald, Hugh Mahon, Billy Hughes, Vaiben Louis Solomon and Henry Willis. Brett singles out Ronald’s impassioned speech: ‘To draw a colour line, and say that because a man’s face is black he therefore is not able to understand the principles of civilisation, is misanthropic, inhumane and unchristian’ (64–5). Here, at least, is something positive to cling to in our founding story. There are, of course, many other things to which we may cling, but their successes – such as the franchise for white women – ring hollow without their universal application. The White Australia Policy and the exclusionary nature of Australia’s egalitarianism cast a long shadow.

From Secret Ballot to Democracy Sausage will be invaluable to students of politics seeking an accessible history of Australia’s electoral system. In taking a long view we can understand why the introduction of postal voting was disputed: how proportional representation changed the dynamics of Australian politics; and what the growing influence of minor parties means for Australian democracy.

Brett is right to remind us that the adaptations along the way in our electoral history, both big and small, now make it easier for citizens (but not residents) of Australia to cast a ballot than almost anywhere in the world. But the exclusionary impulse that substituted race for class continues in other guises. For Brett, the evolution of Australia’s electoral system is, with caveats, a success story. And here there is much to debate. The largely genial nature of Australia’s present-day Saturday voting rituals notwithstanding, I drew different conclusions from the author: that our faith in parliamentary processes is misguided, that the attainment of a vote doesn’t equal full participation in the wider polity, and that it’s time we ditched Bentham and got ourselves a Bill of Rights.

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Australia’s First Spies: The Remarkable Story of Australia’s Intelligence Operations, 1901–45
By John Fahey. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2018. Pp. 434. A$34.99 paper.

When working on intelligence history, detective work in the archives is a must. Rarely can a researcher request a file from the archives, read it from back to front, and learn what they need. Instead, the researcher needs to look for clues. Something as nominally insignificant as a scribble in the margin, a date, or a signature, can help lead to (or clarify) other clues. The intelligence historian, therefore, must piece their story together from disparate and most often incomplete (or non-existent) records. Of course, such skills and the challenges of research extend beyond intelligence history, but in that realm, it is often more apparent. Why? Because, except in rare circumstances, those working on these histories do not have access to voluminous swathes of largely still-classified government records. Nor do they have ready access to the records of foreign intelligence...
services, most of which remain beyond the prying eyes of their own citizens, let alone visiting historians. For a historian of intelligence organisations, trying to understand what they did, how they were structured, who was on the payroll, or the sources and methods they employed to collect and analyse intelligence, primary sources are patchy. Moreover, conscious of their own security, often those intelligence officers who created the documents on which we rely, wrote them in such a way as to hide the whole story, and throw off the scent anyone who unwittingly came across their files. Reading between the lines, and dealing with deliberate obfuscation, is a key skill of this historian. So, too, the ability to understand the patchwork of evidence that makes it through the redactions or exemptions and into the archives.

With this in mind, John Fahey, a former employee in Australia’s Defence Signals Directorate, is to be commended on the breadth of research and detective work in Australia’s First Spies: The Remarkable Story of Australia’s Intelligence Operations, 1901–45. In more than 400 pages and across 25 chapters he traces the history of Australia’s fledgling intelligence apparatus from 1901 through to the end of World War II. The reader is taken on spying expeditions to the New Hebrides, New Caledonia, and Japan (amongst others), and given tours of some of those buildings that once housed Australia’s top wartime secrets. Themes of sovereignty in intelligence collection, which mark the early chapters, give way to the significance of Britain, and later the United States, in the expansion of Australia’s intelligence architecture and capabilities. Along with the stories of the intelligence organisations, which some readers will be familiar with, we are also given stories of individuals whose experiences are central to the story of those organisations. Some of these stories have been previously told, although rarely with the same level of detail that Fahey has unearthed. It is an exciting story, for the most part well told.

Amidst the abundant research and fascinating accounts, however, is Fahey’s troubling use of historical imagination. In itself, imagination need not be methodologically problematic. Indeed, Fahey uses appropriate language to distinguish between those things for which he has evidence and those he does not. By doing so, he invites the reader to consider other possibilities. The concern, however, is where he uses this technique to mount an argument and lead to definitive conclusions that are not substantiated by evidence. Chapter twelve is a case in point. It argues that Harry Freame, a Gallipoli veteran (of Japanese heritage) and later intelligence personality, was garrotted in Japan by the military police (Kempeitai) – due to poor Australian operational security and leaks of his intelligence role – rather than dying of cancer (as is the official reason for death). Instead of mounting a case with evidence, Fahey presents two seemingly unrelated case studies (both of which are equally problematic from an evidentiary perspective) to show that the Kempeitai were capable of such action. With this theory, and Fahey’s assessment that Freame’s autopsy did not necessarily match symptoms synonymous with cancer, Fahey concludes that the Japanese dealt the blow that caused an Australian spy’s death. That may have been the case, and Fahey may indeed be correct, but he – and we – have no evidence to support what in reality is merely a leap in imagination, however plausible the logic may seem. This chapter, and its findings, introduce methodological concerns which undermine the otherwise strong historical backbone of an important book dealing with, as it does (and as the title claims), a remarkable story. This book will appeal to anyone interested in Australian intelligence history, but it should be read with caution and a keen eye for the evidential trail.

Reel Men: Australian Masculinity in the Movies, 1949–1962
By Chelsea Barnett. Melbourne: Melbourne University Publishing, 2019. Pp. 233. A$49.99 paper.

Reel Men is about blokes. More specifically, Chelsea Barnett’s text explores representations of masculinity in postwar Australian films. In doing so, Barnett aims to unsettle some of the erroneous but commonly held assumptions about gender relations and cinema in the Australia of that period.