

**THE NOVEL POOR WHITE PROBLEM:
SOUTH AFRICA AND THE AMERICAN SOUTH
IN COMPARISON
1850-1950**

by

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“...although fiction is not true, however, it is not a forgery of the truth, but rather an embellishment of reality and aims to teach...”

(B. Simon)

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Abstract

Poor whites are not solely limited to one single country and neither was the poor-white problem. As such poor whites lend themselves to comparative study, and in this case South Africa (SA) and the American South (AS). These regions share a number of similarities with regards to their respective histories. However, it is the tenet of this thesis that historical sources can be augmented by novels to produce a nuanced understanding of the history and everyday lives of the poor whites. Novels, especially those from the Realism genre, have been proven to be a valuable source where there exists little to no information on a topic of a fringe community generated by themselves. Realism novels were used to not only give voice to the marginalised, but to also reveal the daily lives and everyday thoughts of the poor whites themselves. This study compares the histories of the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South and reveals that the Carnegie Commission was an important link between the two countries and their respective poor-white problems. Different aspects and themes in the histories of these two countries are placed side by side for comparative analysis. The different Movements the novels fall into, as well as the novelist and the period they lived in are examined and compared to create a better understanding of the period, context, genre and topic. The different definitions and types of poor whites reveal a number of differences and similarities regarding the poor whites. The causes that led to poor whitism are examined and reveal different outlooks and solutions, but also similar circumstances. Lastly the beliefs (religions and superstitions) of the poor whites, as well as the perceptions surrounding poor whites and their perceptions of “others” are considered and compared. The last chapters are instrumental in revealing the importance the novels play as primary sources with regards to the thoughts and inside story of the poor whites, by adding a “real” and “human dimension” to the existing histories.

Key words: Poor whites; poor-white problem; South Africa; the American South; comparative history; novels; fiction; Realism, Carnegie Commission.

Technical Aspects

This thesis is relatively lengthy running to some 400 pages. This is primarily because it includes direct quotations from the novels as primary sources, and in the case of South Africa, includes both the original excerpts in Afrikaans as well as the English translations. The quotes are taken exactly from the sources or novels in order to maintain the authenticity, nuances and the specifics of the language usage. In this regard it must be noted that the language used by the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South was parochial and localised and often included a slang or jargon germane to their class. In the case of South Africa, the poor whites often anglicised their words. For example, the word *pynkeller* is used for painkiller – a combination of Afrikaans (*pynstiller*) and English (painkiller) and the word *getrep* is used for trapped – again a combination of Afrikaans (*gevang*) and English (trapped). This indicates that many poor whites were not well educated at the time when Afrikaans was being developed into a “pure” language by the Language Movement. It also is marker of how they differed from the rest of society. In the case of the American South the language usage is marked by a distinct slang which differs from the conventional use of American English. For example, words such as *Heyer* for “Here I am” and *Sho Kernel* for “Sure Colonel”.

As the thesis makes use of contemporary material the racial terminology of the period is oftentimes derogatory and includes racial slurs. These terms have been maintained in order to preserve the ethos of the time as well as the original nature of both sources and novels. In no way does this present the views or opinions of the author or the institution. The terminology used to denote the main races discussed in this thesis has been simplified to whites and blacks in line with the official nomenclature in South Africa.

All the translations from Afrikaans and Dutch into English are the author’s loose translations and are an attempt to encapsulate the broader meaning.

Abbreviations

AS	American South
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNO	<i>Christelik-Nasionale Onderwys</i>
DEIC	Dutch East Indian Company
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FWP	Federal Writers Project
GK	<i>Gereformeerde Kerk</i> (Reformed Church)
HSRC	Human Science Research Council
NHK	<i>Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk</i> (Reformed Church)
NP	National Party
OFS	Orange Free State
SA	South Africa
USA	United States of America
WPA	Works Progress Administration
ZAR	<i>Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek</i> (South African Republic)

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List of Novels

South Africa

- A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling* (The Farm Division), 1932.
A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer* (The Roaming/Moving Farmer), 1934.
J. Lub, *Dark Johannesburg*, 1912.
D. Matthee, *Circles in a Forest*, 1984.
J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis* (The Locust Official of Sluis), 1988.
J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie* (Ampie: The Trilogy), 1965.
J. van Bruggen, *Bywoners* (Sharecroppers/Tenant Farmers), 1973.
C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte* (Drought), 1930.

The American South

- E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, 1932.
E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, 1933.
W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, 1930.
W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, 1936.
W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, 1994.
W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, 1995.
J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, 1939.
H.B. Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1853.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the history of the social phenomenon of poor whites, both in South Africa and the American South, from 1850-1950. It takes on a novel approach by augmenting a historical comparison by including novels as part of the analysis. Through the adoption of this alternative archive as a source of primary material, it will contribute a new dimension to an understanding of this phenomenon. “Poor whiteness” has been a critical feature in both South African and American socio-economic and political development. The period covers the emergence of the poor white phenomenon in the mid nineteenth century and concludes when the poor white problem was considered resolved. However, its legacy persists in the twentieth century society and continues to perpetuate both a racial and class divide in both societies.

Poor whites exist throughout the world and have been prevalent for as long as there have been whites, a class structure, a social setting where race relations are interlinked and an economy or setting where people are unable to earn or make a living for themselves.¹ The entire colonial world has been affected by policies concerning poor whites and as E.J. Bottomley accurately states “The global significance of the poor-white question has not been fully recognised.”² The concepts “poor white” and “poor-white problem” can be considered as transnational terms.³ These are neither new nor uncommon and are not solely the phenomenon of a specific country. Poverty in general is not linked to a single race, ethnicity or nation.⁴ These concepts were never confined to a single country. In the colonial world of European empires, poor whites have also been a concern with examples in Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), Kenya, West Indies and Sri Lanka.⁵ Poor whites have been researched and written about in their own individual contexts or realms, but the transnational connections are generally unrecognised. The focus on the nation has placed limitations on the broader picture. Thus, it is argued that a comparative analysis will provide a more comprehensive view.

¹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 1.

² E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 77.

³ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 76.

⁴ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 1.

⁵ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012, p. 155.

Both South Africa and the United States of America (USA) have what is referred to as a “poor-white problem”. In South Africa, poor whites received the most considerable political attention from the inception of the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* (South African Republic or ZAR) until the end of apartheid in 1994. In the United States of America (USA), there existed poor whites prior to the Civil War, (1860-1865), but the legacy of Reconstruction, (1863-1877) and then a generation later – the Great Depression (1920s) plunged many thousands into desperate poverty, especially in the Southern States. However, the roots of poor whitism existed in both countries long before the middle of the nineteenth century.

This chapter considers the aim of the study, important concepts are defined, the methodological approaches are examined and the outline of the chapters is set out.

This study uses a selection of novels with available and relevant secondary and primary sources to firstly illustrate how the poor whites, their culture, everyday lives and experiences are portrayed in both South Africa and the American South. This in a sense can possibly be seen as being instrumental in the emergence of the different dispositions towards the poor whites in popular consciousness. Secondly, it will compare the novels and poor whites between these two domains to deduce whether there were any similarities or differences in the culture, history and daily lives of these poor whites during the selected time-frame. While it is not the concern of this study, it can, however, also be argued that these novels might also have perpetuated certain perceptions among the white readership and society at large. This in turn could have augmented the reaction of the whites in these two countries to be supportive of separate development and the upliftment of the poor white or, on the other hand, to further shun and ridicule them.

This study makes a case for viewing poor whites and the poor-white problem in a global context and to confirm that poor whitism was not solely limited to one country through the use of a counter or additional archive, that is, fiction that refers to the literature and more specifically, the novel. Furthermore, it expands the history of the poor-white by presenting a comparative view to indicate that poor whitism extended beyond the boundaries of national histories and experiences. In this context, it will also integrate the causal nature of this phenomena which perpetuates in current societies.

The study is not intent on proving that the poor white histories of these two domains are the same, but rather that similar conditions existed and that through events, experiences and circumstances,

both similar and different patterns emerged. This study proposes to make a contribution to South African and American historiography by focusing on the place and importance of poor whites in a comparative format and uses the novel as the analytical key.

The time period of this study was selected because the height of the poor-white problem in both countries was in the mid-nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century. Poor whites existed in both realms before 1850 and after 1950, however, it was during this period, in South Africa and the American South, that the “problem” received the most attention. During this time, much official and unofficial political and social intervention took place, and at the same time numerous novels were written about the poor whites in both countries. It is evident that the poor-white problem was such that it even captured the attention of novelists.

Generally speaking, the topic of poor whiteness is multifaceted.⁶ The governments of both countries tried to intervene with the situation, but it was the novelists who portrayed the real reality. The idea of poor whiteness contradicts the idea of white supremacy.⁷ If whites were so superior, how could they be poor? Thus, the difficulty of reconciling white superiority with white poverty led to a degree of anxiety on the part of the ruling elite.⁸ In both countries this attitude persisted because it served an important social function within and without of the white group.⁹ The discrimination against and degradation of “non-whites” frequently served to bind together the white population, including the poor whites, to create a sense of community or solidarity that could become a way of life and not only a cover for economic exploitation.¹⁰ In specific areas and at specific times, white nationalist ideology was utilised by the “more powerful” classes of whites to elicit the support of the “lower elements” or poor whites in order to maintain the system of “non-white” economic exploitation. These ideas and practices tended to bolster self-esteem¹¹ and to assuage their “status anxieties” in highly competitive and materialistic environments.¹² Thus, the poor white topic

⁶ There are a range of opinions, views and emotions linked to the poor whites. These range from them being despised and rejected to being sympathised and embraced. This can be seen in the sources and will be discussed in more detail in chapter two.

⁷ White supremacy can be defined as the attitudes, systematic beliefs and practices associated with the rise of blatant forms of white or European dominance over the non-white population and is characterised by colour bars, racial segregation and the restriction of meaningful citizenship rights. It involves making invidious distinctions of a socially crucial kind that are based primarily on physical characteristics and ancestry. G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, p. xi.

⁸ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 20.

⁹ V.P. Franklin, “Review: Black vs White in the U.S. and South Africa”, *Phylon*, 44(2), 1983, p. 160.

¹⁰ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. 70.

¹¹ Letting the lowest white man count for more than the highest non-white.

¹² V.P. Franklin, “Review: Black vs White in the U.S. and South Africa”, *Phylon*, 44(2), 1983, p. 160.

is varied. In the present day, from a South African perspective, in a country with a much larger poor black population, there is no place for poor whites and from an American perspective, it does not form part of the American dream or view of the land of promise. However, history is not supposed to be popular nor should it adhere to what society expects, but it should rather be analytical, introspective, informative and educational. In 2008, a former President of South Africa visited a poor white squatter camp and was astonished to find that there were whites living in similar conditions to poor blacks. He openly admitted he was ignorant about the history of poor whites.¹³ The topic has mostly been frowned upon and this is mainly due to the racial colonial notion that whites were not “supposed” to have sunk to the same low poverty levels as so called “non-whites”.¹⁴ However, it has received a lot of attention from various disciplines, in order to reflect, explain, justify and make recommendations to rectify the situation.¹⁵

Since neither country has been able to successfully eradicate the “problem” and since representing other subjected races’ histories has become a more pressing topic, present day poor whites and the history of poor whites have become a forgotten entity, hidden and literally kept out of the public eye. Every now and then they and their history are rediscovered and a new generation is made aware of their existence and then just as suddenly they are returned to obscurity.¹⁶ In the case of the USA, they are a source of contempt and ridicule, whereas in South Africa they are barely spoken of.

Definitions and Relevant Concepts

The term “poor white” and the concept of the “poor-white problem” are complex and difficult to define, however, most people know what they mean.¹⁷ The poor whites fall into a class of their own. Many different definitions have been assigned to define them, but these definitions, from both a South African as well as a Southern United States of America perspective, have different

¹³ D. Williams, “Zuma: I Didn’t Know There Were Poor Whites”, *The Mail and Guardian Online*, 24 July 2008, <<https://mg.co.za/article/2008-07-24-zuma-i-didnt-know-there-were-poor-whites/>>. Accessed: 25 October 2021.; B. Corcoran, “Zuma Expresses Concern Over White Poverty”, *The Irish Times*, 26 July 2008, <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/zuma-expresses-concern-at-white-poverty-1.946801>>. Accessed: 25 October 2021.

¹⁴ It is important to define what is meant as non-white. A non-white is a member of a race of people who are not of European origin. It is usually used to describe people who are considered not to have pale/white skins. In the context of this study it does not aim to be a slur nor cause offense.

¹⁵ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 2.

¹⁶ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 10.

¹⁷ Z. Magubane, “The Interconnected Histories of South African and American Sociology: Knowledge in the Service of Colonial Violence” in F. Greenland & F.M. Göçek, *Cultural Violence and the Destruction of Human Communities*. London: Routledge, 2016, p. 83.

connotations. The definition depends on the context and position of the source. Throughout history this group or class of people has had many names and definitions assigned to them, for example *armblankeplaag*¹⁸ (poor white plague), poor-white trash¹⁹ and hillbillies.²⁰ The term poor white could only come into usage in a country inhabited by what was deemed an “inferior” non-European population and by Europeans. It tends to imply that the Europeans have a higher standard of living, the criterion of which depends on what was accepted by the white community.²¹ According to J.F.W. Grosskopf, one of the Commissioners for the Carnegie Commission:

The term *Poor White* could only originate in a country where white and dark skinned people live together in relatively close intercourse. And the name itself indicates that poverty among itself to be something more or less exceptional. In the United States the word “poor white” had already come into use in the Southern States in the slavery days, and there is little doubt that we received the term from them.²²

It also needs to be emphasised that the Commissioners likely got the idea that a meaningful distinction could be made from B. Mitchell, an American historian, who stated: “All whites who were poor were not poor whites.”²³ R.W. Wilcox, the Carnegie Commission’s Commissioner of psychology, emphasised this notion that there were cultural distinctions between poor whites and white poor. Poor whites evinced a lack of qualities such as intelligence, dependability, and habits of industry and white poor referred to those who did not show these shortcomings.²⁴ Ultimately, a poor white was poor and the degree of poverty would depend on the investigator. Therefore, for the purposes of this study “poor white” is more than a pale-skinned person who exists under conditions of poverty.

It also is important to explain what “poverty” implies in this study. Poverty is a difficult term to define and is based on a number of value judgments.²⁵ The meaning of poverty is highly contested

¹⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1934, p. 161.

¹⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*. New York, Viking, 2016.

²⁰ New Georgia Encyclopaedia, ‘Poor Whites’,

<<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/poor-whites/>>, n.d. Accessed: 11 April 2022.; A. Harkins, *Hillbilly: A cultural history of an American icon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

²¹ Anonymous, “Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *International Labour Review*, 29(2), 1934, p. 231.

²² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932, p. 17.

²³ B. Mitchell, *The Rise of the Cotton Mills in the South*. Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1921, p. 165.

²⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932, p. 74.

²⁵ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 26.

and usually used as a tool by those in power to be exploited and used to their own ends.²⁶ The *Oxford Dictionary* defines it as: “the state of being very poor.”²⁷ But what is poor and how is it measured? In negative terms it is defined as a lack of access to resources, such as land or social networks through which basic economic activities take place. Poverty in a pre-capitalistic context is poverty suffered by victims of disease, drought, calamitous wealth or extrusion from the social group. A new type of poverty emerged, which entailed the propertyless and conjecturally unemployed.²⁸ In the time period of this study, poverty could mean a lack of land money and equipment. Usually, the poor did not have these commodities, nor did they have a job or steady income.²⁹ Defining, poor whites forms an important part of this study and chapter seven examines the different definitions and types of poor whites.

For the purposes of the study, the definition of “poor white” provided by the American funded South African Carnegie Commission of 1932 will be used as a standard.³⁰

Due to the colonial histories of both countries, poor whites formed part of all “nationalities” perceived as white, regardless of where their ancestors originated from. Therefore, in South Africa, although the Afrikaners or Afrikaans-speaking whites formed the majority of poor whites, there were also poor non-Afrikaans whites who originated from a wide spectrum of backgrounds. In the USA, the majority of the white population originated from Britain, but there were many others who later came from across Europe, including countries such as France and Germany.

Another concept that requires explanation is that of realism or literary realism. The novels examined in this study are contemporary novels written by authors in the time period they lived. The novelists wrote about what they experienced or what was happening around them.³¹ Thus, literary realism can be described as:

²⁶ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 2 & 16.

²⁷ C. Soanes (ed.), *South African Pocket Oxford Dictionary*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press Southern Africa, 2002, pp. 691 & 697.

²⁸ B. Freund, “The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa” in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992.

²⁹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 3.

³⁰ The full detail to be found in chapter seven

³¹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 13.

...a literary movement that represents reality by portraying mundane, everyday experiences as they are in real life. It depicts familiar people, places, and stories, primarily about the middle and lower classes of society. Literary realism seeks to tell a story as truthfully as possible instead of dramatising or romanticising it.³²

In short, realism attempts to describe life without idealisation or romantic subjectivity.³³ The novels selected for this study offer insights into the lives of the poor whites captured at the time the novels were written.

Methodology and Sources

This thesis uses an over-arching comparative method to assess select aspects related to poor whiteness. A survey of recent comparative work makes it apparent that there is no firm agreement on what comparative history is or how it should be carried out. This study uses a number of different comparative approaches inspired by a range of comparative historians. The interest in the use of cross-cultural approaches has increased over the past 30 years. However, it has mostly been used in other fields of the social sciences, that have drawn on the work of historians and in turn whose works have also influenced historians.³⁴

It is important to note that comparative history is not a new approach and has been applied in many cases, especially comparing the history of ideas, social groups and two or more countries.³⁵ There were two main periods in world history in which scholars took a specific interest in comparative studies. The one was Greek antiquity, which started with the works of Herodotus and the other was the era of modern scholarship, which was stated in other scientific fields such as philosophy, law and anthropology, and later histories written by historians such as Alfred Weber.³⁶ Comparative history is an established field of historical research and many comparative works have been done.³⁷ At the 1957 meeting of the American Economic History Association, an entire

³² MasterClass, 'What is Literary Realism? Definition and Examples of the Realism Genre in Literature', <<https://www.masterclass.com/articles/what-is-literary-realism#:~:text=Literary%20realism%20is%20a%20literary,and%20lower%20classes%20of%20society>>, 9 September 2021. Accessed: 13 April 2022.

³³ J. C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*. Pretoria: Academica, 1978, p. 59.

³⁴ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xiii.; R. Grew, "The Case for Comparing Histories", *The American Historical Review*, 85(4), 1980, p. 776.

³⁵ F. Redlich, "Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems", *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, pp. 362-388.; P. Alexander & R. Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, pp. 5-18.

³⁶ F. Redlich, "Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems", *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, pp. 362-363, 369-372 & 382.

³⁷ G.M. Fredrickson, "Comparative History" in M. Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writings in the United States*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980, pp. 457-473.

day was devoted to discussing comparative studies in economic history and in 1958, the first issue of the international quarterly entitled *Comparative Studies in Society and History* appeared.³⁸ It was in his 1958 article that Fritz Redlich stated that there was a need for more such histories to be written for a better understanding of the world and history in general.³⁹ His call was answered and the 1980s in particular saw an escalation in comparative works, especially on South Africa and the USA.⁴⁰ The importance of comparative work was highlighted when it was made the central theme for the 1978 annual convention of the American Historical Association and for the October and December 1980 issues of the *American Historical Review*.⁴¹ The focus, however, remained essentially on race relations, segregation and the liberation struggles.

Historian Fernand Braudel hoped that there would come a day when the historian may do more than just “study walled gardens”.⁴² According to Redlich, this is exactly what comparative history tries to do. It goes beyond merely narrating the “saga of world history”, as Leopold von Ranke expressed it. Restricting historical work to answering the questions – what, when, and why – was legitimate as long as the saga of world history remained to be written. However, historians have learned to ask topical questions. These questions can either be descriptive or analytical.⁴³ Moreover, comparative history has a special ability to suggest new ways of thinking about old problems by calling attention to alternative approaches to their management or solution. It is also argued that by understanding how another society has confronted challenges similar to ones own can be a stimulus to social and political creativity.⁴⁴

G. M. Fredrickson argues that the value of comparison is that it allows the researcher to escape, to an extent, from the “narrow-mindedness” and limiting assumptions that tend to be a result of continuous entanglement in the study of one culture, which is very constricting if the culture of

³⁸ F. Redlich, “Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems”, *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, p. 362.

³⁹ F. Redlich, “Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems”, *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, p. 379.

⁴⁰ J.S. Bergh, “White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research”, *Historia*, 48(1), 2003, p. 355.

⁴¹ P. Kolchin, “Comparing American History”, *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 1982, p. 64.

⁴² T. Benjamin, *The Atlantic World: Europeans, Africans, Indians, and Their Shared History, 1400-1900*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. xxvii.

⁴³ F. Redlich, “Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems”, *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, pp. 377 & 384.

⁴⁴ G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, p. 17.

nation is his/her own.⁴⁵ It becomes of importance for the historian to be able to illuminate the different cases equally in terms of their special features, particularities or individuality.⁴⁶

According to P. Kolchin, although the concept comparative methodology appears self-defining, it is not. There are widely differing conceptions of what it is, can be and should be.⁴⁷ As already mentioned, there is no firm agreement on what comparative history is or how it should be carried out.⁴⁸ According to leading comparative historian Fredrickson, all history that aims at interpretation or explanation involves some type of explicit or implicit comparison.⁴⁹ Thus, the object of comparative history is a dual one: it can be valuable as a way of illuminating the special features or particularities of the societies being examined and also useful in enlarging the theoretical understanding of the kinds of institutions or processes being compared, thus making a contribution to the development of social-scientific theories and generalisations.⁵⁰ Therefore, according to Fredrickson, the term “comparative history” should be reserved for a relatively small but significant body of scholarship that has as its main objective the systematic comparison of some process or institution in two or more societies that are usually not conjoined within one of the traditional geographical areas of historical specialisation.⁵¹

Yet P. Levine states that the comparative method can be simply defined as a historical investigation that works at multiple sites, in this case, two domains. It is essentially used to tease out the similarities and differences and to test what may reveal the general.⁵² It acts as a bridge builder and encourages original and innovative ways of approaching a historical topic.⁵³ In essence comparative history is a means to make sense of the interactions by creating a betweenness without oversimplifying, but by comparing across and not in spite of.⁵⁴

⁴⁵ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, pp. xiv-xv.

⁴⁶ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xv.

⁴⁷ P. Kolchin, “Comparing American History”, *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 1982, p. 64.

⁴⁸ G.M. Fredrickson, “Comparative History” in M. Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writings in the United States*, p. 457.

⁴⁹ G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, p. 21.

⁵⁰ G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, p. 24.

⁵¹ G.M. Fredrickson, “Comparative History” in M. Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writings in the United States*, p. 458.

⁵² P. Levine, “Is Comparative History Possible?”, *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, p. 332.

⁵³ P. Levine, “Is Comparative History Possible?”, *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, p. 331.

⁵⁴ P. Levine, “Is Comparative History Possible?”, *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, p. 343.

According to M. Lange, comparative historical methods are used to expand insight into diverse social phenomena and make contributions to the understanding of the social world. He claims that the comparative method allows important awareness into “perplexing and pertinent social issues”.⁵⁵ A sense of connectedness is sought by using certain common traits and themes.⁵⁶ Therefore, according to Frederickson:

...comparative history can readily be viewed as a form of cross disciplinary, social scientific investigation in which historians can play a contributing role.⁵⁷

According to Kolchin, there are three functions of comparative history. The first is where comparison is used to create an awareness of alternatives and show development to be significant that may not appear so otherwise. The other two functions require more rigorous comparative analysis and they involve the formulation and testing of hypotheses. Thus, explaining historical differences and peculiarities, weighing and isolating variables responsible for specific conditions/events. They allow the historian to test impact or factors as well as to seek and recognise generalisations.⁵⁸

In an article by T. Skocpol and M. Somers,⁵⁹ the authors examine three logics to writing comparative histories. The parallel demonstration theory, whereby the writer opens their analysis with a set of propositions concerning some aspects of social change. They then use various historical case studies to illustrate the theory and demonstrate its utility and accuracy. The second logic is the contrast of context. These are usually historians by training. Historians usually do not make generalisations; their interest is to bring out unique features of each case and to show how these unique features affect the working out of putatively general social processes. The third logic is the macro-casual analysis, whereby comparative history is used to draw casual inferences about macro-level structures and purposes. It acts as a bridge between the other two logics.⁶⁰ Thus, in an article by G.R. Andrews, entitled “Comparing the comparers”, three authors who have written comparative histories regarding South Africa and the USA are examined. It is established that S.B. Greenberg follows the parallel demonstration theory, G.M. Fredrickson follows the

⁵⁵ M. Lange, *Comparative-Historical Methods*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2013, p. 1.

⁵⁶ P. Levine, “Is Comparative History Possible?”, *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, p. 336.

⁵⁷ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xiii.

⁵⁸ P. Kolchin, “Comparing American History”, *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 1982, pp. 64-65.

⁵⁹ T. Skocpal & M. Somers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22(2), 1980, pp. 174-197.

⁶⁰ T. Skocpal & M. Somers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry”, *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 22(2), 1980, pp. 174-197.; J.S. Bergh, “White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research”, *Historia*, 48(1), 2003, p. 364.

contrast contexts and J.W. Cell the macro-casual analysis.⁶¹ Therefore, combined they provide not only valuable information, but also the different ways of writing comparative history. The works of these authors will be examined in the literature review in chapter two.

The main objective of comparative history should be the systematic comparison of some process or institution in two or more societies that are not usually conjoined within one of the traditional geographic areas of historical specialisation.⁶² However, Fredrickson states that two-sided comparisons are what historians can do to the best effect. He continues that it gets harder adding more sides and keeping the same amount of attention and depth and knowledge of each one.⁶³

P. de Klerk states that comparison is an essential element of the historian's method and the ability to see similarities and differences should form part of his task.⁶⁴ I. Berlin puts it simply:

... a capacity for integration, for perceiving qualitative similarities and differences, a sense for the unique fashion in which various factors combine in the particular concrete situation, which must at once be neither so unlike any other situation as to cause a total break with the continuous flow of human experience, not yet so stylised and uniform as to be the obvious creature of theory and not flesh and blood.⁶⁵

By doing comparative history one cannot behave in all respects like a conventional historian. When doing comparisons one needs to look constantly for similarities and differences in the portrayal of events, processes and the interpretations thereof. A. Budd contends that an important challenge remains in determining the appropriate aspects that need to be compared, tested, and validated and how to emphasise differences and similarities.⁶⁶ In other words, comparatives generate analysis by studying similarities and differences between things. Ideally the comparative method generates a richer sense of context and prevents the development of narrow-minded parochial conclusions developed through the use of isolated examples or singular case studies.⁶⁷

⁶¹ G.R. Andrews, "Review Essay: Comparing the Comparers: White Supremacy in the United States and South Africa", *Journal of Social History*, 20(3), 1987, pp. 585-599.

⁶² G.M. Fredrickson, "Comparative History" in M. Kammen (ed.), *The Past Before Us: Contemporary Historical Writings in the United States*, p. 485.

⁶³ G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁴ P. de Klerk, "Vergelyking in die Bestudering van Geskiedenis", *South African Historical Journal*, 6(1), 1974, p. 89.

⁶⁵ I. Berlin, "History and Theory: The Concept of Scientific History", *History and Theory*, 1(1), 1960, p. 30.

⁶⁶ A. Budd (ed.), *The Modern Historiography Reader: Western Sources*. London: Routledge, 2009, p. 509.

⁶⁷ J.S. Bergh, "White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research", *Historia*, 48(1), 2003, pp. 355-372.

When undertaking a comparative history, it becomes important to explain why, in this case two countries are compared. Fredrickson explains, that every nation is unique, this however, does not mean that one nation departs from a general pattern manifested by others.⁶⁸ What was the underlining factor that caused them to be compared? The two realms that form the focus of this study share many comparative elements and many comparative histories have been written about them.⁶⁹ This type of cross-national comparative history exists as a means to explore a particular question.⁷⁰ According to J. Tosh, experiences and events in a nation, in the past are never truly distinctive as they share features with other nations.⁷¹

C. Saunders claims that although similar situations arise, how a particular nation in turn reacts can differ.⁷² Influences from their own history, internal politics and even worldwide influences or international movements can shape a different outcome.⁷³ Furthermore, a country's historical experience as well as cultural heritage helps to explain the different social policies and this also makes every case exceptional.⁷⁴ Therefore, both structure and culture are important while comparing phenomenon or events and can reveal that although each domain has a distinctive culture, it also confronts similar structural problems or conditions.⁷⁵ De Klerk adds that the dominant characteristics of a specific country can only become apparent when compared to the history of others. Comparisons reveal how far occurrences and trends in the past are unique and how far they form a part of larger historical occurrences and tendencies. Thus, comparative history may make an important contribution to our knowledge and overview, of a time, place or event.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, p. 589.

⁶⁹ P. Alexander & R. Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, pp. 5-18.

⁷⁰ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, p. 587.

⁷¹ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2010, p. 164.

⁷² C. Saunders, *Writing History. South Africa's Urban Past and Other Essays*. Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1992, p. 29.

⁷³ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, pp. 590-591.; P. Kolchin, "Comparing American History", *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 1982, p. 66.

⁷⁴ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, p. 599.

⁷⁵ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, pp. 599-600.

⁷⁶ P. de Klerk, "Vergelyking in die Bestudering van Geskiedenis", *South African Historical Journal*, 6(1), 1974, pp. 88 & 103.

P. Alexander and R. Halpern argue against the notion made by historians such as J. Lonsdale and R. Greenstein,⁷⁷ that a comparison between South Africa and the United States is misconceived and that a better comparative history would be to compare South Africa with other African countries.⁷⁸ They believe there may be many interesting studies that arise from such studies, pointing out the United States is not the only country that shares many similar patterns with South Africa. However, it is important to appreciate that different questions lead to different comparisons.

As suggested, South Africa and the USA have been compared in a number of different disciplines and studies. Both South Africa and the USA were colonial realms and both were ruled for a time by Britain and fought for their independence from Britain. Both received a large migration of people who travelled away from initial settling points. Both experienced the institution of slavery. Both went through an industrial age and both had race issues and later liberation struggles/civil rights movements.⁷⁹ These similarities may have taken place during different time periods, with some overlapping and others at the same time.⁸⁰ (See Table One) Saunders states, comparisons need to be appropriate and done within the context of tangible ones, they also need to have a clear purpose in view.⁸¹ In this context, comparing certain aspects related to the poor whites of South Africa and the poor whites of the American South is a viable exercise.

⁷⁷ R. Greenstein (ed.), *Comparative Perspectives on South Africa*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1998.

⁷⁸ P. Alexander & R. Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, p. 6.

⁷⁹ G.M. Fredrickson, "From Exceptionalism to Variability: Recent Developments in Cross-National Comparative History", *The Journal of American History*, 82(2), 1995, p. 596.

⁸⁰ P. Alexander & R. Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, p. 15.

⁸¹ C. Saunders, *Writing History. South Africa's Urban Past and Other Essays*, p. 29.

Table One: South Africa and the American South Compared

Comparison	South Africa	The American South
Arrival	1652	1607
Colony	1652 (DEIC – Dutch) (1652-1775) 1806 British (1775-1803)/(1806-1910)	1607 British (1706-1776)
Whites	Mostly Dutch Also: German, French, British...	Mostly British Also: French, German, Swiss
Poor whites from the outset	Yes Company servants	Yes Indentured servants
Indigenous peoples	San, Khoi, Bantu-Speakers	Native Americans
Slavery	1658-1834	1619-1865
Migration	Northward and Eastward	Westward
Importance of land	Yes	Yes
Subsistence Farming	Yes	Yes
Independence	The Orange Free State (OFS) Republic 1852 ZAR Republic 1854 Union of South Africa 1910	1776
Wars	First ABW against British (1880-1881) Second ABW against British (1899-1902)	War of Independence against British (1775-1783) Civil War pro-slavery vs anti-slavery (1861-1865)
Term poor white came about	Mid-19 th century	First half of the 19 th century
Term poor white in print	1860s	1820s
Poor white right to vote	Yes	Yes
Poor whites in the rural area (keep)	Yes	Yes
Poor whites in the urban area	Yes	Yes
Moved off land	Yes	Yes
Poor white women and children work	Yes	Yes
Help from government	Poor whites	All poor
Help from churches and other NGOs	Poor whites	Poor whites and other poor peoples
Separation and segregation	Supremacy and poor whites	Supremacy
Problem first recognised	1890	Mid-19 th century
National problem	Start of the 20 th century	1870
Focus on poor whites	1930s	1930s

Class	Separate, but still white	Separate
Culture	Separate, but still Afrikaans	Separate
Commissions	Appointed to help poor whites	Appointed to help all poor
Carnegie Commissions interest	First half of the 20 th century	First half of the 20 th century
Solved	After WWII	After WWII
Continue	Still continued 2023	Still continued 2023

There are a number of variations between the two domains and it is important to keep them in mind. The demographics of South Africa and the USA differs vastly. The ratio of white settlers to the indigenous so called “non-white”. In South Africa, the “non-whites” (San, Khoi and the black Bantu-speaking peoples)⁸² were and are the overwhelming majority, whereas in the USA, the indigenous population was and is a relatively small minority. It is also important to add that the indigenous population of the USA that is being referred to are the first peoples or Native American Indians. However, the white population in the USA has always been larger than the black, African American population.⁸³ The majority of African Americans in the USA are descendants of the enslaved population who were brought to America to perform manual and intensive labour.⁸⁴

The second most obvious difference is the physical or geographical environment and the possibilities it held. South Africa is approximately one sixth the size of the USA and compared to the USA, South Africa is a naturally poor country in terms of agricultural potential. It resembles the United States west of the hundredth meridian – this leaves out the USA corn belt and cotton kingdom. South Africa also lacks the extensive, rich and well-watered farming areas of the eastern USA. Eighty six percent of South Africa’s land is arid or semi-arid and only one third receives the 25 inches of rain necessary to cultivate most crops. This resulted in South Africa’s white population and economy developing at a much slower pace than the United States after colonial settlement.⁸⁵

Another physiographic barrier in terms of development for South Africa was the lack of a natural transportation system. South Africa does not have navigable rivers or arterial lakes and it is also criss-crossed with mountain ranges and escarpments with few natural passes. The USA did not experience these physical environmental problems before the introduction of the railroad.⁸⁶

Furthermore, South Africa entered the industrial revolution much later than the USA, after the discovery of its mineral rich resources in the latter quarter of the nineteenth century. However, the development thereafter occurred quickly. In contrast, the USA developed rapidly in industrial terms almost directly after European settlement. There were huge increases in settlers and

⁸² The San and Khoi are in a sense similar to the Native American’s with regards to their numbers, however, in South African they are classified as non-white together with the Coloureds and Indians and Bantu peoples.

⁸³ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xxi.

⁸⁴ H. Lynch, Britannica, ‘African American People’

<<https://www.britannica.com/topic/African-American>>, n.d. Accessed: 20 April 2022.

⁸⁵ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xxiii.

⁸⁶ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. xxii.

wealth, so much, so that it eventually became the richest country in the world in terms of per capita wealth and the most populous of all the new societies resulting from the expansion of Europe.⁸⁷

The third difference between the two countries was the semi-autonomous realm of government and politics. In 1776, 13 American colonies declared their independence from Britain and the United States of America was founded. Subsequently its government functions within a framework of a constitutional federal republic and a presidential system, with various levels and branches of power. Under the American Constitution, the Federal Government is the national government of the country, composed of three distinct branches that share powers.⁸⁸ South Africa underwent a number of changes with regard to its government and politics. During the 1850s, South Africa was divided into two British Colonies.⁸⁹ After the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902)⁹⁰ the two Boer republics became colonies of the British Empire and in 1910, South Africa became a Union or centralised, unitary state.⁹¹ The Status of the Union Act, declared the country to be a sovereign independent state within the British Empire.⁹²

As a foundational point, both South Africa and the American South, had a poor-white problem. Although, it can be argued that many other nations also experienced poverty and essentially included poor whites, it was these two countries that faced this problem in the wake of intensifying race relations with blacks who not only competed with them for work, but were compared to them in the wake of colonial attitudes of white supremacy. Furthermore, it is these two countries that defined the poor white issue as a “problem”. This study is a comparative history from below as it will focus on ordinary people and their relations or interactions with the environment and different institutions using the novel as a critical lens.⁹³

⁸⁷ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, pp. xxii-xxiii.

⁸⁸ A.D. Gulyakov, “Multivariance of the State Structure of Federalism: Comparative Historical and State Studies”, *Journal of Siberian Federal University*, 13(10), 2020, pp. 1688-1699.; H. Brogan, *The Pelican History of the United States of America*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books Ltd, 1986, pp. 192-222.

⁸⁹ C.P. Lucas, *A Historical Geography of the British Dominions, Vol. IV. South Africa, Part II. History of the Union of South Africa*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1915, p. vi.; H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007, pp. 191-194.

⁹⁰ Also referred to as the South African War. However, due to the positioning of the Afrikaner and the context of this study it will be referred to as the Anglo Boer War.

⁹¹ R. Hyam & P. Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa Since the Boer War*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 102.

⁹² R. Hyam & P. Henshaw, *The Lion and the Springbok: Britain and South Africa Since the Boer War*, p. 114.; H.W.R. Wade, “The Basis of Legal Sovereignty”, *The Cambridge Law Journal*, 13(2), 1955, pp. 190-191.

⁹³ P. Alexander & R. Halpern, “Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, p. 6.

This comparative study on the poor whites used a range of sources. The primary sources include archival records that are in the public domain, contemporary newspapers and magazines, legislation, reports and commissions. In recent times, sources utilised by historians have expanded and therefore, novels written about poor whites in South Africa and the American South were utilised as primary sources. History is written on the basis of archival material, which was a landmark in the development of historiography. Each historian uses such material and becomes a master in this art. However, the work in the archives is not the purpose, but rather a means to an end.⁹⁴ Taking this further, Fredrickson states that a good comparative history does not solely rely on extensive archival research, but rather uses secondary sources as well.⁹⁵ In a seminal article on comparative history, Redlich takes this point further by describing the special relationship between primary and secondary sources in comparative historical work as follows:

Comparative historiography's main sources are by necessity historical monographs, i.e. the results of preceding generations of historians. While up to now a historical work to be recognised had to be based on archival sources, whereas the literature on the subject, i.e. the results of earlier or similar work were permitted only to play a very minor accessory role and comparative historiography demands as its source material a wealth of monographs. It would go to the archives to fill in the gaps in knowledge and check to see if the monograph writers truly saw those aspects of historical fact or development in which we are interested. One might put it this way: while traditional monographic historiography begins in the archives, comparative historiography ends there.⁹⁶

Thus, in summary the aim of this study is to use a selection of relevant primary and secondary sources, which includes novels, to compare the phenomenon that was the "poor-white problem" in both South Africa and the American South within selected categories and themes. Both South Africa and the American South experienced what they viewed as a "problem" concerning the impoverishment and poverty of white people.

The sources used in this historical-comparative study have been divided into four main types. The first includes the primary sources. These are mostly documentary sources such as archival

⁹⁴ F. Redlich, "Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems", *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, p. 385.

⁹⁵ G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*, p. 11.

⁹⁶ F. Redlich, "Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems", *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, p. 386.

material, which includes commissions, newspapers and government legislation focusing on the poor-white question at the time. The novels are also regarded as primary sources. This category includes novels written during the first half of the twentieth century by authors from South Africa and the American South, who expressed what was happening around them in the form of fiction. Second, are the academic sources which are considered the secondary sources. These include general histories of South Africa and the American South written by a range of specialist scholars. These histories reflect on how the poor whites have featured in the broader perspective on the past. The third includes comparative specialists who have written comparative histories on South Africa and the USA. Not only do these scholars provide a model on how to write a comparative analysis, they also provide certain important information to consider such as the environment and demography. The last category includes the literary specialists who have written secondary sources, however, which have reviewed and analysed the novels.

This study follows a qualitative comparative approach and adopts cross-national comparative history. It is important to define exactly what is implied with qualitative research. D. Silverman explains:

Qualitative research is the type of research that finds out about people's experience. It helps us understand what is important for people.⁹⁷

It can be further defined as a process of naturalistic inquiry that seeks an in-depth understanding of social phenomena within their natural setting. The focus is on the "why" of social phenomena and relies on the direct experiences of human beings as meaning-making agents in their everyday lives.⁹⁸

The foundations of a historian's methodological research and work remains sacrosanct and will also be applied in this comparative study. The sources are extremely important for the historian's research. Source criticism is an important element of historical methodology.⁹⁹ The historical method and criticism of the sources will be applied. This is the pivot on which the whole methodology revolves.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ D. Silverman (ed.), *Qualitative Research*. Los Angeles: Sage, 2021, p. 3.

⁹⁸ University of Texas Arlington: UTA Libraries, 'Quantitative and Qualitative Research', <https://libguides.uta.edu/quantitative_and_qualitative_research/qual#:~:text=Qualitative%20research%20is%20a%20process,in%20their%20every%20day%20lives>, n.d. Accessed: 12 May 2022.

⁹⁹ M. Bucheli & R.D. Wadhvani (eds.), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 313.

¹⁰⁰ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*. Rajapalayam: VC Publications, 2005, p. 386.

Historical criticism is based on documents or sources. These are the “reports” of events including the impressions made on someone by past events and consciously or unconsciously recorded for the purpose of transmitting information.¹⁰¹ According to G. Venkatesan, documents or sources should never be accepted at face value – they need to be elevated.¹⁰² M. Bucheli and R.D. Wadhvani explains the validity and credibility needs to be established, which will then enable the researcher or rather historian to place each piece of information in its proper perspective and from there draw conclusions.¹⁰³ The purpose of historical criticism is to eliminate error and to know the truth. This is why R.J. Shafer’s external and internal criticism of the source or document becomes of importance.¹⁰⁴ With regard to this study each source will be evaluated according to these criteria.

Heuristics is a term derived from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means “to find”.¹⁰⁵ Shafer states that this is exactly what external criticism aims to do – that is to determine the authenticity of the document and the veracity of information within it.¹⁰⁶ It is also referred to as lower criticism. According to Tosh, it determines whether the author, place, date, intended audience, purpose and context of the source are what they purport to be.¹⁰⁷ External criticism is a preparatory study of documentary evidence as well as the search for material and the preliminary study of that material to know the essentials about it.¹⁰⁸ The historian needs to establish the validity of the source by analysing the circumstances surrounding its production and preservation. Bucheli and Wadhvani state that by determining the validity of a source it establishes the authenticity and pertinence of the research.¹⁰⁹ Material traces can be found in a number of places such as libraries, museums and private collections.¹¹⁰ As soon as the document is traced the historian needs to decide if the trace is suitable for their research, if so the next step is to determine its credibility and to eliminate fakes and forgeries. Thus, external criticism is focused on the “outside” or external aspects of the document and source.¹¹¹

¹⁰¹ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 381.

¹⁰² It is this elevation that is known as historical criticism. Whereby the aim is to determine whether a source, document or idea is acceptable, authentic or credible.

¹⁰³ M. Bucheli, & R.D. Wadhvani (eds.), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*, p. 313.

¹⁰⁴ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*. Chicago: The Dorsey Press, 1980, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 381.

¹⁰⁶ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 124.

¹⁰⁸ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, pp. 128-129.

¹⁰⁹ M. Bucheli, & R.D. Wadhvani (eds.), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*, p. 313.

¹¹⁰ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 126.

¹¹¹ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 128.

Hermeneutics is the internal interceptive criticism or internal criticism. It is also called higher criticism.¹¹² Hermeneutics focuses on the internal aspects of the document or source thus, it is concerned with the credibility of the content.¹¹³ It seeks to determine whether the content is true or not.¹¹⁴ Bucheli and Wadhvani state that this involves assessing a source's trustworthiness or reliability in addressing the researchers' question.¹¹⁵ According to Venkatesan, its purpose is to establish the trust and worthiness of the content of the document or source.¹¹⁶ As with external criticism traces need to be established, however, in the case of internal criticism each trace contains a message and therefore, the historian needs to determine if each message or "fact" is genuine without personal elements, subjectivity or errors.¹¹⁷ Shafer explains that historians depend upon records for information therefore, the authenticity and credibility of the content needs to be ascertained and the use of internal criticism is used to check if the document or source contains fallacies, lies or errors and whether these may be intentional or if the source of information may be defective.¹¹⁸ A critical approach is necessary to guard the historian. Thus, every single trace is analysed and tested in order to determine the nature of historical facts and test their authenticity and credibility.¹¹⁹ The historian will need to deal with two types of internal criticism – positive and negative.¹²⁰ Positive criticism refers to the analysis of the content – to know the literal and real meaning of the statement, language and time plays an important role.¹²¹ Negative criticism deals with the process of eliminating statements which are untrue.¹²²

Novels as an Alternative Sources

With monographs and other published sources being seen as critical for the production of comparative history, this study takes it one step further. As emphasised, in assessing the poor whites within their respective contexts the research also includes contemporary literary works of fiction. These include novels written by contemporary authors about the poor whites adding another key to understanding and analysing the poor white phenomena, or poor whiteness.

¹¹² G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 383.

¹¹³ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, p. 126.

¹¹⁴ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 149.

¹¹⁵ M. Bucheli, & R.D. Wadhvani (eds.), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*, p. 314.

¹¹⁶ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 383.

¹¹⁷ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, pp. 382 & 384.

¹¹⁸ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 149.; G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 384.

¹¹⁹ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 385.

¹²⁰ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 386.

¹²¹ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 151.

¹²² G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 386.

The use of novels as a primary source is not a new trend. For over a century, scholars have argued for it and proven its use.¹²³ As early as 1907, G. Murray reveals the debt historians have to the novels of the period they are studying in his lectures at Cambridge:

If the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were all fiction we should still learn from them a great deal about early Greek customs, about the practices of war and government, about marriage, land tenure, worship, farming, commerce, and above all, the methods of seafaring. Let anyone read thoughtfully the story which Eumaeus, the swineherd, tells of his life, in *Odyssey*, and then consider how much history of the life of the Aegean, about the seventh century B.C., he has learnt from three pages of poetical fiction.¹²⁴

Historical documents or historical sources exist in different formats. Archival sources are the more traditional ones historians use. Oral history or story telling is another form of historical evidence, but libraries and archives traditionally have not been interested in collecting and housing sources from the lower classes. Oral history as well as novels help to fill these gaps. Novels reveal more about ordinary people's lives and can be viewed as a people's history.¹²⁵ A. Mac Donald Taylor explains that the reconstruction of a living age is only possible by examining the "writings which grew out of it". It includes the consciousness of the time. It is important to note that before history became a science, it was literary writers who were the historical dilettantes writing history as an extension of literature.¹²⁶ D.B. Skårdal argues that history cannot afford to reject any sources because its goal is to understand as much of the past as possible. The main goal is not only to reconstruct the facts, but also to attempt to portray the unique quality, distinctive character and typical consciousness on its own premise. Thus, history will always be incomplete and imperfect as life itself.¹²⁷

¹²³ This is clear by the articles published in *The Sewanee Review*. It is an American literary magazine established in 1892 and the oldest continuously published quarterly in the United States. It publishes original fiction and poetry, essays, reviews, and literary criticism.

¹²⁴ A. Mac Donald Taylor, "The Historical Novel: As a Source in History", *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 1938, p. 465. Quoting G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Harvard University*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.

¹²⁵ M.T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016, p. 4.

¹²⁶ A. Mac Donald Taylor, "The Historical Novel: As a Source in History", *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 1938, pp. 460-461.

¹²⁷ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 75.

Skårdal continues that of all the different kinds of data and sources used by historians, novels are the least used perhaps because many have assumed the sharp line between fact and fiction.¹²⁸ A. H. Pasco explains that this is mostly attributed to the question – can literature legitimately serve as a historical archive?¹²⁹ T. Rowat states that archives themselves are becoming less concerned with the distinctions of legitimacy and authenticity and are more concerned with a broader range of formats that reach the realm of popular culture. This entails “blurring the distinctions between non-fiction and fiction in the documentary record and analysing it as a cultural construct.”¹³⁰ However, it is the fictional novels that are often forgotten in serious analysis of the whole phenomenon, but these have begun gaining increasing credibility.¹³¹ These fictional sources can be seen as forming part of what is referred to as a community or counter-archive.¹³² According to Skårdal, literary fiction can be used as another kind of source which contains much more historical evidence. These novels present an essential part of real life which historians are unable to grasp, thus, the novel can be used as an illustration of reality.¹³³ R. Carroll adds that the novel grants the reader a greater understanding of a specific period and why people acted as they did.¹³⁴ According to R. Slotkin, novels arise from the shortcomings of history, the limits of historical writing and observations about the inadequacies of historical experience.¹³⁵ M.T. Garcia adds, that novels can provide insight into history that more formal documents cannot, thus creating a new window into the past.¹³⁶ It is important to note that novels do not usually provide exact information, but they do serve well for insight into common opinions, attitudes and everyday life.¹³⁷

According to Tosh, novels must to some extent be considered a source.¹³⁸ Although not historical statements, they do offer insights into the social and intellectual milieu in which the writer lived and vivid descriptions of the setting as well. He gives the example of Charles Dickens as evidence of the frame of mind in which middle-class Victorians considered the “condition of England”. He

¹²⁸ D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 75.

¹²⁹ A.H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive”, *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 373.

¹³⁰ T. Rowat, “The Record and Repository as a Cultural Form of Expression” *Archivaria*, 36, 1993, p. 203.

¹³¹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 5.

¹³² T. Cook, “Archival Science and Postmodernism: New Formulations for Old Concepts”, *Archival Science*, 1, 2001, p. 24.; T. Cook, “Fashionable Nonsense or Professional Rebirth: Postmodernism and the Practice of Archives”, *Archivaria*, 51, 2001, pp. 16-21.

¹³³ D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 73.

¹³⁴ R. Carroll, “The Trouble with History and Fiction”, *M/C Journal*, 14(3), 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.372>>.

¹³⁵ R. Slotkin, “Fiction for the Purpose of History”, *Rethinking History*, 9(2/3), 2005, pp. 221-222.

¹³⁶ M.T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience*, p. 5.

¹³⁷ A.H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive”, *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 373.

¹³⁸ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*. London: Longman, 2000, p. 64.

later goes on to say that through this source the historian is able to observe or infer the sequence of day-to-day events.¹³⁹

Skårdal states that social historians have increasingly used all types of literature as historical sources. Previously it was sufficient to use records of the ruling group, the elite of the period, but social history, such as this study, focuses on submerged social groups or the subaltern for example, women, workers, minorities, children and the lower levels of society, such as the poor.¹⁴⁰ Pasco argues that using conventional sources has resulted in many historians being left virtually in the dark about the lower classes, “the not notables”, and their day-to-day experiences.¹⁴¹ Garcia adds that these groups have not only been victims of history, but have also made history.¹⁴² Sources concerning these groups are very scarce and therefore, the use of any available material becomes crucial.¹⁴³ Thus, this lack of archival materials may lead to unanswered questions, which have turned historians to accept the idea that a different or “unusual archives” be exploited. It is important to develop new resources for uncovering the past as well as to find new perspectives on older resources.¹⁴⁴ According to Carroll, historians are no longer seen as the sole guardians of historical truth and such views have become outdated in the light of accumulated knowledge.¹⁴⁵ Mac Donald Taylor claims that using novels represents a unique way to rethink history. J.H. Robinson explained that there needs to be a readjustment of our historical narratives:

... history at its best needs not simply to be authentic. Its value, as a contribution to wisdom, depends on the selection we make from the recorded occurrences and institutions of the past, and our presentation of them.¹⁴⁶

As indicated above, the novels selected for this study come from the Realism genre and thus encompass a certain degree of truth, history and reality. Skårdal explains that if history is the study of past events, then combined with the Realism genre, these novels are usually regarded as contemporary historical fiction.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁹ J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*, pp. 64, 93.

¹⁴⁰ D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 76.

¹⁴¹ A.H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive”, *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 376.

¹⁴² M.T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience*, p. 13.

¹⁴³ D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 76.

¹⁴⁴ A.H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive”, *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, pp. 373-374-376.

¹⁴⁵ R. Carroll, “The Trouble with History and Fiction”, *M/C Journal*, 14(3), 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.372>>.

¹⁴⁶ J.H. Robinson, “The Newer Ways of Historians”, *The American Historical Review*, 35(2), 1930, p. 252.

¹⁴⁷ A. Mac Donald Taylor, “The Historical Novel: As a Source in History”, *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 1938, p. 464.

In essence, the term “fiction” is literature describing imaginary people and events. Novels in turn are portrayed with either real events or people in realistic presentations of the time and culture.¹⁴⁸ J. Conrad stated that “fiction” is history and that it is based on the reality of forms and the observation of social phenomena, whereas “history” is based on documents and second-hand impressions. He claimed that fiction is nearer to the truth, but that a historian may also be an artist and a novelist historian, preserver, keeper and expounder of human experience.¹⁴⁹

According to A. Fleishman, each of the professions, novelists and historians, have argued for their professions: For the novelist “A novel can tell a truth otherwise hidden: fiction is a way of knowing”,¹⁵⁰ while the historian claims: “History, after all, is the true poetry;... Reality, if rightly interpreted, is grander than fiction.”¹⁵¹ Skårdal states that historians use words like the novelist, but they are bound to source materials and methods.¹⁵² Historians associate their field with the social sciences, however, their profession is more like novel writing with limits. Slotkin declares that by asking a historian for an explanation, they will produce a story based on the facts and sources they can find.¹⁵³

The main difference between factual and fictional discourse is one focused on what is “true” and the other is focused on what is “real”. Carroll explains that both present the past: the novel deals with what is “real” and it can tell the past as accurately or even in a more plausible way than history, which deals with what is “true”.¹⁵⁴ Carroll claims that historians are aware of their inability to reconstruct a “dead” world in its completeness, however, through their documentation and thus, something more is needed.¹⁵⁵ It is safe then to say that novels can provide the historian with information about past experiences, attitudes of the time, as well as external information.¹⁵⁶ A novel can be as accurate as a history in telling what happened, when and how.¹⁵⁷ Therefore, Pasco clarifies that raw facts can be revitalised with a better and more in-depth understanding of

¹⁴⁸ A. Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971, pp. xi-xiii.

¹⁴⁹ J. Conrad, “Henry James, an Appreciation”, *The North American Review*, 203(725), 1916, p. 581.

¹⁵⁰ A. Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, p. x.

¹⁵¹ A. Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, p. xiv.

¹⁵² D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 74.

¹⁵³ R. Slotkin, “Fiction for the Purpose of History”, *Rethinking History*, 9(2/3), 2005, p. 222.

¹⁵⁴ R. Carroll, “The Trouble with History and Fiction”, *M/C Journal*, 14(3), 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.372>>.

¹⁵⁵ R. Carroll, “The Trouble with History and Fiction”, *M/C Journal*, 14(3), 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.372>>.

¹⁵⁶ D.B. Skårdal, “‘Hard’ Facts and ‘Soft’ Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material”, *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 77.

¹⁵⁷ R. Slotkin, “Fiction for the Purpose of History”, *Rethinking History*, 9(2/3), 2005, p. 221.

the people and period. Novels are important for making history come alive with breath and detail.¹⁵⁸

According to E. Updale, a modern historian, looking at the past, may need to wade through a number of records in order to find information which a novelist, writing at the time, may provide at a passing glance. It is these unspoken assumptions and unintended insights that can provide the truest period detail – the things that were taken for granted. Fiction can reveal things that the official record and sanitised histories never touched upon.¹⁵⁹ Mac Donald Taylor explains, it becomes important to distinguish between the use of novels when applied to history. Contemporary historical fiction (which is usually from the Realism genre) acquires historical value by the passage of time. He continues that authors copy life from their own day and thus give evidence not only of events, but manners, thought and customs. The novels are unconscious testimonials of the state of culture of their period.¹⁶⁰ I. Hofmeyr echoes this by stating that novels do not spontaneously condense out of nothing – they must have some previous “narrative tradition” on which to draw and develop.¹⁶¹

Commenting on the role of Fiction and its relationship with History anthropologist and fictional novelist, A. Ghosh claims:

History is like a river, and the historian is writing about the ways the river flows and the currents and the crosscurrents in the river. But, within this river, there are also fish, and the fish can swim in many different directions.¹⁶²

According to Ghosh, the fish are the novel in his metaphor. The water is history in which the fish or novel “swims” and it is important to know the flow to create the cultural setting, the time period and ideas of the time. He argues that the novelist's approach is different to that of the historian, it is through the novels and the eyes of the characters where a greater understanding of some aspects of the past are formed, which historians do not deal with. For Ghosh, historical novels

¹⁵⁸ A.H. Pasco, “Literature as Historical Archive”, *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, pp. 388-389.

¹⁵⁹ E. Updale, The History Girls, ‘Fiction as an Historical Source’, <<http://the-history-girls.blogspot.com/2011/11/fiction-as-historical-source-by-eleanor.html>>, 25 November 2011. Accessed: 28 March 2022.

¹⁶⁰ A. Mac Donald Taylor, “The Historical Novel: As a Source in History”, *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 1938, pp. 464-465.

¹⁶¹ I. Hofmeyr, “The Mining Novel in South African Literature: 1870-1920”, *English in Africa*, 5(2), 1978, p. 2.

¹⁶² M. Kooria, “Between the Walls of Archives and Horizons of Imagination: An interview with Amitav Ghosh”, *Itinerario*, 36, 2012, p. 9.

would not be possible if historians had not laid the foundations first.¹⁶³ In terms of Ghosh's analogy, this study will be looking at the novels, which is the fish's point of view. The Realist novel may add to the historical account, in terms of ideas, feelings, and culture, which has not been explained or recorded in the historical record. According to J.C. Simmons, contemporary historical novels or Realism have been used as a medium for the discussion of contemporary problems and social problems. These novels are no longer only vehicles of escapism, but also a means to create awareness.¹⁶⁴

In the 51st J.B.M. Hertzog Memorial Lecture, presented by E.J. Bottomley, he stated that the poor whites had no voice, but this is not entirely true. Most poor whites were illiterate and there seems to be no written record of their lives¹⁶⁵ thus, historians have used a wide variety of other sources to recreate their lives.¹⁶⁶ As J.W. Flynt explains, degenerate poor whites appear only infrequently in the historical record, however, they dominated the fictional accounts of the white bottom class.¹⁶⁷ Although it can be argued that the novels were written from the top-down and rarely told from the point of view of the disenfranchised people,¹⁶⁸ it needs to be mentioned that the novelists selected for this study witnessed and in some cases experienced what it was like to be a poor white and thus, their work falls into the Realism genre. Thus, this study argues that the novels themselves act as a voice for the poor whites and offers an insight into their lives.

First and probably the best-known primary work done on the poor whites is that by the Carnegie Commission.¹⁶⁹ The Carnegie Commission was the first national poverty survey that could claim the status of a scientific enterprise.¹⁷⁰ This Commission was funded by the Carnegie Corporation in the USA, the Union Government and the Dutch Reformed Church. Five Commissioners and a number of assessors were appointed from different fields. These Commissioners were: J.F.W.

¹⁶³ M. Kooria, "Between the Walls of Archives and Horizons of Imagination: An interview with Amitav Ghosh", *Itinerario*, 36, 2012, p. 9.

¹⁶⁴ J.C. Simmons, *The Novelist as Historian*. The Hague: Mouton, 1973, p. 21.

¹⁶⁵ Written by themselves or other poor whites. These include diaries and letters.

¹⁶⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 26-27.; J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006, p. 7.

¹⁶⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989, p. ix.

¹⁶⁸ K.L. Thomas, "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 15.

¹⁶⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

¹⁷⁰ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, p. 82.

Grosskopf, R.W. Wilcocks, E.G. Malherbe, W.A. Murray, J.R. Albertyn and M.E. Rothmann.¹⁷¹ By the late 1920s, white poverty became a national issue for two reasons: Firstly, it was a global economic issue, which coincided with a prolonged drought in South Africa. The local government tried to stem the flow of impoverished whites leaving the rural area to the city by making loans available and boosting relief and subsidies for temporary employment on public works. The second reason was that white poverty was given specific focus within the academic world, and a more scientific approach was taken towards social ills. Thus, with many similarities between South Africa and the USA, the Carnegie Commission of New York became interested in the problem of white poverty in South Africa.¹⁷²

The result was a five volume report on the poor-white question. It includes a wealth of information on most of the aspects of the poor whites: their lives and attitudes; the education and living conditions, including even a report on mothers and daughters of poor-white families; health and sociological issues; economic conditions; and the psychology of poor whites. However, their actual “culture” as white South Africans and as poor whites was not included, but significant changes and developments are recorded.

The Carnegie Commission reports will serve as a primary source because it was carried out in the time frame of this study and was and still is considered one of the most important pieces of research done on poor whites. The Carnegie Commission, which was compiled in the 1930s, remains one of the best primary sources to examine along with the novels written around the same time. The Carnegie Commission will be examined in more detail in chapter five. Furthermore, the Carnegie Commission, in a sense, also acts as a voice for the poor whites. A number of interviews were conducted with poor whites, and although it can be argued that the questions were from a top down perspective, the answers themselves were the ideas, thoughts, beliefs and opinions of the poor whites. It was these answers that would serve as the basis of the report.

Fleishman states that the historical novel, like history, must try to present the past to the present with controlled subjectivity and try to find meaning, rethink and complete the rationale to

¹⁷¹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 30.

¹⁷² H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003, pp. 345-346.

reconstruct the nexus of past action. He states that it is the formula of the historian and novelist that differs, but also has similarities.¹⁷³

According to Skårdal, using novels as historical sources is viable in light of the historians' training in literary criticism. External and internal criticism is equally applicable to using the novel as a primary source. In the same manner that individual witness statements and oral history need to be tested for distortions, novels also need to be subjected to the same thorough critical analysis.¹⁷⁴ Carroll emphasises this by stating that historians should constantly question the evidence.¹⁷⁵ It is important that the historian does not depend too heavily on a single source or novel. Pasco urges that in using the novel as a historical source, a large sample of novels on the topic should be examined.¹⁷⁶ When the same themes reappear in numerous works by different authors there is more reason to accept the results as an accurate and meaningful reflection of the culture and period.¹⁷⁷ Therefore, like other sources, if sufficient depictions of reality are presented, they can become evidence.¹⁷⁸ Iteration increases the likelihood that numerous writers and, by extension, readers held these views.¹⁷⁹ Skårdal explains that external and shared experiences of groups reflect the reliability in literature if the novelist is proven to be a solid witness (through the use of the historians' craft in external and internal criticism of sources). If many novelists represent similar things in their presentation or if the novelist has experienced a time or event, then the historian may and should add such evidence to that of other sources in order to create a better reflection of the past.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, Garcia emphasises this by stating that although novelists writing at a specific time and place write their own story, they are writing within a context of a collective experience. No story is just an individual one. We are all the products and subjects of our historical period. Thus, novels speak in one way or another to collective experiences.¹⁸¹

According to Pasco, novels may be consulted as legitimate historical sources because they reveal, more than any other sources, the ideals that fascinated authors in the time that they

¹⁷³ A. Fleishman, *The English Historical Novel: Walter Scott to Virginia Woolf*, p. xv.

¹⁷⁴ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 75.

¹⁷⁵ R. Carroll, "The Trouble with History and Fiction", *M/C Journal*, 14(3), 2011, <<https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.372>>.

¹⁷⁶ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 379.

¹⁷⁷ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 387.

¹⁷⁸ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 76.

¹⁷⁹ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, 388.

¹⁸⁰ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 79.

¹⁸¹ M.T. Garcia, *Literature as History: Autobiography, Testimonio, and the Novel in the Chicano and Latino Experience*, pp. 14-15.

wrote.¹⁸² Novelists are then also valuable historical witnesses when they portray the periods they live in themselves.¹⁸³ They are able to give voice to the silent majority or minority– the poor whites, who in this case are mostly illiterate.¹⁸⁴ Therefore, the historian needs to investigate the period and place the novelist lived in to determine what the author may know from their own experiences. It is also important for the historian to investigate what the novelist could count on their readers' knowing because the reader's knowledge will limit the authors' imaginative freedom. Skårdal emphasises that the novelist will not be able to violate what is considered fact.¹⁸⁵ To attract and hold their readers' attention, the attitudes and facts needed to be possible if not true thus, the novelist cannot fail to retain enough contemporary reality for their readers.¹⁸⁶ The purpose of the novel also needs to be investigated. The novelist's background and beliefs also need to be examined to determine who he/she represents. Once this is accomplished, the historian can then make use of the novel as a source of ideology in its time and the novel can be treated as a cultural record which provides a unique entry into the consciousness, ways of thinking and experiences of another time.¹⁸⁷ In short, the novel, written during the time period of the historical study, tested against other novels and historical works, without neglecting the archives, allows the historians to go far in perceiving the character of the time.¹⁸⁸

Realism

According to Simmons, the Realism authors of the novels do not intend to corrupt history and misguide their readers, but rather encourage an interest in the formal history and after reading the novel the reader could leave with a degree of knowledge.¹⁸⁹ As Ghosh states, when reading a Realism novel, the average person could learn something of history and culture while being entertained. Often, the novel also introduces the public to an aspect of historical study almost neglected by formal historians.¹⁹⁰ E. Nolte states that younger readers may ask what the relevance is for the modern contemporary reader? Her answer to this is simply that it is of literary-

¹⁸² A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 389.

¹⁸³ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 77-79.

¹⁸⁴ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 375.

¹⁸⁵ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 77-79.

¹⁸⁶ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 383.

¹⁸⁷ D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 77-79.

¹⁸⁸ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 389.

¹⁸⁹ J.C. Simmons, *The Novelist as Historian*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁰ J.C. Simmons, *The Novelist as Historian*, pp. 27-28.

historical interest. These novels are dated in their time and thus, provide insight into the social history.¹⁹¹

Skårdal states that the Realism novel holds a central position as the best psychological documentation and source for the novelist's interpretation of their society. The novelist is characterised by a special ability in observation and intuitive understanding in their time. They see more and understand better and therefore, historians should be interested in the novelist's attitudes as an expression of the general attitudes of the time they are writing in, as well as widely accepted opinions (thus what the readers may know and feel).¹⁹² The readers at the time looked to novels to elucidate aspects of their world, to reveal it as it was in actuality, to explain things so that they would be better able to understand and cope with what they heard, saw and sensed around them as well as deal with how this affected them and to relate and understand the world around them.¹⁹³ Slotkin argues that a novelist's portrayal of the past may be truer and more accurate than work produced by a historian.¹⁹⁴ Pasco claims, that this is especially true when the fictive reality is tested against other archives or sources.¹⁹⁵

The Realists have their own way of looking at the world and putting what they see on paper.¹⁹⁶ Literature therefore becomes a reflection of social conditions and evolution of the mind, like holding a mirror up to society and reflecting what was happening onto the pages. As C. van Onselen states in his study *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*:¹⁹⁷

If any of the characters in this work shake themselves free of the word-shackles that bind them to the page and walk three-dimensionally into the reader's mind, it is a tribute to the story-telling abilities of these informants.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹¹ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1988, pp. v-vi.

¹⁹² D.B. Skårdal, "'Hard' Facts and 'Soft' Sources: Literature as Historical Source Material", *American Studies in Scandinavia*, 16(2), 1984, p. 78.

¹⁹³ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, pp. 380-381.

¹⁹⁴ R. Slotkin, "Fiction for the Purpose of History", *Rethinking History*, 9(2/3), 2005, p. 222.

¹⁹⁵ A.H. Pasco, "Literature as Historical Archive", *New Literary History*, 35(3), 2004, p. 389.

¹⁹⁶ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1973, p. 10.

¹⁹⁷ C. Van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*. Cape Town: Phillip, 1996.

¹⁹⁸ C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*, p. ix.

This is exactly what Realism tries to achieve. He also adds that the story-tellers become the “best social historians”.¹⁹⁹

J.A. Fishman and O. Garcia explain that generally novels in the Realism genre are based on experiences that the authors have either witnessed or heard second-hand, which gives the novel more credibility as they contain real events and people within the fiction. This implies that it most likely eliminates the “sensationalism” of other genres. The important factor remains to try and separate the two so that what remains is the historical essence.²⁰⁰ Nearly all literature has some degree of Realism. It is important for readers to be able to recognise and identify with the characters and the world they inhabit in the novel.²⁰¹ Realism has been mainly concerned with the common places of everyday life among the middle and lower classes, where the character is a product of social factors and where the environment is the integral element in the dramatic complications.²⁰²

S. Earnshaw explains that the Realist or contemporary novel presents stories, characters and settings that are similar to those commonly found in the contemporary everyday world. This requires events to take place in the present or recent past, and events themselves are usually organised in a linear, chronological sequence and located in places familiar to the author and audience either through direct observation or report. The characters are plausible. The desire to portray contemporary everyday life entails and requires a breadth of social detail. As a consequence, the classes represented tend to be those categorised as working class and middle class, since these form the majority of the population. The subject matter is usually whatever is found in everyday life, good or bad. These novels often engage with social issues of the day. The Realist novel may offer some moral viewpoint, but usually remains neutral and objective and rather strives for accuracy of representation. According to Earnshaw, in the realist world cause and effect explains everything.²⁰³ G. Dekker gives the following definition of Realism. The novelist can approach outer reality by losing himself/herself in the outer world and learn to know things in the outer world with such loving care that they might irrevocably reveal their deeper meaning or

¹⁹⁹ C. van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*, p. ix.

²⁰⁰ J.A. Fishman & O. Garcia, *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity: The Success-Failure Continuum in Language and Ethnic Identity Efforts II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 15-16.

²⁰¹ D. Campbell, Review: 'Realism (late 1800s-early 1900s)' in *The New Book of Knowledge*, <<http://www.scholastic.com/browse/article.jsp?id=3753924>>, n.d. Accessed: 12 April 2022.

²⁰² The Columbia Electronic Encyclopaedia, 6th ed. Columbia University, 'Realism', <<http://www.infoplease.com/encyclopedia/entertainment/Realism-literature.html>>, 2012. Accessed: 12 April 2022.

²⁰³ S. Earnshaw, *Beginning Realism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010, pp. 14-15.

spiritual truth to him. If the novelist portrays this reality, the truthful version of his careful contemplation will take centre-stage. However, this version will always be filled with a deeper meaning. Such an artist is called a realist.²⁰⁴

Thus, in summary, the aim of this study is to use a selection of relevant primary and secondary sources, which includes novels, to compare the phenomenon that was the “poor-white problem” in both South Africa and the American South within selected categories and themes. Both South Africa and the American South experienced what they viewed as a “problem” concerning the impoverishment and poverty of white people in the mid nineteenth century to the mid twentieth century.

Chapter outline

This study consists of ten chapters dealing with specific themes pertaining to the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South. Each chapter examines the theme in each country and highlights the similarities and differences and the reasons for these.

This chapter served as the Introduction. It highlighted the research aims and hypothesis for the study, as well as the relevance of the study. It laid out the methodology and how it will be applied. It also examined definitions such as the term poor white and what was meant in each context it was used. Furthermore, it examined the primary sources and the uses of novels as a source, as well as what is meant in terms of Realism and the Realism genre.

The literature review serves as the second chapter. As mentioned, there is a wealth of information written on the poor whites in both South Africa as well as the United States. A selection of the key texts pertaining to a range of themes is presented. Sources include books, journal articles, conference papers, travel accounts, newspapers, magazines and novels. Each source is reviewed and its importance to the study is elucidated.

Chapter three examines the history of the poor whites in South Africa. This acts as a background and context for the rest of the study. Chapter four is the parallel chapter of chapter three and examines the history of the poor whites in the USA, namely, the South. It provides context and background for the rest of the study.

²⁰⁴ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1935, pp. 135-136.

The Carnegie Commission is the focus of chapter five. The Commission is a key study which links South Africa and the USA regarding the poor-white problem or question.

The different language movements or schools, as well as the novelists selected for the analysis are discussed and compared to one another in chapter six. This chapter is of greater length given the material it needs to cover for a comparative perspective it concludes with. The language movements the novels fall into, as well as the novelists' biographies, shed some light on the poor whites place in society and why they formed an important theme or topic. Lastly, their style and novels are examined to serve as a background and context to understand the period the novels were written in as well as the people who wrote them.

Chapter seven examines what a poor white is and looks at a number of definitions and descriptions from each country using a wide selection of sources. The Carnegie Commissions categories or groups of poor whites are also examined. The different poor-white characters from the selected South African and Southern novels are placed into these categories and reveal the similarities and differences between the types of poor whites as well as the poor whites from the respective countries.

The causes for poor whiteness forms the theme of chapter eight. Using three distinctive categories the different causes, which also feature in the selected novels are compared and a number of similarities and differences are revealed. The penultimate chapter examines the religion, superstitions and perceptions of the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South. Thus, their religion and superstitions are scrutinised and the novels once again provide valuable examples and insights into the lives of the poor whites which reveal a number of similarities and differences in their outlooks and beliefs. Furthermore, the chapter examines how the poor whites were perceived by "other" groups, as well as how they perceived these groups in turn. Thus, various views, judgements and stereotypes are highlighted. The novels are instrumental in this as they allow an insight into the mind of the poor white. The last chapter reflects on the study. The final analysis reflects on the comparability of poor whites in South Africa and the American South and the use of the novel as a primary source. It also offers insight into further research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Thus, if the poor could not speak for themselves, there are many who could speak about them or for them: those who wish to repress them, to reform them, to rescue them, to romanticise them, to represent them.¹

The poor whites in both South Africa and the American South have received attention from a number of disciplines and in this rather extensive body of work a wide range of topics regarding the poor whites have emerged. Some of the fields of research include history, cultural history, sociology, anthropology, media, as well as literature. Poor whites rank as one of the most popular and most written about topics in the history of South Africa. In the USA, there also exists a wealth of information on the poor whites. However, according to historian C.C. Bolton, in the USA, the poor whites have been characterised rather than studied and thus, they tend to remain the most historically obscure social group of the “Old South”.² This literature review include a selection of sources that are relevant to its aims.

For the purposes of this literature review the sources have been divided into three different groups. First, are the non-fiction or academic sources. These include general histories of South Africa and the American South written by a range of specialist scholars. These histories reflect on how the poor whites have featured in the broader landscape of the past. They indicate the significance or insignificance of what could be perceived as the general concept of the poor whites, as well as their possible place in popular consciousness. The second section includes comparative specialists who have written comparative histories on South Africa and the USA. Not only do these scholars provide a range of models on how to write a comparative analysis, but they also highlight certain important information to consider, such as environment and demography. Lastly, the literary specialists will be examined who have also written secondary sources and have reviewed and analysed the novels. This literature overview of the poor whites is by no means exhaustive of the different categories, it is rather a selection of key sources.

¹ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 30.

² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. ix.

Poor whites remain a popular and well written about topic both in the history of South Africa and the American South. The term itself has been frowned upon in both white South African circles and in white American society, and has even at times been transformed into more derogatory connotations, implying the same people. However, it cannot be denied that it is a topic that has received a great amount of attention from numerous academic disciplines and an extensive range of academics, scholars and authors. In both the sources on poor whites in South Africa and those from the American South, the different historiographical schools will be examined.

Poor whites also feature in a number of academic journal articles. These have a specific focus on different themes and topics relating to the poor whites in these two countries. The range of disciplinary approaches to the topic is reflected in a range of journals from different fields. For example, geography,³ economics,⁴ medicine,⁵ history,⁶ politics,⁷ religion,⁸ sociology,⁹ culture,¹⁰ and literature.¹¹

Poor White Sources: South Africa

The focus of poor whites in South African academia first appeared under the Afrikaner Nationalist School. This historiographical school is divided into a pre-academic phase and an Afrikaner-centric academic or professional phase.¹² It was under the second phase that poor whites were first considered.

³ E.J. Bottomley, "Transnational Governmentality and the 'Poor White' in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, pp. 76-86.; J. Winders, "White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in Postbellum US South", *Cultural Geographies*, 10(1), 2003, pp. 45-63.

⁴ J. Fourie, "The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today", *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, 1270-1296.

⁵ Anonymous, "'The Poor White' Problem in South Africa", *The British Medical Journal*, 2(3788), 1933, pp. 296-297.

⁶ S. Klausen, "'Poor Whiteism', White Maternal Mortality, and the Promotion of Public Health in South Africa: The Department of Public Health's Endorsement of Contraceptive Services, 1930-1938", *South African Historical Journal*, 45(1), 2001, pp. 53-78.; S.V. Ash, "Poor whites in the occupied South, 1861-1865", *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, pp. 39-62.

⁷ T. Willoughby-Herard, "South Africa's Poor Whites and Whiteness Studies: Afrikaner Ethnicity, Scientific Racism and White Misery", *New Political Science*, 29(4), 2007, pp. 479-500.

⁸ R.R. Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 67-85.

⁹ M.R. Mell, "Poor Whites of the South", *Social Forces*, 17(2), 1938, pp. 153-167.

¹⁰ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's 'God's Little Acre' and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 375-392.

¹¹ B. Ladd, "Poverty and the Boundaries of Whiteness", *The Southern Literary Journal*, 41(1), 2008, pp. 131-134.

¹² W. Visser, "Trends in South African Historiography and the Present State of Historical Research", Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute. Uppsala. 2004, p. 3.

The study by P.J. van der Merwe, in 1938, looked at the phenomena of *bywoners*¹³ (sharecroppers/tenants) and *trekboers* (moving farmers).¹⁴ This study moved completely away from the Leopold von Ranke top-down style of history writing, although the focus was still in line with the Von Ranke custom with a historical thematology, centred on “national” political history, military history the state and inter-state relations, as well as the deeds of past great men. The shift began to focus on other sections of their nation. This was a change from Afrikaner Nationalist History that was written at the time and can be viewed in line with the economic and social history written and studied in the 1970s.¹⁵ The poor white gradually became an important focus point in this developing nation.¹⁶ Van der Merwe’s work does not go into great detail, but it is able to provide a broad overview of the poor whites’ role and place in the larger history of South Africa. Although this source focuses on a period before the time of this proposed study, it is important to note that poor whites existed before 1850. It also serves as a background for understanding the poor white phenomena in South Africa. It thus, accounts for a general view of poor whites in South Africa. This source was first written in Afrikaans and was later translated into English.

In 1941, A.N. Pelzer published an article entitled “Die ‘arm-blanke’ in die Suid-Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”.¹⁷ The period he examines is when the poor-white problem in South Africa is first recognised as an issue up until the Anglo-Boer War, which exasperates the problem. Pelzer examines the causes leading to poor whiteness as well as what assistance was provided to prevent the problem from getting out of hand. He uses a number of different sources such as letters and newspapers to provide a greater insight into the nuances of the time.

In the early twentieth century, many Afrikaner Nationalists wrote the “Great Histories”, which focused on the history of important men, as well as political history. However, changes did slowly start to take place.¹⁸ Well-known historian, F.A. van Jaarsveld was one of the first to examine

¹³ *Bywoners* literally means by-dweller but can also be a sharecropper or tenant. They denote a landless rural person to whom the resident owner of a farm has given permission, under conditions that vary considerably, to live on his farm.

¹⁴ P.J. van der Merwe, *Die Trekboer in die Geskiedenis van die Kaapkolonie (1657-1842)*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1938.

¹⁵ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*. Johannesburg: Southern Book Publishers, 1988, pp. 76-78.

¹⁶ K. Smith, *The Changing Past*, p. 65.

¹⁷ A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, pp. 123-150.

¹⁸ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 32.

ordinary everyday Afrikaners and thus, poor whites¹⁹ and therefore, poor whites found a place in his first general history of South Africa.²⁰ He examines them and their place in the larger history of South Africa in different sections of his book and looks at some of the reasons that caused these Afrikaners to become poor. He further examines their economic and political situation, as well as the government assistance they received. He does not go into great detail, however, but merely provides a broad overview of the place and role of poor whites in the broader South African history. It therefore probably accounts for the general focus on the poor whites.²¹ This source was first written in Afrikaans and was also later translated into English.

There was a revision of Afrikaner history writing towards the end of the twentieth century. This revision was more liberal in its approach, but still Afrikaner Nationalistic in nature.²² Historians E.L. P Stals and H.B. Giliomee fall into this category. Their sole motivation was to write a history focusing solely on the Afrikaners. Stals examined the Afrikaners in the setting of Johannesburg. His history included the poor whites and their migration from the rural areas to the urban areas and the push and pull factors, some of which were the causes of poverty in the rural areas. In parts of his two volume study *Afrikaners in die Goudstad*²³ (Afrikaners in the gold city), he considers the poor whites as a section of the Afrikaner people during the first half of the twentieth century. He examines the measures that were taken to “bring them back” into the fold or *volk* (people/nation/folk). The unique feature of his work is that he examines the different generations of poor whites in the urban area and compares their poverty, as well as the reasons for their poverty.²⁴

In Giliomee’s more recent study *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*,²⁵ he examines the history of the Afrikaner people. An entire chapter entitled “Wretched folk, ready for any mischief”,²⁶ was dedicated to the poor whites. In this chapter, he explores the categories and causes of their

¹⁹ It is important to note that the majority of poor whites in South Africa during the time of this study were Afrikaners and thus they have become the focus on the histories written about poor whites. It is also because they were Afrikaans and part of the volk that the government went to such lengths to assist them.

²⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*. Johannesburg: Perskor, 1975.

²¹ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, pp. 117-319.

²² W. Visser, “Trends in South African Historiography and the Present State of Historical Research”, Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2004, pp. 5-6.

²³ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad I, 1886-1924*. Kaapstad: HAUM Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, 1978.; E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*. Pretoria: HAUM Opvoedkundige Uitgewery, 1986.

²⁴ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 33.

²⁵ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2003.

²⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 315-354.

poverty in both the rural and urban areas; the assistance they were given; as well as the force they used to ensure that the government assisted them. Although a general history of the Afrikaner people, he delves into some very personal accounts in order to create a better understanding of these people in the larger Afrikaner context. In another of Giliomee's later works, *Die Afrikaners van 1910-2010: Die Opkoms van 'n Moderne Gemeenskap* (The Afrikaners of 1910-2010: The emergence of a modern community),²⁷ he again presents the history of the Afrikaner people and once again the poor whites feature. Here he goes into more detail and a large section is dedicated specifically to the poor whites. The Carnegie Commission is used as a source and its history is also examined. In this source, Giliomee does not focus on the causes of poor whiteness, however, he expounds on the assistance and help they received, as well as the movements and organisations involved in assisting them. He also examines the different phases the poor whites went through.²⁸

Although much of the history and information written about poor whites in South Africa is from Nationalist and Social historians, there were also Liberal historians who wrote about them. The difference between the Nationalist and Liberal historians in this regard was that the latter presented a more inclusive history of South Africa and thus, they also looked at black poverty and white as well as poverty in competition and in relation to each other. W.M. Macmillan²⁹ and C.W. de Kiewiet are two such historians.

In Macmillan's general economic history of South Africa he focuses an entire section on the poor-white problem entitled "Poor Whites!"³⁰. He provides a broad overview of the history of poor whites and examines the origin and causes of the poor-white problem in both the rural and urban regions of South Africa. Macmillan further considers the investigations that were undertaken regarding the poor-white problem, unemployment, as well as the destitute life in the rural areas, the different systems of living off the land and their financial conditions. Lastly, he also examines the poor white migration from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of a better life. He provides different examples of their way of life, labour, labour conditions, legal protection, wages and the conditions surrounding these issues, as well as their hopes. One of Macmillan's main points was that the poor-white problem was not an isolated phenomenon, but rather a result of an all-

²⁷ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die Opkoms van 'n Moderne Gemeenskap*. Pretoria: Die Erfenisstigting, 2011.

²⁸ H Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die Opkoms van 'n Moderne Gemeenskap*. Pretoria: Die Erfenisstigting, 2011.

²⁹ W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*. London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1930.

³⁰ W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, pp. 45-113.

embracing historical transformation from agrarianism to capitalism. He was also adamant that poor whites and poor blacks were not separate entities.³¹

De Kiewiet, a student of Macmillan's, scrutinises poverty in *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*.³² In his chapter entitled "Poor Whites and Poor Blacks",³³ he focuses on poverty in general and examines the poor whites and poor blacks in an unsegregated history of South Africa. With regards to the poor whites, he starts where the "problem" was first taken notice of and where solutions were sought. He further examines white poverty in different settings: rural and urban; homes; health; lifestyles; skills; labour systems; culture; tradition; isolation; *bywoners* (sharecroppers/tenants); legislation; assistance they received; and their interaction and competition with blacks. De Kiewiet is able to contextualise the poor whites and sheds "new" light on issues that had as yet not been examined by other historians. Both the works by Macmillan and De Kiewiet have been used extensively by other academics studying the poor whites, poverty and the time period in South Africa. They are still regarded as seminal works on the topic.

Major political changes began taking place in South African history towards the 1970s. This too had an impact on the historiography of poor whites. The "neglected" histories were being examined by historians, which included the history of blacks, other marginalised groups and minorities – such as the poor whites. Academics were now writing a history from the bottom up, a more social history. They were no longer concerned with the top-down approach, elites or political history. The focus became the ordinary, everyday person, such as the unemployed, workers, home owners, renters, squatters, those living in poverty, criminals, policemen and even women, including prostitutes. These were the people who had previously slipped through the cracks or were not deemed important enough to write about.³⁴ Poor whites were now studied as part of a larger history of South Africa which included social and popular culture and other aspects, such as sport, music, dance and literature, which offered a better understanding of their everyday life.³⁵ It was during this time period that the use of oral history as a source became progressively

³¹ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, p. 68.

³² C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*. London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

³³ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp. 178-207.

³⁴ S.E. Pretorius, "Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950", M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, pp. 35-36.

³⁵ W. Visser, "Trends in South African Historiography and the Present State of Historical Research", Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2004, pp. 12-13.

more important. Therefore, by the 1980s, the social or revisionist history approach began to shed new light on the poor-white phenomenon.³⁶

One of the first postgraduate studies on the poor white appeared in 1973. R.A. Lewis examined the poor whites in his Master's dissertation entitled "A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa".³⁷ The focus of his study was on some of the causes of the poor-white problem, the poor-white migration from the rural areas to the urban areas, as well as the assistance they were given to act as solutions to their problems and lift them out of poverty. Lewis uses the Carnegie Commission as a crucial source in his study, which underlines its persistent value as a source.

Although not a source entirely on the poor whites or the Carnegie Commission, the Doctoral thesis by L. Pretorius entitled: "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", examines a number of important Commissions undertaken for various reasons in South Africa. The Carnegie Commission is one such Commission. Pretorius examines. He looks at the background; designation and composition; the assignment and method of operations; the politics of poverty the interpretation of the poor-white question; interpretations, recommendations and ideological accents and the reactions all pertaining to the Carnegie Commission. It provides a thorough background and insight into the Carnegie Commission from a range of interested participants as well as into the arrangements and dealings within the Commission on poor whites.³⁸

Social historian L. Callinicos published three books in the 1980s all related to the theme: A People's History of South Africa.³⁹ Her method was very much aligned with the "Histories from below" approach. In her work, she examines the everyday lives of ordinary people, including women, in a focused area – Johannesburg – as part of a larger history. Her work also focuses on the outskirts of Johannesburg and rural areas where most of the poor whites came from. All races

³⁶ W. Visser, "Trends in South African Historiography and the Present State of Historical Research", Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2004, p. 11.

³⁷ R.A. Lewis, "A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1973.

³⁸ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985.

³⁹ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1980.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1987.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa III. A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*. Braamfontein: Raven Press, 1993.

and their interactions are examined. With regards to the poor whites, she considers the reasons for their poverty and what was done to assist and help them. However, she goes beyond this by recreating their daily lives and the cultural changes they underwent being exposed to a new and different environment, situation, people and cultures. Her work includes interviews, which opens a window into the frame of mind and daily lives of the poor whites.⁴⁰

Historian C. Bundy produced a chapter entitled “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White poverty in the Cape before Poor Whiteism”.⁴¹ In this chapter, he sets out to prove that poor whites existed in the Cape region before 1890 by examining the history of smaller towns. He uses a range of different sources, such as letters, journals of people who lived or travelled through the area, as well as newspapers. He is able to prove that poor whites before 1890 suffered from similar causes to those who emerged later, even though the problem escalated on a much larger scale from the end of the nineteenth century. Although his work focuses mainly on the Cape region, it offers much insight and serves as a good background for understanding the time period after the Great Trek (1834-early twentieth century) and before the outbreak of the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902).

The start of the 1990s saw a new interest in the poor-white history. J. Bottomley completed his doctoral study in history, which examined the public policy and white rural poverty between 1881 and 1924.⁴² His focus tends to be on the rural areas, however, reference is made to the urban areas, industrialisation and migration. He presents a short history of the poor white Afrikaners and expands on how public policy developed around them.⁴³

In 1992, the History Workshops at the University of the Witwatersrand produced a collection of essays edited by R. Morrell entitled *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*.⁴⁴ The main reason for the compilation of the book was what the

⁴⁰ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, pp. 73 & 75.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 31.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa III. A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, pp. 9-13, 18, 21 & 27.

⁴¹ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*. Witwatersrand: Raven Press, 1986.

⁴² J. Bottomley, “Public Policy and White Rural Poverty in South Africa 1881-1924”, D. Phil. dissertation, Queens University, 1990.

⁴³ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 45.

⁴⁴ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992.

editor termed a “strange silence” hanging over the history of the poor whites.⁴⁵ In his preface, Morrell points to a key concern of this study:

Poor whites in literature, poor white culture and the poor white experience are all notable absentees...⁴⁶

These essays do not solely focus on the usual approach including causes and solutions of the poor-white problem, but also on a range of different aspects surrounding the history and lives of poor whites. The essays also examine the poor whites from a range of different geographical areas and present new outlooks and perspectives in contrast to the broad overview most historians had presented to date.

Towards the end of the twentieth century and the start of the twenty-first century, a number of general South African histories appeared. While there are a plethora of studies that focus specifically on the poor whites, this section will briefly consider how the poor whites are depicted in a selection of the key general histories of South Africa. The view on the significance of the poor whites is varied and this is evident in the different ways the poor whites are portrayed and the amount of attention that is assigned to their part in history. Put differently, the poor whites form part of these general histories, but the amount of detail each researcher pays to them differs. None look exclusively at the poor whites, most only briefly mention the poor whites. They remain relatively neutral and objective, with only the briefest mention of the poor whites in terms of their political and economic position, as well as the causes and solutions that were sought to fix the problem. There are, however, some that also view the consequences of their poverty. A considerable amount of the information they use is repetitive as they tend to use the same sources to compile these histories. They will be discussed in a thematic order.

The general histories selected provide more detail on the poor whites and in particular their social, economic and political impact. *History of Southern Africa*,⁴⁷ by Omer-Cooper published in 1984, examines the poor whites in the context of the economic and political history of South Africa and their involvement in shaping it. The poor blacks are also mentioned. However, his study does not detract from the poor whites or compare them to the blacks. Omer-Cooper mentions the roles

⁴⁵ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xi.

⁴⁶ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xii.

⁴⁷ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*. London: Currey Portsmouth, 1987.

both groups played. He focuses on the poor whites in the rural and urban areas, their migration, the causes of their poverty, the reaction to them and the consequences of this.⁴⁸

L.M. Thompson's *A History of South Africa*⁴⁹ published in 1995 examines the history of the poor whites in two separate sections. This includes the history prior to 1910 and the history thereafter, extending to the 1970s. He presents more detail on the causes of the poor-white problem, their role in the political history of South Africa and the gradual rise and economic improvement of many poor whites as a result of Afrikaner nationalism. The poor-white topic is examined as an important part of twentieth century South African history in the economic and political spheres.⁵⁰

In 2000, the general history by R. Davenport and C. Saunders, entitled *South Africa: A Modern History*,⁵¹ the poor whites are once again viewed for their important role in the political history of South Africa. A few reasons for their poverty are mentioned. It is, however, their poverty and what was done about it by the government of the time, the reasons for government involvement, as well as the impact that this had on the future of South Africa, which is focused on in considerable detail.⁵²

Interestingly, the next group of general historical texts affords much greater attention to the poor whites. One such study includes the *Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*⁵³ published in 1992, which was edited by D. Oakes with C. Saunders and C. Bundy as historical advisors. It does not conform to any historiographical approach, but takes on a more popular format. The focus of this source is on South African people and classes and takes a "bottom up" approach. The poor whites have a section whereby most of the research is taken from the Carnegie Commission's report. The source includes a lot of information from the time the poor-white problem was first identified and mentioned in a public sphere. Furthermore, it examines the causes of the problem and how the National Party (NP) Government tried to solve the problem for their own gain.⁵⁴ A number of different scholars contributed to this book, however, no indication is given as to who wrote which section. This source was also published in English and Afrikaans.

⁴⁸ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, pp. 149-150, 167, 171-172, 175, 177, 193-194 & 202.

⁴⁹ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*. London: Yale University Press, 1995.

⁵⁰ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, pp. *pre 1910* 64, 112, 132, *post 1910* 155, 162, 169, 172 & 188-189.

⁵¹ T.R.H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*. London: Macmillan Press, 2000.

⁵² T.R.H. Davenport & C. Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History*, pp. 191, 624, 635-636, 638, 665 & 683.

⁵³ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*. Cape Town: Reader's Digest Association, 1992.

⁵⁴ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, pp. 328-337.

In 2007, *New History of South Africa*,⁵⁵ was published much of which was written and edited, by H. Giliomee and B. Mbenga. As a general history of South Africa, it examines the earliest recorded times to the modern day. The research for this source was also done by a range of historians and academics from other fields and there is again little indication given as to who wrote what section. The source was also published in both Afrikaans and English simultaneously. The poor whites are afforded much attention with both their history and the role they played being focused on. All spheres of poor whiteness are examined, such as rural and urban, social, economic, political and even cultural to an extent. Their role in the history of South Africa is seen to be integral and their importance is stressed with many examples provided.⁵⁶

The Cambridge History of South Africa, Volume II 1885-1994,⁵⁷ edited by R. Ross, A. Klerk Mager and B. Nasson, which appeared in 2012, looks at the time period in which the poor whites played the biggest role in the history of South Africa. It also considers the results and consequences this poverty had on broadening the history of South Africa, underlining their importance and influences on the larger picture and the direct role they played. The poor whites in the rural and urban areas are examined, as well as their migrations, and the reasons for their poverty along with reasons for the solutions that were sought. Although this source mainly focuses on the political and economic dimensions of history during this period, it also has a social and to an extent, cultural approach.

The seminal work of renowned historian C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand 1886-1914*, examines the early history of the Witwatersrand. In these two volume publications, he focuses on the groups that were marginalised and the consequences thereof. In his analysis, all racial groups are included, but his chapter entitled “The Main Reef Road into the working class”,⁵⁸ specifically considers the lives of the poor whites. He considers the reactions of the poor whites’ move to the urban area and how they adapted and evolved with regards to the labour market and industrialisation, as well as how they competed with immigrants and “non-whites” in order to make a life for themselves in this new and unfamiliar environment. Van Onselen also examines the causes of poor white poverty in the rural areas and thus the reasons for their move or migration to the urban setting, as well as the reasons and causes of

⁵⁵ H. Giliomee & B. Mbenga (eds.), *New History of South Africa*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2007.

⁵⁶ H. Giliomee & B. Mbenga (eds.), *New History of South Africa*, pp. 226, 239, 255, 265, 271, 280-282, 288 & 292-293.

⁵⁷ R. Ross, A. Klerk Mager & B. Nasson, *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume II 1885-1994*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

⁵⁸ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*. Johannesburg: Johanathan Ball, 2001, pp. 309-367.

white poverty in the urban areas. He further examines the help and assistance they received and what the government of the time was “forced” to give them. The consequence of the poor-white problem for the government and the poor whites themselves is also examined. Through his research, the daily lives and struggles of the poor whites in the Witwatersrand are illustrated within the wider contextual picture.⁵⁹

In 2003, a social history entitled *White, Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg*⁶⁰ was produced by L. Lange, which acknowledges the profound influence C. Van Onselen had on his work. The book examines four main topics: the formation of white working-class families; working-class accommodation; the constitution of social networks in working-class neighbourhoods; and the political and ideological aspects of white workers’ unemployment. It was able to give insight into the behaviour, thoughts and everyday lives of the poor whites. What makes this source unique is that Lange focuses on the poor white working class, as well as poor whites in an urban setting. The time period selected (the end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century) provides the reader with a look into the formative period of the Witwatersrand and the reaction of the poor white working class, which in turn led to changes and a policy review in South Africa. It also demonstrates that not all poor whites were without employment and that there were those who had jobs, but were still classified as “poor”.

In 2009, D. Langer edited a book entitled *Gebroke Land: Armoede in die Afrikaanse Gemeenskap Sedert 1902* (Broken land: Poverty in the Afrikaans community since 1902).⁶¹ This book is divided into two parts. The first deals with the findings of the Carnegie Commission, while the second part focuses on the current poor-white problem of the twenty-first century in South Africa. This source includes new observations, as well as qualitative and quantitative data on the current poor-white problem. Academics from different fields contributed to this book, which was funded by the trade union “Solidarity”.⁶² The books started as a photo exhibition, “silent white poverty”, but it was

⁵⁹ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*. Johannesburg: Johnathan Ball, 2001.

⁶⁰ L. Lange, *White Poor and Angry: White Working Class Families in Johannesburg*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2003.

⁶¹ D. Langner (red.), *Gebroke Land: Armoede in die Afrikaanse Gemeenskap Sedert 1902*. Brandfort: Kraal-Uitgewers, 2009.

⁶² Solidarity is a trade union whose origins go as far back as 1902. Its motto is “We protect the people”. The trade union also has strong connections to Afri-Forum, which is a community organisation focusing on the rights of minority groups in South Africa. One of their major issues is to help the poor whites in South Africa and to stand up for their basic human rights. It has a number of divisions, including its Helping Hand Fund. The Helping Hand Fund undertakes a number of social projects to help the community. Their main focus is the white community. The Helping Hand Fund decided to compile the book *Gebroke land* to create an awareness.

decided to add a narrative to create a “full colour history”, whereby each chapter examines something different about the poor whites.⁶³ This source addresses the lesser known history of poor whites, poverty, the progression of war, political oppression, social decay and marginalisation. There are still a number of photos included in the publication keeping with the initial concept.

“Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950” is a Master’s dissertation by S.E. Pretorius (the candidate) completed in 2015.⁶⁴ In this study, Afrikaans novels written by authors from the realism genre are compared to the historical records, in order to show that these novels may be used as a historical source in their own right. This study also uses the Carnegie Commission’s findings to motivate the comparisons.

The 2018 Master’s dissertation by J.R. Cowlin⁶⁵ examined ways to understanding white poverty in South Africa. It focused mainly on the causes, as well as the solutions that were sought for white poverty in South Africa. The period that is considered is a small fragment of the poor whites’ history and does little to explain the background causes and solutions. However, it devoted considerable attention to scientific racism and eugenics which was used with regards to the changing nature of race relations. Once again, the findings of the Carnegie Commission are used as one of the key primary sources.

Another more recent study on the poor whites is the 2020, *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa, 1930s-1990s* edited by D. Money and D. van Zyl-Herman⁶⁶ It examines and challenges concepts and existing scholarship of the white societies that existed, lived and worked in southern Africa. The research which has mostly focused on whites and poor whites during the first half of the twentieth is expanded. The book attempts to argue against the common understanding and popular consciousness of white society and reveal how class and race caused tensions and played a dominant role, which in turn resulted in social, economic, political and cultural complexities. The editors thus argue that race and class cannot be considered independently.

⁶³ Solidarity: Helping Hands, ‘Letters to Mandela Leads to New Social Work Degree’, <<http://www.helpinghandfund.co.za/archive/2011-09-15/?p=1941>>, 2011. Access: 13 January 2012.

⁶⁴ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015.

⁶⁵ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018.

⁶⁶ D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020.

The theme of the poor whites has also been represented in other more popular formats, such as journalistic articles, documentary films and drama performances. Thus, the poor-white problem was studied not only by historians, but also by academics and other writers from other disciplines. The article by J. van Wyk is from the University of the Witwatersrand revisionist History Workshops.⁶⁷ It focuses on the National Party's ideology and social concerns portrayed in Afrikaans drama between 1930 and 1940. He examines how the poor whites were portrayed in these plays or productions and how their portrayal affected the attitudes and outlooks of the audience and society. He notes that many of the dramas were written with the intention to romanticise or sensationalise the situation and create sympathy for the poor whites as part of the "Afrikaner race".⁶⁸

Regarding documentary films, in 1977, D. Harrison directed a five-part BBC series on the "Afrikaner in South Africa".⁶⁹ The series was so popular that it was decided that a book needed to be written on it. Harrison focuses on the Afrikaners, however, in a chapter entitled "Naked as Kaffirs in Congoland",⁷⁰ he examines the poor whites. He also uses the Carnegie Commission as a valuable source and especially focuses on the personal accounts of Dr E.G. Malherbe, one of the Commissioners, who documented his personal experiences while undertaking the investigation. Harrison examines white poverty and ties it in with the domination of the Afrikaners in the broader political, economic and social domains.

In 2004, anthropologist, A.B. Teppo, examined the poor whites in her doctoral thesis.⁷¹ She presented a well formulated and broad historical overview on how the Nationalist Party Government tried transforming and rehabilitating the poor whites into what they perceived whites should be. She has continued with her interest into the poor-white problem and has thus expanded her research and produced further sources of relevance.⁷² Her work provides another perspective on the poor white, as well as a history and explanation of their poverty.

⁶⁷ J. van Wyk, *Nationalist Ideology and Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period, 1930-1940*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990, pp. 1-29.

⁶⁸ J. van Wyk, *Nationalist Ideology and Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period, 1930-1940*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990, p. 6.

⁶⁹ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*. Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1986, p. back cover.

⁷⁰ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*. Johannesburg: Macmillan South Africa, 1986.

⁷¹ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004.

⁷² A.B. Teppo, "Building White Spaces, Making White Minds: Space and Formation of "White" Identity in South African Former "Poor White" Areas" in P. Gervais-Lambony, F. Landy & S. Oldfields (eds.), *Reconfiguring Identities and Building Territories in India and South Africa*. New Delhi: Manohar, 2005.

More recently, the topic of the poor whites has started to make a “comeback” as new angles are being examined. For instance, the poor whites in the twenty-first century are being compared to the poor whites in the twentieth century and the poor whites of the twentieth century are being compared to the poor blacks in the twenty-first century. In 2006, J. Fourie examined the poor-white problem in the twentieth century from an economic perspective in order to find solutions for the twenty-first century problem. In his journal article entitled “*The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today*”,⁷³ he focuses on causes and reasons for white poverty and then compares this to black poverty today. Once again, his research also relies heavily of the findings of the Carnegie Commission.

In 2012, E.J. Bottomley, the son of J. Bottomley, published *Poor White*.⁷⁴ As a geographical historian and journalist, this publication is unlike other sources pertaining to poor whites in South Africa. It is unique in that it examines the cause of poor white poverty that was created by themselves. He analyses the solutions governments and churches sought to eradicate the problem of “shameful whites” who were perceived as a threat to the *volk* (people, folk, nation) and Afrikaner Nationalism.

These sources provide a comprehensive scope on the South African poor whites as a topic of analysis. Each source provides a unique and different angle on how the poor whites can be examined and contributes to a better understanding of them as a class, culture and people in their own right.

Poor White Sources: The American South

In the USA, more attempts have been made to record the history of the poor whites. As in South Africa, the second half of the twentieth century saw an explosion of interest in the poor whites and many sources were published.

There are different theories of where and how poor whites slotted into US society between 1850 and 1950. It must be noted that many Old South scholars focused on planters and enslaved peoples and in many cases poor whites remained stereotyped as “unremitting racists”.⁷⁵ Historian

⁷³ J. Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today”, *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, pp. 1270-1296.

⁷⁴ E. J. Bottomley, *Poor White*. Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012.

⁷⁵ D. Brown, “A Vagabond’s Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 805.

J. Forret adds that the early historical scholarship on the poor whites were marred by such stereotypes, especially the poor whites in the Old South.⁷⁶ There exists a big division between where the poor whites fitted in in terms of *herrenvolk*⁷⁷ democracy.⁷⁸ Some historians claim that poor whites benefited from their shared colour/race, while others argue against this view.

In 1859, one of the first pieces of literature regarding the poor white appeared: *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*⁷⁹ by H.R. Helper which examines the American South and poor whites in the wake of the Civil War. Helper, himself a poor North Carolina white, expresses that slavery undermined the prosperity and soul of the South and the remedy was to abolish slavery. He is one of the first to have examined how slavery helped keep poor whites at the bottom of the social and class hierarchy. This source offers an early interesting insight into the reason for and cause of poor whites in the American South.

D.R. Hundley is one of the first to publish a book that has an entire chapter dedicated to the poor whites. His book was published in 1860, entitled *Social Relations in Our Southern States*.⁸⁰ It falls into both the Romantic School of American historiography, which entails physical exertion, aggression, an active life, courage and a willingness to endure hardship and individualism; as well as the Evolutionary School, which focuses on natural forces, biological forces or energy that impact people.⁸¹ This source, a sociological study, examines the different classes in Southern society. He rejects popular Northern stereotypes depicting the South as a three-class society. Each chapter deals with a specific class, however, there is much overlap. It is of interest that he divides the classes into eight and discusses them hieratically. In his chapter entitled "Poor white trash",⁸² Hundley examines the origin, behaviour, and daily lives of the poor white class, as well as their interactions with one another and other classes. He defines them as a class that is socially and culturally distinct from the rest of "respectable" society and as "a great social problem".⁸³ It was also meant to counter the views of abolitionists, such as Helper, who argued that the poor whites suffered as a result of the institution of slavery. This source offers insight into how the poor

⁷⁶ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 1.

⁷⁷ A combination between egalitarian democracy and biological racism.

⁷⁸ D. Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South", *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, pp. 802 & 805.

⁷⁹ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*. New York: A.B. Burdick Publisher, 1859.

⁸⁰ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*. New York: Henry B. Price, 1860.

⁸¹ D.H. Davis, "God and the Pursuit of America's Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography", *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, pp. 465 & 475.

⁸² D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, pp. 250-283.

⁸³ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 262.

whites were perceived at the outset of the Civil War, especially since Hundley's father was an owner of enslaved peoples. The poor whites he describes are the same descendants as Byrd described.⁸⁴ What makes this source different is that Hundley is one of the first that states: "Poor whites of the South constitute a separate class to themselves."⁸⁵

From the start of the twentieth century, there is a shift in how histories were written in the USA. This new history was motivated by popular movements of reform, such as Populism, Progressivism and the New Deal. It was also now that America's history was viewed in terms of big and little people, propertied and unpropertied classes, rich and poor. Focus on the topic of poor whites grew during this Progressive School in American historiography. Furthermore, this school was focused on more than just reporting on the past, but also participating in historical progress.⁸⁶ Later C.C. Bolton also affirms this assessment.⁸⁷ According to B. Cecil-Fronsman, serious studies of poor whites only began in the 1930s in response to the New Deal's concern with the South's poor-white problem.⁸⁸ J. Forret, agrees and adds that the number of secondary works on slavery dwarfed the paucity of historical literature examining the South's poor whites. He points out that it was only from the 1930s that the poor whites piqued the interests of scholars, but that they accepted uncritically the prevailing stereotype.⁸⁹

Culture in the South published in 1935 and edited by W.T. Couch is a publication based on a symposium including chapters by a range of different academics from different fields. Its aim was to provide a comprehensive, revealing and authentic picture of the South. The chapter entitled "The Tradition of 'Poor Whites'"⁹⁰ by A.N.J. den Hollander examines who he considers to be the true poor whites and this went beyond non-slave holders. His view was very much aligned with that of F.L. Owsley, that those who are truly regarded as poor whites only make up a small part of the population and that it is the yeomen who are the majority. Den Hollander offers an insight into who he considers poor whites and why, as well as a description and definition of sorts. He

⁸⁴ D. Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South", *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 800.

⁸⁵ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 193.

⁸⁶ D.H. Davis, "God and the Pursuit of America's Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography", *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, pp. 468-469.

⁸⁷ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 5.

⁸⁸ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common whites: Class and culture in the antebellum North Carolina*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992, p. 223.

⁸⁹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, pp. 1-2.

⁹⁰ A.N.J. den Hollander, "The Tradition of 'Poor Whites'" in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1935.

looks at the origin of the term by examining travel accounts, as well as the attitudes and opinions surrounding the poor whites and how these changed after the Civil War.

In 1941, W.J. Cash published a fairly honest attempt of what the South and its history entailed in a book entitled *The Mind of the South*.⁹¹ In this publication he sets out to provide a history of the South and its people by exploring the evolution of the region, from the colonial period to reconstruction, as well as the reasons for the way things were by the 1940s. Cash does not shy away from the poor whites and they feature as a strong and important element throughout this work. He examines their “minds” and their history as a means of explaining them and their way of life separate from whites as a whole. His work focuses on themes, such as class, culture, gender and race, as well as politics and economics. It was through the qualities of simplicity, violence, white supremacy, romanticism and individualism that Cash determined the sensibilities of Southern society. This source is unique for the period it was produced in and is very forward-thinking for the time it was written in, as it actually falls more into the Revisionist School.

F.L. Owsley is the author of both *Plain Folk of the Old South*⁹² and *The South: Old and new frontiers: Selected Essays of Frank Lawrence Owsley* published in 1949 and 1969, respectively.⁹³ Both of these sources examine the history of the South and its people. *Plain Folk of the Old South* argues that the South was not divided into three classes (planters, poor white and enslaved people), but that another large class made up the South, which comprised of the “yeoman” men or plain folk – a middle class white group. Owsley uses a range of original, primary material as he looks at all aspects of their lives and the culture that emerged. He traces their origin from the Atlantic states to the frontier of the South. This influential work pushed poor whites further to the margins by arguing that the vast majority of non-slaveholding whites were yeomen, not ‘poor-white trash.’⁹⁴ Although, this source does not solely focus on the poor whites and some of Owsley’s views have been disproven,⁹⁵ it still offers much insight into the overlapping similarities between plain folk, yeoman farmers and poor whites. There are also many instances of the groups combining with the other and thus, much of the history and culture of the yeoman farmer may also apply to the poor whites. In 1969, after Owsley’s death, *The South: Old and New Frontiers* was

⁹¹ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*. New York: A Division of Random House Inc., 1991.

⁹² F.L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*. Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1949.

⁹³ H.C. Owsley (ed.), F.L. Owsley, *The South: Old and New Frontiers: Selected Essays of Frank Lawrence Owsley*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1969.

⁹⁴ F.L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, pp. 6-16.

⁹⁵ See K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

edited and released by Owsley's wife. This is a selection of essays regarding the history of the South. Each essay focuses on some aspect of the South and has been placed in chronological order. Again, this source does not have the poor whites as its main focus, although they are mentioned, but it does provide a background and understanding of the larger world in the American South and what was happening during the time of this study.

From the 1960s, American historiography saw a return to a realistic and so-called "accurate history". The Revisionist School⁹⁶ rediscovers poverty, racism, civil rights for minorities and the impact of the Americas past on the citizen of the present. They looked at how forgotten sectors of culture influenced the shaping of the history of America thus, they looked at history from the "bottom up" or rather to the masses and their experiences. However, they held onto the Progressive School's view of dividing the masses from the elites. Many of the histories were social and cultural histories with special emphasis on shared lived experiences. Common people were of interest to Revisionists and how these ordinary people could change history. For example, historians, such as S. Thernstorm use original sources and records to help overturn previous ideas that upward mobility was a realistic possibility for the poor. Thernstorm's methodology was characteristic of the new Revisionist views, which focuses on behaviour rather than action, policy and event.⁹⁷ His book entitled *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*⁹⁸ examines how rarely the poor working class were able to attain middle class status. This source focusses on a specific area and time using unique sources after the Civil War to explain class and mobility. These were the unskilled, illiterate people who were the focus in a social history.

Revisionists re-examine history from a different lens by returning to discussions, to ideas and attitudes as forces in history. They sought to move beyond objective description and analyse causes and judge significance of events and aimed to examine regions not explored.⁹⁹ The goal was to show America as a nation of diversity and was built and belongs to all, not only elites.¹⁰⁰ The bulk of this literature review falls squarely into this School as it focused the most on the poor whites in the American South.

⁹⁶ Also called the New left historiography.

⁹⁷ D.H. Davis, "God and the Pursuit of America's Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography", *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, pp. 472-473.

⁹⁸ S. Thernstorm, *Poverty and Progress: Social Mobility in a Nineteenth Century City*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964.

⁹⁹ D.H. Davis, "God and the Pursuit of America's Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography", *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, p. 474.

¹⁰⁰ D.H. Davis, "God and the Pursuit of America's Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography", *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, p. 475.

In 1970, *White Southerners*¹⁰¹ by L.M. Killian appeared as part of a series entitled “Ethnic Groups in Comparative Perspective”. This source was both historical and sociological in nature. It examines the whites from the South and this included the poor whites and their place in society. Killian looks at the development of the whites and the poor whites in the South and how they stood out or are separate to the Northern whites due to culture, history and shared experiences. The stereotypes surrounding white Southerners and especially poor whites/hillbillies are examined, as well as their lives after reconstruction and the New Deal and their evolution from rural poor white to sharecropper, tenant or urban poor white.

Wayne Flynt may not have been the first academic to research the late twentieth century history on postbellum¹⁰² Southern poor whites, but he was the first historian to capture it. In his *Dixie’s Forgotten People*,¹⁰³ Flynt attempted to create an understanding of the poor whites and their culture. He covers broad periods in each chapter. Little explanation was given on the different poor whites and the areas they come from. His focus was mostly on the Appalachian mountaineers and other areas where poor whites resided, but has received very little attention. He focused on the period before and after the Civil War to give the reader a clearer idea of their past. Flynt drew on the work of other academics, such as anthropologists and folklorists and tried to combat stereotypes and perceptions of poor whites held by most people. *Dixie’s Forgotten People* charted what was in 1979 a largely unknown topic and laid out an agenda for research that is still not complete.

After Flynt completed *Dixie’s Forgotten People*, he decided to publish, along with his wife D.S. Flynt, a biography of sources that focus on the poor whites entitled *Southern Poor Whites: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*.¹⁰⁴ It is by no means a complete list, but their focus was on published materials and because the corpus of information was so enormous, as well as diverse, only representative samples were selected. In the text references were also made to specialised annotated biographies and journals. Due to the number of sources available on all different aspects of the poor whites, the decision was made to include the most representative and useful materials which Flynt hoped would lead to further studies. He also

¹⁰¹ L.M. Killian, *White Southerners*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970.

¹⁰² Antebellum is the term used that refers to the period before a war. Postbellum is used to refer to the period after a war. In both cases it is more commonly used to refer to the period before and after the Civil War in the USA.

¹⁰³ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979.

¹⁰⁴ J.W. Flynt & D.S. Flynt, *Southern Poor Whites: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc. 1981.

ensures that the reader is made aware of what he deemed a poor white was – an “economic indigent”.¹⁰⁵ The source includes an author and subject index in order to facilitate research.

Ten years after *Dixies' Forgotten People* in 1989, Flynt published his work which focused on the poor whites in the Alabama region entitled *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*.¹⁰⁶ Although his book was limited geographically, he did expand on certain themes which affected poor whites across the USA, such as the Civil War and the Great Depression. In his preface, Flynt states that the goal of his work was to tell the story of a people, how they came to their low status, coped, retained their dignity and made sense of the world around them.¹⁰⁷ His work is a thematic study that is divided into four parts. It focuses on the poor whites from the origins of their poverty, how they made their existence, their social and cultural patterns that unified them and their painful process of being integrated socially and economically into a broader society with the North after the Great Depression and New Deal.

In 1984, G.C. Fite published *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*.¹⁰⁸ Although this source did not examine poor whites specifically, it did examine the area and profession most of the Southern poor whites found themselves in. For most of its history, the South had been predominantly a rural and agricultural society. Fite examines this society and the changes that have taken place since the Civil War in attempts to make the South more industrial. He examines the range of problems that were experienced by those living on the land, especially commercial farmers. However, these problems also affected the poor whites living off the land. Not only did he investigate the agricultural aspects, but also the human dimension and thus portrays the Southern agricultural history during this time period.

In the midst of what J.W. Harris refers to as the New Social History historiographical period, he published *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterland*.¹⁰⁹ This source examines how the poor whites felt united with the plantation owners or wealthier whites due to shared race, promise of social mobility and personal relations and how with the Civil War looming, the wealthier whites used this to try and maintain slavery. The study further shows how the strains of war quickly changed this. Harris' study is only based on a specific

¹⁰⁵ J.W. Flynt & D.S. Flynt, *Southern Poor Whites: A Selected Annotated Bibliography of Published Sources*, p. x.

¹⁰⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989.

¹⁰⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. xii.

¹⁰⁸ G.C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1984.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society: White Liberty and Black Slavery in Augusta's Hinterlands*. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1985.

area, but does reflect on what poor whites were feeling, their ideas and what their actions were. Harris explains how and why the poor whites in this area backed secession, but also why they came to mistrust the government they helped to found. It gives an insight into where the poor whites were placed in terms of class, how they were used, as well as their reactions. It examines the interactions between the planters, poor whites and enslaved people.

In 2006, Harris published another book on the South and poor whites: *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*.¹¹⁰ This general history examining the South's history between 1500 and 1877, but also focuses on the poor whites' role in it in terms of their "development", their role in politics and being white, as well as their position in the context of slavery. A section was dedicated to the poor whites' place in the slave society and although only a small part of this source examines the period relevant to this study and provides insight into the history and standing of the poor white in the American South.

G. McWhiney's *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* was originally published in 1988.¹¹¹ This source examines the culture and social life of the old South and compares it to the Celtic culture. As McWhiney points out, the majority of the Southerners were descendants of those who came from the Celtic countries – Scotland, Ireland, Wales Cornwall and the English uplands.¹¹² He further looks at the history of the term "Cracker" and where it came from and what it entailed and how this term was misused and turned to represent poor whites. McWhiney states that all poor whites were "crackers", but not all crackers were poor whites.¹¹³ Thus, this source is not exclusively about poor whites, but references are made to them. Furthermore, this source provides an overview of much of their cultural and social lives and provides insight into what drove them and led to their decision-making. It looks at the migration of these people from their countries of origin and the folklore, customs and traditions that they brought with them and made part of the Southern culture and therefore inadvertently contributed to poor white culture.

I.A. Newby's social history entitled *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence, 1880-1915* was published in 1989.¹¹⁴ He makes it quite clear that the term "plain folk" in this source differs from how Owsley interpreted it in the 1940s. In this source, plain folk

¹¹⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

¹¹¹ G. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1988.

¹¹² G. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*, p. xiii.

¹¹³ G. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*, p. xvi.

¹¹⁴ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

refers to poor whites, which Newby states is more accurate than working-class whites and more neutral than poor whites or “rednecks”.¹¹⁵ The people he focuses on include sharecroppers and those working in cotton mills or other low paying, unskilled jobs. The main aim of the study was to examine the move many people made from the rural to urban areas, as well as the social and economic experiences they had. However, their culture, outlooks and the prejudices towards them are also brought to the forefront and this is due mostly to Newby’s interviews with a number of these plain folk creating an oral history. Newby looks at these peoples’ culture and environment, especially sometime after the Civil War, to understand how it shaped them. His interviews provide a real voice and present an insight into these people.

In 1992, B. Cecil-Fronsman examined poor whites in his book entitled *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina*.¹¹⁶ Although he classes common whites as all non-elite whites, which is an extremely broad definition, poor whites do fall into this group. He argues that these people have not featured as topics that have been researched in-depth and aims to examine where these people fitted into society and to reconstruct their culture. Cecil-Fronsman uses a wide range of source to shed light on the daily lives and outlooks, thoughts and responses of these common whites and the culture they developed, making for an insightful social history.

C.C. Bolton makes a bold, but true statement in his 1994 book entitled: *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*.¹¹⁷ In this context, many authors have expressed the view that the only true representation of the poor whites has been in fiction and novels. In his preface, Bolton explains that this book is about the landless white tenants and labourers in antebellum North Carolina and Mississippi.¹¹⁸ His aim is to reveal the social complexity surrounding the lives of the poor whites and to remove the negative images that surround them by revealing the essential nature of the social, economic and political structure of the South. He attempts to do this by moving beyond characterisations. As mentioned, he sees the poor whites as a separate class placed at the bottom of the South’s social

¹¹⁵ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 5.

¹¹⁶ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*. Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992.

¹¹⁷ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1994, p. ix.

¹¹⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. ix.

hierarchy.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, he counters Owsley's idea of the omnipotent yeoman and claims that in 1860 the poor whites made up approximately half of the South's white population.¹²⁰

The 1997 publication *White Trash: Race and Class in America*¹²¹ is a collection of essays edited by M. Wray and A. Newitz that focus on class and race. The perception of poor white identity is explored by examining what is true and what is false. This source is similar to the source of *Peculiar Whiteness* in that it focuses on whiteness studies, class and race within culture by determining what is true and false in popular perceptions. Although this source focuses more on modern and contemporary poor whites, there are also insights into the history and literature of Southern poor whites.

N. Foley examines race relations and the cotton culture in the USA in his 1997 book entitled *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*.¹²² His focus is on the complex history of ethnicity in the heart of Texas's cotton industry. The time period he considers is very much in-line with the time period selected for this doctoral study. Although only focusing on Texas, this source offers insight into one of the largest and most contested issues regarding poor white – rural labour. Southern history makes up a large part of his research and therefore offers a unique look into the lives of poor whites on the land and the hardships that were faced from other ethnicities, the environment, industrialisation, as well as the class system. Foley's use of archival material and oral history provides a rich view of the everyday lives of those involved in the cotton culture and tells a broad story of racial identity, gender roles, labour and unions, ethnic relations and the white agrarian demise.

Although "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture"¹²³ is an English language and literary doctoral thesis, it focuses on two important elements of this study: poor whites and poor whites in literature. In her thesis, K.L. Thomas focuses on perceptions of what it means to be not only a poor white, but also "poor white trash". She considers how they were viewed and represented during different periods and how their culture evolved. She uses

¹¹⁹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 5.

¹²⁰ D. Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South", *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 808.

¹²¹ M. Wray & A. Newitz (eds.), *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

¹²² N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

¹²³ K.L. Thomas, "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998.

fiction to help prove her arguments. Lastly, in this 1998 thesis, Thomas investigates the birth of a white trash consciousness by examining a range of sources from popular discourse.

In 2003, A. Harkins published a cultural history on the Hillbilly. *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*¹²⁴ examines the poor whites who are often referred to by this term. Although the term has gained popularity, Harkins examines the true history of the term and the mountaineering people from whom the term was derived, as well as its intended definition and what the term has encapsulated over time. He further examines how this term created a depiction of these poor white people in popular media, including novels. This source offers a history of these poor white people and the names they have been called, their portrayal in literature and mass media, as well as the perceptions and views surrounding them and the culture and heritage that developed.

*Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*¹²⁵ is a collection of essays from a number of disciplines edited by S. Currell and C. Cogdell and published in 2006. In the USA. The book reflects on the 1930s that saw a move away from scientific racism to a more eugenic outlook. Eugenics was a popular means to explain and deal with the poor whites. The poor whites are examined in this source from their place in mass media, including novels and at the height of the government's concern about the poor-white question. Furthermore, Currell and Cogdell provide interesting insights into how poor whites were perceived because of mass media. The chapter on poor whites and the Federal Writing Project examines how various arguments revolving around environment vs hereditary were explored through the writing of short life histories of ordinary people. This chapter is of interest because two of these life histories are examined and the means of the investigation is very similar to the Carnegie Commission investigation in South Africa, except no recommendations were given. This source offers public views and opinions on the poor whites, as well as the role eugenics played in mass media and decision-making.

In 2006, J. Forret examines the relations between poor white and enslaved people in his book entitled *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and the Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*.¹²⁶ His work is mostly based on the Carolinas and Virginia between 1820 and 1860.

¹²⁴ A. Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

¹²⁵ S. Currell & C. Cogdell (eds.), *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and America Mass Culture in the 1930s*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2006.

¹²⁶ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006.

The main aim of his work is to connect poor whites and black enslaved people as strained and at times strategic partners against the white slaveholding elite and to dispel the myth that there was always hostility between these two racial groups. He also counters Owsley's breakdown of Southern society, stating that in 1860 poor whites who were landless and slaveless constituted between 30 and 50 percent of the regions' white population. Forret also emphasises that poor whites cannot only be defined in terms of the economic situation, but also by deficiencies in their moral character.¹²⁷ Forret claims this is a part of the history that is often overlooked. He uses a range of different sources from census records, legislative petitions, African American folklore and songs, as well as court cases and runaway slave advertisements to prove his argument and show that the interaction between these groups was not always hostile.¹²⁸

The history and origins of the terms "poor white" and "white trash" were foregrounded in the twenty-first century as "whiteness studies" became a popular field of study in the USA. M. Wray's 2006 book entitled *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*¹²⁹ focuses on the history and abuse of the poor whites from 1700 to the early 1900s. Wray uses a number of different primary sources to demonstrate the changing collective representation of poor whites. This source examines the ideas, stereotypes and views surrounding the poor whites in the twentieth century in the USA, as well as the sanitarian crusades and eugenics that were used to "fix" the problem.¹³⁰ The source is part history and part sociological investigation. Furthermore, it looks at categories, class and boundaries, as well as the policies aimed at helping the poor whites. The cultural significance and consequences of poor white stereotypes are illuminated and how these people were exploited by dominant, wealthy whites to defend and bolster their claims to whiteness.

From Yeoman to Redneck in South Carolina Upcountry, 1850-1915 by S.A. West was published in 2008.¹³¹ Here he examines an interesting time period from before and after the Civil War. Although this source examines one state, it does provide insight into what was happening throughout the South. According to West, poorer whites who before the Civil War were regarded as yeomen before, became and transformed into what is known as "rednecks". His study focuses

¹²⁷ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 9.

¹²⁸ C.P. Thompson, "Reviewed Work: Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside", *The Journal of African American History*, 92(3), 2007, pp. 433-435.

¹²⁹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Durham: Duke University press, 2006.

¹³⁰ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* pp. 65-132.

¹³¹ S.A. West, *From Yeoman to Redneck in the South Carolina Upcountry, 1850-1915*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

on class arrangements and how they changed over time due to a number of factors and then led to new tensions. The poor whites he refers to are both those who owned and those who did not own land. West examines the history of these terms, what they entailed, as well as the stereotypes associated with them and how this has evolved.

In 2012, N.J. Ring's *The Problem South: Region, Empire, and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930* was published.¹³² This source is undoubtedly a revisionist text. It examines the South and the "problems" it was dealing with, postbellum, in a fifty year range. Ring examines how the transformation of the South was regarded as a field and laboratory for social change, development and evolution, but at its own pace. She also looks at the efforts that were put in place to improve what was perceived as "problems". One such "problem" was the poor whites of the South. This source examines their lives, conditions, history and what was done to fix or solve this problem. She also examines the poor-white question in a transnational context.

A.E. Thompson examines the poor white stereotypes and their place in American novels in her 2014 doctoral thesis entitled "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White".¹³³ Through the use of a number of different texts the aim of her study is to prove how the static and undesirable attitudes and beliefs surrounding the poor whites have been adapted to promote disparate agendas. Thompson also examines the impact it had on the poor whites themselves.

One of the latest and more detailed histories written on the American poor whites is that by historian N. Isenberg. In her 2016 book entitled *White trash: The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*,¹³⁴ she examines exactly what she set out to do in her title. Her work starts with a background on the situation in Britain and how this (the British poor) were "packed up" and moved to the American colonies. She considers how a white lower class figured prominently in the development of the colonies and the new, young country, but also how from the start these people were referred to as "waste and refuse".¹³⁵ America's founding myths of leaving Britain to start new lives faces the hard truth in her study. Many of these people were indentured servants, prostitutes, vagrants, highway men, rebels and convicts, along with merchants, landowners and clerks. Thus, she argues that the poor-white problem does not develop in the USA, but is brought across to the

¹³² N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.

¹³³ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014.

¹³⁴ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*. New York, Viking, 2016.

¹³⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 17-42.

USA. She is able to prove that the British class system, based on land ownership, did not magically disappear. Isenberg follows the history of the poor whites from the time they land on American soil to the image we have of them today in trailer parks. However, by the time she reaches the twentieth century, the social and economic content thins to be replaced with the representations of poor whites in pop culture and their continued role in American politics.

The 2016 thesis by M. Stallard entitled “‘The State of Society is Aweful’: Poor whites, Class, Mobility and the Mixed-Labour Economy of New Orleans, 1820-1835’,¹³⁶ focuses solely on New Orleans. However, it provides some insight into what was happening across the USA during the 1820s and 1830s. He uses a number of pioneering digital techniques, legal and government records, as well as primary sources, in order to investigate the development of a white working class. Stallard is able to prove that their poverty and inability to reach the capitalist markets facilitated the migration of thousands of poor whites to look for work elsewhere in the USA and abroad. Furthermore, he examines the alienation of the poor whites, their culture and the use of mixed-labour, which caused many poor whites to react and protest violently. This source uses a range of different sources to argue its views. Although it does not focus on the time period of this study, there are important aspects that help with a background understanding of the poor white history in the USA.

In 2014, K.L. Merritt completed her PhD thesis entitled “A Second Degree of Slavery: How Black Emancipation Freed the Deep South’s Poor Whites”,¹³⁷ which would be the foundations of her later 2017 publication *Masterless Men*. She makes the statement that Southern history has been interpreted primarily through the studies of planters and enslaved people and that the poor whites remain understudied.¹³⁸ In this source, Merritt defines them as not owning enslaved people or land. Furthermore, she states that on the eve of the Civil War, poor whites comprised between 30-50% of the white population, which is larger than what was claimed by F.L. Owsley. She describes the difficulties these poor whites experienced due to the slave system, as well as their discontent with their situation and their objection to the Confederate cause. She also provides insight into their lives after emancipation and how it improved at the expense of the African-

¹³⁶ M. Stallard, “‘The State of Society is Aweful’: Poor Whites, Class, Mobility and the Mixed-Labour Economy of New Orleans, 1820-1835”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Manchester, 2016.

¹³⁷ K.L. Merritt, “A Second Degree of Slavery: How Black Emancipation Freed the Deep South’s Poor Whites”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2014.

¹³⁸ K.L. Merritt, “A Second Degree of Slavery: How Black Emancipation Freed the Deep South’s Poor Whites”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2014, p. Abstract.

Americans who, as she puts it, now occupied poor white people's former place at the bottom of "free" society.¹³⁹

The aim J. Mellette's had for her book entitled *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*¹⁴⁰ is encapsulated as follows:

One of the hopes of this project is to shed light on how the pernicious ideology of white supremacy weaponizes language.¹⁴¹

This study focuses on the complexities and disparate treatment of poor whites in Southern literature. Mellette argues that "white trash" has suffered a dehumanising process in the writing of various authors. These stories in turn have created an idea and perception that is not true of all poor whites in the American South. Mellette discusses a number of Southern authors who wrote about the poor whites with major exaggerations and considers the power and means these novels had to sway public opinions. This study builds upon "whiteness studies" and Southern studies to investigate the parallels and unexamined history of the poor whites to separate "myth from reality".¹⁴²

The poor whites in the American South also piqued the interest of other fields of research. In 1936, *Fortune Magazine* sent journalist James Agee and photographer Walker Evans on an assignment to Alabama to explore the daily lives of sharecroppers in the South. They spent six weeks living amongst these poor whites gathering information and accounts, as well as taking photographs.¹⁴³ The article was never published and it was not long after his return that Agee resigned due to frustrations and limitations of the magazine.¹⁴⁴ However, five years later in 1941, Agee and Evans published a collaborated article entitled *Let us now praise famous men*,¹⁴⁵ which was based on the research and time they had spent among the poor sharecroppers. This was

¹³⁹ K.L. Merritt, "A Second Degree of Slavery: How Black Emancipation Freed the Deep South's Poor Whites", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2014, p. Abstract.

¹⁴⁰ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2021.

¹⁴¹ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, p. ix.

¹⁴² J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, pp. 3-21.

¹⁴³ C. Haughney, "A Paeon to Forbearance: The Rough Draft", *New York Times*, 3 July 2013, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/business/media/james-agees-article-as-cotton-tenants-three-families.html>>. Accessed: 13 July 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Goodreads, 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men', <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/243360.Let_Us_Now_Praise_Famous_Men>, n.d. Accessed: 13 July 2022.

¹⁴⁵ C. Haughney, "A Paeon to Forbearance: The Rough Draft", *New York Times*, 3 July 2013, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/business/media/james-agees-article-as-cotton-tenants-three-families.html>>. Accessed: 13 July 2022.; J. Agee & W. Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. New York: First Mariner Books, 2001.

meant to be the foundation of the first of three books, however, it was only in 2013 that the full extent of this research, which included the original 30 000-word article, was published under the title: *Cotton Tenants: Three Families*.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the original names of the people he interviewed were now also published. This source gives a true, first-hand account of the lives of poor white sharecroppers during the first half of the twentieth century. It provides an “honest” insight into their lives, culture and outlooks. It includes interviews, first-hand experiences and accounts. The photographic evidence also provides an additional perception and can be placed side-by-side with the photographs of poor whites in South Africa for comparison.

As is the case for South Africa, the USA has a number of different researched works that provide insight into the topic and contribute to the larger understanding of the poor whites and their place in society.

Comparative History: South Africa and the American South

Over the years South Africa’s history and development have been compared to many different nations.¹⁴⁷ However, one of the most popular comparisons is with the United States of America. Reasons for this include the parallel similarities between the two nations, but can also be attributed to the pioneering American historians who engaged in comparative history.¹⁴⁸ There have been many comparative works done on South Africa and the United States using a range of different themes.¹⁴⁹ One of the earliest studies can be traced to 1935, when a small comparative booklet by J.E. Holloway, entitled *American Negroes and South African Bantu*, was published.¹⁵⁰ However, it was in the 1980s that an increase in comparative work on these two

¹⁴⁶ C. Haughney, “A Paeon to Forbearance: The Rough Draft”, *New York Times*, 3 July 2013, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/04/business/media/james-agees-article-as-cotton-tenants-three-families.html>>. Accessed: 13 July 2022.; J. Summers (ed.), J. Agee & W. Evans, *Cotton Tenants: Three Families*. Brooklyn: Melville House Publishing, 2013.

¹⁴⁷ For more info on the different countries South Africa has been compared to see: P. de Klerk, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis in Vergelykende Perspektief – ‘n Metodologiese Ondersoek”, *Historia*, 44(2), 1999, pp. 287-306.; P. Alexander & R. Halpern, “Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, pp. 5-18.

¹⁴⁸ P. de Klerk, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis in Vergelykende Perspektief – ‘n Metodologiese Ondersoek”, *Historia*, 44(2), 1999, p. 288.

¹⁴⁹ A few comparative histories not discussed include: T.J. Noer, *Briton, Boer and Yankee: The United States and South Africa 1870-1914*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1978.; J.O. Gump, *The Dust Rose Like Smoke: The Subjugation of the Zulu and the Sioux*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.; R. Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood: South African Culture and the World Beyond*. New York: Routledge, 1994.; J.T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.; W. Beinart & P.A. Coates, *Environment and History: The Taming of Nature in the USA and South Africa*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

¹⁵⁰ J.E. Holloway, *American Negroes and South African Bantu*. Pretoria: Carnegie Visitor’s Grants Committee, 1932.

nations appeared.¹⁵¹ This can partly be ascribed to the fact that it was the central theme for the 1978 annual convention of the American Historical Association and for the October and December 1980 issues of the *American Historical Review*.¹⁵² The focus, however, remained essentially on race relations, segregation and the liberation struggle. During the 1980s, scholars such as the aforementioned S.B. Greenberg, G.M. Fredrickson and J.W. Cell, all produced comparative works on these two nations on these themes. In 1981, H.R. Lamar and L.M. Thompson focused on comparing the frontier histories of these two nations. Although this current study does not address these themes, these sources offer insights into the range of approaches adopted to compare these two countries and also include information on race issues that are of relevance to the poor whites. As mentioned by Andrews in the methodology section of this research, each of these authors used different approaches to writing their comparative histories.

In 1980 Greenberg produced a book entitled *Race and State in Capitalist Development: South Africa in Comparative Perspective*.¹⁵³ Although his book does not deal with poor whites per se, he provides the history of South Africa and the USA during their development and respective divisive racial phases. The poor-white problems are closely linked to these themes and share that history. He focuses on commercial farmers and labour which are part of poor white history. His book, however, does not solely focus on the USA and South Africa, although it is SA and Alabama that are compared (not the entire USA or American South).

A year after the publication of Greenberg's book, Fredrickson released the first of his three studies that compare South Africa and the United States, entitled *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South*.¹⁵⁴ It was this book that attracted the most attention out of the four authors of the 1980s.¹⁵⁵ Fredrickson is able to compare these two nations by not restricting himself to place, time, topic or units of analyses, but adheres to his geographical reference point. He also examines the attitudes, beliefs and policies and provides cases, characteristics and consequences. As with Greenberg, the non-white history is closely linked with the poor whites, similarly the history of white supremacy is also linked to poor-

¹⁵¹ J.S. Bergh, "White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research", *Historia*, 48(1), 2003, p. 355.

¹⁵² P. Kolchin, "Comparing American History", *Reviews in American History*, 10(4), 1982, p. 64.

¹⁵³ S.B. Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development: South African in Comparative Perspective*. Yale: Yale University Press, 1980.

¹⁵⁴ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

¹⁵⁵ J.S. Bergh, "White Supremacy Twenty-One Years On: Opportunities for Comparative Historical Research", *Historia*, 48(1), 2003, p. 357.

white history. In the 1990s, Fredrickson produced two more comparative histories on South Africa and the USA.¹⁵⁶ His second book entitled *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* presents ways in which to write and compile a comparative study. Fredrickson's third book, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism and Social Movement*, again offers a "model" on how to compare the history of two nations, but also includes valuable detail that the poor-white problem in both nations share.

As mentioned, one of the four books released in the 1980s did not focus on race relations, but rather looked at the frontier history of South Africa and the United States. Editors Lamar and Thompson also included contributions from nine other historians, which was the result of graduate seminars on comparative frontier history at Yale University in the 1970s, as well as a conference with the same theme in 1979. The book entitled *The Frontier History: North America and Southern Africa Compared*,¹⁵⁷ comprises of different themes and includes four essays on the comparative frontier histories of South Africa and the USA. The frontier history of both nations is important when examining the history of the poor whites.

In 1982, J.W. Cell published his book entitled *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South*.¹⁵⁸ The period focuses on the years 1890-1925. Although it may seem very similar to the work done by Fredrickson, these sources are very different.¹⁵⁹ The period Cell focuses on in his work (1850-1950), is similar to this study and the topic itself is closely linked to the history of the poor whites. The comparative history genre in terms of South Africa and the USA has a lengthy and established trajectory.

This thesis is not the first study that compares South Africa and the United States of America. Nor is it the first to compare the poor whites of these two nations. Already in 1935 a very short pamphlet was published by Professor R.W. Wilcocks titled: *Rural poverty among whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*.¹⁶⁰ Critically, Wilcocks led the Carnegie Commission

¹⁵⁶ G.M. Fredrickson, *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.; G.M. Fredrickson, *The Comparative Imagination: On the History of Racism, Nationalism, and Social Movements*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

¹⁵⁷ H.R. Lamar & L.M. Thompson, *The Frontier History: North American and Southern Africa Compared*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

¹⁵⁸ J.W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

¹⁵⁹ S. Marks, "White Supremacy: A Review Article", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 29(2), 1987, p. 397.

¹⁶⁰ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural poverty among whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*. Stellenbosch: The Carnegie Corporation Visitors' Grants Committee, 1935.

and was also one of the main investigators. He was responsible for the *Psychological Report: The Poor White, Part II of The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Report of the Carnegie Commission*.¹⁶¹ Prior to the investigation, Wilcocks had already travelled to the United States on a Carnegie Corporation grant to conduct a comparative study on poor whites in the USA South and South Africa.¹⁶² The above-mentioned source was the result. Although only 15 pages in length, the source has a wealth of information and uses different themes of comparison, such as the pioneer period, the influence of isolation, the impact of blacks and the effects of war to mention a few. However, given the brevity of the study it is rather superficial as it does not provide much detail. It also only focuses on the poor whites in the rural areas, neglecting the urban scene. Disappointingly, it also has no sources or references. This proposed study will therefore address these shortcomings and build on this existing work.

Z. Magubane has also written a number of chapters and articles regarding the poor-white problem and the Carnegie Corporations involvement in the matter.¹⁶³ She examines the history and background of the Corporation, its role in researching the poor-white problem and the reasons why an American Corporation became involved in South Africa. The Carnegie Commission is an important link between the histories of the poor whites in both South Africa and the USA. According to Magubane, the Carnegie Commission opened the field and made comparative histories regarding poor whites possible.

Another very important source is that of E.J. Bottomley.¹⁶⁴ In his geography thesis completed in 2016 at Cambridge University, he attempts to expand the understanding of the geography of the poor white by arguing that the problem was a transnational concern that transcended national borders. His thesis builds on the above mentioned work done by N.J. Ring.¹⁶⁵ Bottomley argues that efforts to control and discipline the population constituted a “transnational governmentality”

¹⁶¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia 1932.

¹⁶² E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 80.

¹⁶³ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, pp. 691-713.; Z. Magubane, “The Interconnected Histories of South African and American Sociology: Knowledge in the Service of Colonial Violence” in F. Greenland & F.M. Göçek, *Cultural Violence and the Destruction of Human Communities*. London: Routledge, 2016.; Z. Magubane, ‘Poverty, Race and Land: The Carnegie Study on Poverty in 1930s South Africa’ *Oppositional Conversations*, 29 March 2022, <<http://www.oppositionalconversations.org/current-issue-land/2022/3/7/poverty-race-and-land-the-carnegie-study-on-the-poor-white-question-in-1930s-south-africa>>, Accessed: 24 August 2022.

¹⁶⁴ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016.

¹⁶⁵ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.

in order to uphold white prestige. His study examined some of the ways poor whites were disciplined and “racially rehabilitated”.¹⁶⁶ Throughout his study, Bottomley argues that his approach is from a geographical field, however, he admits the importance of history in this study. Furthermore, he claims that his study is not a comparison, however, it reads as and appears as a comparative analysis. On pages 12-13 of his thesis, he refers to the “colouration” of American novels by John Steinbeck and William Faulkner¹⁶⁷ on the struggles of the poor white in the American South, however, he states that this is missing from South Africa. I disagree with this entirely. Literary novels by Jochem van Bruggen, Christiaan Maurits van den Heever, Abraham Hendrick Jonker,¹⁶⁸ as well as others, are all great examples and representations of the struggles and tribulations the poor whites in South Africa underwent.¹⁶⁹

The Literary Analysts: South Africa and the American South

The literary analysts form an important link between the academic sources and the novels. These analysts are able to provide important insights regarding the novelists and their works. The selection of analysts discussed below are literary specialists who focus on novels from a certain genre and time and in this case, also specific country. The novels written about poor whites from South Africa and the American South will be compared in this study and therefore, it is important to focus on each individually in this case. This choice of analysts was made to represent both similar and different ideas with regards to the selected novelists and novels. The sources focus on the historical portrayals of the literature, the language movements, as well as the novelists and the novels themselves.

The emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that during the time that this study focuses on, the majority of poor whites in South Africa were considered Afrikaans. Therefore, the novels regarding the poor whites in South Africa between 1850 and 1950 are Afrikaans novels from the Second Language movement.¹⁷⁰ Most of the authors themselves are regarded as *Die Dertigers* (The Thirties).

¹⁶⁶ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 5.

¹⁶⁷ Both these authors will feature in this study.

¹⁶⁸ These authors will also be examined in this study.

¹⁶⁹ For more information on the representation of poor white in South African novels see S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015.

¹⁷⁰ This movement will be examined in more detail in Chapter 4.

The 1935 work by G. Dekker entitled *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*¹⁷¹ (Afrikaans literature history/History of Afrikaans literature) examines the history of the Afrikaans language, poetry and literature. He focuses on the start of Afrikaans as a language, the different language movements, the reasons behind them and the impact each had. Dekker also looks at the different genres, the poets and their poetry and the novelists and their novels. He does not examine each poet or novelist in detail, but rather focuses on the understanding of the Afrikaans historical context. He also examines different publications, such as magazines and newspapers, as well as dramas, plays and productions that have originated from the literature of the Afrikaner.

R. Coetzee's 1937 Master's dissertation entitled "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde",¹⁷² (The poor white in Afrikaans literature) is a combination of history and literature analysis. This study is written during the height of the poor-white question in South Africa and examines the South African novels written during the same period as the Carnegie Commission. Thus, at the time of writing, the information was all still relatively new. The Carnegie Commission is the only historical source Coetzee uses and in some instances he does compare the poor whites in the novels to the Carnegie Commission, but does not go into great detail.¹⁷³ Coetzee's main focus is the novels and the poor whites portrayed in them. There is very little information given regarding the novelists themselves.

In 1939 P.C. Schoonees published an important source with regards to this study entitled *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging* (The literature of the Second Afrikaans Movement).¹⁷⁴ This source provides a brief history of the First Afrikaans Language Movement and a comprehensive explanation of the Second. Schoonees offers much information on the different developments and spheres that make up the Second Afrikaans Movement. He gives a detailed explanation of the social and cultural climate of the time as well as some history. This background enables the reader to gain a better understanding of the literature or novels and the climate in which they were written. All the different themes are examined and explained, as well as other important sources at the time that were publishing Afrikaans literature. He also identifies some of the novelists who worked at these newspapers and magazines. This source includes a wide selection of novelists during the time period of the Second Afrikaans Language Movement and provides a short biographical sketch of each, as well as an analysis of a selection of the novelists'

¹⁷¹ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1935.

¹⁷² R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937.

¹⁷³ R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, pp. 238-243.

¹⁷⁴ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*. Kaapstad: Bussy, 1939.

most important works. More attention is given to some novelists than to others. The source is well-structured and user-friendly and includes coverage of the South African novels that have been selected for this study.

P.J. Nienaber's *Hier is ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaans Skrywers* (Here are our Authors: Biographical Sketches of Afrikaans Authors) was published in 1949.¹⁷⁵ In this source, he includes the biographies of a number of Afrikaans authors and provides reasons why they wrote what they did, as well as what factors may have led to their specific expressions and choice for their novels. Some novelists receive more attention than others thus, in some instances a clearer picture is portrayed of certain novelists at the expense of others.

The two sources *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur I* (History of the Afrikaans literature I)¹⁷⁶ and *Die Afrikaanse Literatuur 1652-1987* (The Afrikaans literature 1652-1987)¹⁷⁷ are both authored by J.C. Kannemeyer and include much overlapping information. These volumes examine the influence that the history of the Afrikaner people had on their literature and poetry. They contain information on the novelists who form part of the second Afrikaans Language Movement and also provide a brief background and history of the period the novelists wrote in, as well as the different genres and themes that were used.

Both edited works by P.J. Nienaber – *Perspektief en Profiel*¹⁷⁸ and H.P. van Coller – *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II* (Perspective and Profile: An Afrikaans Literary History II)¹⁷⁹ examine literature and poetry. Although they do not address a specific period in the literature, they do include a selection of poets and novelists who have made important contributions to Afrikaans literature. A range of different experts have contributed to both sources. They look at specific poets and novelists and also deal with literary analysis. The analysis provides the background to the life and works of the novelists, as well as providing a detailed analysis of their work. By combining the two sections, the reader gains a better understanding of the period in which the novels were written in, a greater understanding of the novelists, as well as a better understanding of the reason or need the novelists had to express himself¹⁸⁰ with regards to the

¹⁷⁵ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Persboekhandel, 1949.

¹⁷⁶ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Lteratuur I*. Pretoria: Academica, 1978.

¹⁷⁷ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Die Afrikaanse Literatuur 1652-198P*. Pretoria: Academica, 1988.

¹⁷⁸ P.J. Nienaber (red.), *Perspektief en profiel*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Persboekhandel, 1951

¹⁷⁹ H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en profiel: 'n Afrikaanse literatuurgeskiedenis II*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1999.

¹⁸⁰ They were mostly male.

writing of the novel. Not all the South African novelists used in this study feature in these sources, however, these sources still remain relevant.

D. Attwell and D. Attridge are the editors of *The Cambridge History of South Africa*.¹⁸¹ This source is not a literary analysis per se, however, it includes the history of South African literature and considers various relevant developments. Gerrit Olivier's chapter entitled "The *Dertigers* (The Thirties) and the *plaasroman* (farm novel): Two brief perspectives on Afrikaans literature",¹⁸² deals with the South African novelists and period of this study. Olivier describes the genres and themes that feature, as well as the period in which the novels were written. Although this source does not examine the novelists in great detail, it does explain the reasons why they wrote their novels.

Die Huisgenoot (The Home Companion), an Afrikaans popular magazine, first appeared in 1916 as a monthly edition. It acquired a lot of popularity so that by 1924 it became a weekly magazine and is still published today. The magazine featured many different topics including topics on the South African language issue, as well as the poor whites. The topics were often filtered through into stories, some of which were also featured in the magazine. *Die Huisgenoot* as a source indicates who the popular authors were at the time and what the general public was encouraged to read. It also included book reviews of the popular Afrikaans books and the novels.

As with the South African novels, a number of the American novels selected that focus on the poor whites in the American South were also written during the first half of the twentieth century and specifically the 1930s. According to R.E. Spiller it was during the first half of the twentieth century that the literature of the United States experienced a "second renaissance", which focused on naturalism and realism. It was the Southern authors who remained in the South and interpreted what was occurring around them in the form of novels.¹⁸³

The publication, *The American Novel*¹⁸⁴ by C. van Doren was first published in 1921. This source looks at the historical treatment of the development of what is deemed the "Great American Novel" and expands on the work van Doren did on fiction in *The Cambridge History of American*

¹⁸¹ D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

¹⁸² D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, pp. 308-324.

¹⁸³ R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*. Massachusetts: Colonial Press Inc., 1962, pp. v-viii.

¹⁸⁴ C. van Doren, *The American Novel*. New York: Macmillan, 1940.

Literature.¹⁸⁵ *The American novel* focuses on the different periods and genres of American literature. He gives biographical details about the authors and background to the periods they wrote in. Furthermore, a number of novels and themes are examined and analysed. He further provides short details about the novel and the reaction or influence that they had.

In 1948 the revised second edition of *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* by J.D. Hart was published.¹⁸⁶ This source offers short biographies of the novelists, as well as information regarding their style and subject matter. Hart also includes summaries and descriptions of the novels along with historical outlines of the literary schools and movements. Furthermore, this source examines literary societies, magazines and awards. As more authors were added after the fifth edition, this source became known as *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*.¹⁸⁷

In 1939, S. McIlwaine published *The Southern Poor White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road*.¹⁸⁸ In this source she examines the history and culture of poor whites from across the American South and also examines the literature that has been written about them starting with William Byrd. Different aspects of the poor whites' lives are examined, as well as the different views and opinions regarding them. This source is a literary analysis, but has some comparative aspects that include both history and literature. What is of interest, is the use of literary portrayal of various periods she uses to trace the social history of the poor whites in the American South from the eighteenth century to the twentieth century. She also discusses the history, development, views and changes the poor white underwent in the history of the literature written about the poor whites.

The title *American Literature in the Twentieth Century*¹⁸⁹ by H. Straumann is a little misleading as the source was published in 1951 and therefore only truly focus on the first half of the twentieth century. This source examines different novelist who wrote during this time and provides a short biographical sketch and an overview of their most important works. Straumann also looks at the different genres and how the novelists contributed to them.

¹⁸⁵ C. van Doren, S.P. Sherman, J. Erskine & W.P. Trent, *The Cambridge history of American Literature*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1917.

¹⁸⁶ J.D. Hart, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1948.

¹⁸⁷ J.D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

¹⁸⁸ S. McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road*. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc., 1970.

¹⁸⁹ H. Straumann, *American Literature in the Twentieth Century*. London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951.

American literature, especially focusing on the South is examined in *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*¹⁹⁰ edited by R.E. Spiller. This source focuses on the first half of the twentieth century and the genres, novels and novelists this period produced. The influences and what was happening in the South and how it influenced the novelists and their reactions in the form of novels is explored providing solid context.

In 1977, Spiller published *Milestones in American Literary History*.¹⁹¹ This source forms part of the “Contributions in American studies, series 27” and is a compilation of the history of American literary works and authors by a number of different experts. The source is not all inclusive, but does examine and review a number of novels and novelists and their place in American literary history, as well as the impact they had.

In 1963, J.M. Bradbury published *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*.¹⁹² In this source he focusses on the Southern Renaissance Movement, what it entailed, its history and the works produced under this school. Fiction, poetry, and drama are examined. The works are evaluated, the patterns outlined, and the traditions of the region and the new forces at work in the twentieth-century South are discussed.

S. J. Cook examined the poor whites in 1930s literature in her PhD thesis entitled “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”.¹⁹³ She states that in the 1930s one of the most richly endowed American literary traditions was that of the Southern poor white. In her thesis she examines three American novelists and their works. She provides a background to the Southern poor white literature and the formation of opinions and stereotypes that were created through these novels. In 1976, she published *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*.¹⁹⁴ Her work builds on her PhD and again focuses on the works of three American novelist selected for this study. Although she provides a history of poor white literature, her focus is on the 1930s and the place these novels had in society and what they represented.

¹⁹⁰ R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*. Massachusetts: Colonial Press Inc., 1962.

¹⁹¹ R.E. Spiller, *Milestones in American Literary History*. Westport: Greenwood Press Inc., 1977.

¹⁹² J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1963.

¹⁹³ S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973.

¹⁹⁴ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1976.

The Norton Anthology of American Literature edited by R. Gottesman is a typical anthology¹⁹⁵ that provides historical background to each novelist, as well as a brief biography placing them firmly in the time of change and influence, as well as providing examples of their works. Not all American authors are listed, but the focus seems to be to what is referred to as the “great writers”.

The 1980s see many works of literary analysis being written about novelists and their works. Southern literature and the complicated, but rich culture, traditions and history become of immense interests to academics. In 1980, R.H. King’s perceptive study of cultural movement demonstrates how Southern writers in the first half of the twentieth century come to terms with Southern tradition by expressing it in their literary works. In *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*,¹⁹⁶ King not only examines the novelists, but also looks at the above mentioned authors Agee and Cash. He focuses on the history and motives of the works within the greater South and its traditions and culture.

In 1983, *The Literature of the United States of America* was published by W. Marshall.¹⁹⁷ E. Pound comments that the book is written for the average person “who wants to know more”.¹⁹⁸ This source is divided into different periods and genres of American literature and aims to answer questions regarding the novelists and their novels and thus examines actions and reactions, as well as the relationships between the novelist and society.

A valuable source of information on the novelists, their novels and literary analysis is *Twentieth Century American Literature* edited by H. Bloom and produced in 1985.¹⁹⁹ In seven volumes, he examines the authors who made contributions to American literature during the twentieth century. This source provides detailed background on the novelists, excerpts from interviews and reviews. It discusses and analyses their works and offers the reader a broad insight into the lives of the novelists, the influences on their works, the work itself and how it was received.

The 1987 publication, *Reference Guide to American Literature*²⁰⁰ edited by D.L. Kirkpatrick examines a wide range of different American novelists. This source provides biographical

¹⁹⁵ R. Gottesman (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature, Vol. II*. New York: Norton, 1979.

¹⁹⁶ R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

¹⁹⁷ W. Marshall, *The Literature of the United States of America*. London: Macmillan, 1983.

¹⁹⁸ W. Marshall, *The Literature of the United States of America*. London: Macmillan, 1983, p. Acknowledgements.

¹⁹⁹ H. Bloom (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*. New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1985.

²⁰⁰ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*. Chicago: St. James Press, 1987.

backgrounds to the novelists, critical essays on their works, literary insights into the time they wrote in, the genres, topics and what influenced them and how their novels influenced the public.

American Literature Since 1900 was published in 1993 not long after the death of the editor M Cunliffe.²⁰¹ This source is a combination of essays that examine trends in modern American literature. It deals with a range of authors and their works in terms of analysis and literary criticism. A range of literary schools and genres are discussed, as well as the novelists who contributed to them. The history and influences on the novelists are also considered.

In 1995, S.J. Tracy examines the poor whites in novels in her work entitled *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*.²⁰² Although the authors that will be examined in this study do not feature in this source, it does provide a history and background to the poor whites in Southern literature, how they were portrayed, as well as the place and roles these poor whites were afforded in Southern literature.

Like Spiller mentioned earlier, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature* that was published in 1997 by J.A. Bryant²⁰³ examines a time period between the two Wars as part of a Southern renaissance and one of the most significant literary events in American fiction. Realism is featured as an important genre and Bryant examines the history and cultural context of the novels and authors. A short background and biography of the authors is given, as well as the context to the novels and subjects.

The Cambridge History of American Literature was published in 2002 under the editorship of S. Bercovitch.²⁰⁴ This volume examines the prose written in the period 1910-1950. The different authors and their works are discussed, as well as the movement, the Southern Renaissance Movement, they wrote in. It provides insight into the period the novels were written in.

In 2004, *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South* was published by editors R. Gray and O. Robinson.²⁰⁵ This source includes discussions on various forms of art, with

²⁰¹ M. Cunliffe (ed.), *American Literature Since 1900*. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

²⁰² S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*. Amherst Mass: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995.

²⁰³ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1997.

²⁰⁴ S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

²⁰⁵ R. Gray & O. Robinson (eds.), *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004.

novels being one such form. The literary works and historical events are examined in the broader themes, issues and movements. The chapter entitled “Visualizing the Poor White” by S. Kidd, examines the topic of poor whites in Southern literary as well as photographic works. This chapter deals with the history and culture of the South at the start of the twentieth century and the influence the novels, interviews and photographs had on the public and the State through the use of the media. The myths, opinions and the views that were held regarding the poor whites and how they were portrayed is also discussed.

In the 2011 publication *The Cambridge History of the American Novel* edited by L. Cassuto²⁰⁶ the American novel is traced from its emergence in the eighteenth century to the modern day. This source examines new views and debates on American literature from a range of academics. It includes essays which highlight the cross-currents between novelists and their work across historical periods, as well as examining the development of genres and how the history influenced and informed the reading public.

In 2012, K.J. Hayes published *A Journey Through American Literature*.²⁰⁷ In this source he examines literary works as they have evolved with regards to key events in American literary history using a thematic approach rather than a chronological one. The novelists and their work are examined within their different genres along with events that shaped the cultural history and how it influenced the novelists.

The more recent *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South* edited by S. Monteith in 2013²⁰⁸ examines the literature pertaining to the American South. It examines the Southern Renaissance Movement, as well as the theme of poverty which appears in a number of Southern novels.

Finally, in 2015, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*²⁰⁹ was published. This source examines the diversity of writers who shaped American literature. It examines the different themes and genres, as well as a number of novelists and poets. The

²⁰⁶ L. Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

²⁰⁷ K.J. Hayes, *A Journey Through American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

²⁰⁸ S. Monteith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²⁰⁹ A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*. Dahlonega: University of North Georgia Press, 2015

Southern Renaissance Movement is discussed in detail as well as the period in which it featured and some of the novelists who wrote as part of this movement.

There thus exists a plethora of information surrounding the poor whites in South Africa and the American South. This literature review has traversed a wide canvas of research on which this thesis builds. In a parallel format it has considered a selection of sources on general South African and USA histories pertaining to the poor whites; the comparative historical works on the two countries; and the literature on literature.

CHAPTER THREE

A Brief History of the Poor Whites in South Africa

For the purpose of this study, it is necessary to present a brief history of the poor whites in both countries. Chapter three considers the poor whites in South Africa, while chapter four considers their history in the USA. This will serve as background and context for the analysis that follows. As mentioned, poor whites existed long before the time period of this study. As long as there has been civilisation there have been class systems, and it thus follows that where there are whites and a class system, there will be poor whites.

It is important to note that in both the USA and South Africa, whites came to the country as colonialists. In order to understand the place of the poor whites in society, the hierarchy within the society needs explanation. Before whites arrived there existed the indigenous or first peoples. In South Africa, these people were the San and Khoi Khoi. While the former peoples lived as an egalitarian society mainly as hunter gatherers, the Khoi Khoi were herders. Possessions in the form of cattle ensured that a hierarchy was formed.¹ The Bantu-speakers as pastoralists as well as crop cultivators were to migrate from the north into the southern African region.² When the settlers arrived, there already existed a form of class which was brought with them from their former European homelands. The settlers included officials who ruled and ensured order and the workers who were the labour force.³ There now existed a case of us and them. Whites versus the indigenous population. Due to the differences in race, language, culture, tradition and particularly religion the whites considered themselves as superior and the land as unoccupied.⁴ This feeling was exasperated when slavery was introduced in South Africa in 1658.⁵ Menial labour was considered slave labour, and race (colour) converged with class. Thus, the race factor was now added to class in the hierarchy of society. Whites were regarded as dominant and superior, but within the white race there also existed a class system.⁶ The poor whites created a problem in society, as in theory they were supposed to be “above” those of other races – the indigenous peoples and enslaved peoples in the class hierarchy – but in practice, some sank even lower.

¹ R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 7 & 9.

² R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, pp. 7-8.

³ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 5.

⁴ A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, pp. 927-928.; J. Dobošová, “Calvinism in the Context of the Afrikaner Nationalism Ideology”, *Asian and African Studies*, 18(2), 2009, pp. 305, 309 & 312.

⁵ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 36.

⁶ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 40.

Early White Poor

Poor whites have existed in South Africa since the onset of their arrival in the mid seventeenth century when the whites first landed on the shores of what would become South Africa. The Dutch East Indian Company (DEIC) arrived at the Cape of Good Hope under the command of J.A. van Riebeeck.⁷ The first white people who came to the Cape region took up residence and were employed by the DEIC. They were to set up a small station and gardens to provide the DEIC's passing ships with supplies on their route to the East.⁸ These first whites initially traded with the local indigenous peoples, the San and Khoi Khoi, but for the most part they kept to themselves.⁹ According to Giliomee, although these immigrants came from the lower rungs of society, they were regarded as poor, humble and ignorant, and not the dregs,¹⁰ but, according to R. Ross, those who were sent to South Africa were the dregs of European society.¹¹ In 1657, nine of these workers, who were known as Company servants, were freed from their contracts and given permission to become full-time farmers on plots of land that were given to them. They thus became known as "free burghers".¹² This was the first indication that the Company was in favour of colonising and moving into the interior.¹³ These free burghers were able to produce agricultural products and sell to the DEIC, however, they were often not paid their allocated price as the Company dictated the prices, which caused many to sell their goods to smugglers.¹⁴ It was in the same year that the first help was given to some of these people who became destitute by the Dutch Reformed Church in the Netherlands, an action that would repeat itself in later years. The assistance was given to prevent them from falling into dire poverty.¹⁵ However, the DEIC officials often complained that the burghers were lazy and drank too much.¹⁶

⁷ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 185.

⁸ M. Wilson & L. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume I: South Africa to 1870*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p. 189.

⁹ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, p. 25.

¹⁰ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 6.

¹¹ R. Ross, "The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism" in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminatie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociale Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*. Hilbersum: Verloren, 1987, p. 210.

¹² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 2.

¹³ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1946, p. 12.

¹⁴ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 2.

¹⁵ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 42.

¹⁶ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 2007, pp. 48-49.

In 1658, the DEIC permitted the implementation of enslaved people, which impacted hugely on the labour market and employment opportunities.¹⁷ It was not long after this that more and more company servants became free burghers, especially after the influx of Europeans to the Cape of Good Hope. Soon, a small community town developed in Cape Town, which now also included carpenters, blacksmiths, bricklayers and tavern-keepers.¹⁸ The free burghers could barely live on what they made selling their wheat and thus, the Dutch government decided to donate funds from church collections to help the poor burghers.¹⁹ The climate and environment were harsh and something they were not accustomed to. It resulted in many crop failures, and this was accompanied by excessive alcohol abuse, created a situation where by 1661, the first poor whites were apparent in South Africa. In a letter to the DEIC, Van Riebeeck describes the extreme poverty he witnessed. He stated that there were children who were half naked and left to sleep on the ground with a little straw next to livestock.²⁰ Over time, more company servants were released from their Company contracts as the DEIC decided to save money and allowed them to farm as free burghers.²¹ The small community began to expand due to the need to improve their conditions as a result of conflicts with the indigenous tribes, competing with enslaved labour and other economic challenges with the DEIC. As a result, many immigrants and free burghers began to expand further into the interior and became known as *trekboere* (moving/roaming farmers).²² Most of these people were independent pastoralists moving around to obtain pastures and were relatively isolated from one another as well as the developments that were taking place in Europe during the eighteenth century.²³ It is important to note that only 14% of South Africa is arable land for planting crops. It is mostly made up of semi-deserts with frequent droughts and the areas that have relatively good rain fall have a rugged terrain. In the light of these climatic challenges stock farming developed as a way of life.²⁴ This expansion into the interior and ultimately the extension of the colony was encouraged by Van Riebeeck's successor and the first Governor of the Cape, Simon van der Stel.²⁵ However, it was only in 1688 that the Company's plans for colonisation

¹⁷ N. Worden, E. van Heyningen & E. Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The Making of a City*. Claremont: Verloren Publishers, 1998, pp. 26-27.; South African History Online, 'The Early Cape Slave Trade', <<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/early-cape-slave-trade>>, n.d. Accessed: 4 November 2022.

¹⁸ N. Worden, E. van Heyningen & E. Bickford-Smith, *Cape Town: The Making of a City*, p. 59.

¹⁹ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika*, pp. 48-49.

²⁰ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 2.

²¹ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 6.

²² *Trekboere* literally means moving or travelling farmer. They were usually nomadic sheep farmers.

²³ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, pp. 25-26.

²⁴ H. Giliomee, "'Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief': The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 608-609.

²⁵ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*, p. 14.

were aided by the Dutch government.²⁶ Although there were outward signs of prosperity, all was not well with the colony's economic life. Supply exceeded demand and there were many monopolies and restrictions on trade. Land was also an issue and was granted unfairly. This was evident with the best land being granted to the governor and his chief subordinates, as well as trading rights.²⁷

For a 150 years from the time the first whites arrived, citizens were kept under restrictive economic and political bondage and suppression. Internal and external trade, as well as shipping was monopolised and denied to the *burghers* (citizens) by the DEIC. Thus, their desire to pursue free trade was smothered, forcing many to seek their livelihood as farmers to the extent that they became known purely as *Boere* (Farmers). Farmers were also exploited by officials. The Company's inability to adapt to the needs of a growing settlement led to the events at the Cape being allowed to follow their own course. This spiritual, economic and political neglect resulted in a number of *burghers* and *Boere* turning their backs on the sea and on trade, and turning their gaze into the interior thus, their isolation in the interior led to the development of a way of life of their own.²⁸ This would have drastic impacts as many became poor whites later on. In their isolation they would have no business sense and no idea of the changing world.

The *trekboere* soon began to adjust to the environment and many learned how to survive from the indigenous peoples. Due to these factors, many cultural adaptations and changes occurred. This behaviour continued into the twentieth century and it was only when fixed regional borders were set that this movement slowly drew to a close and people became more permanently settled.²⁹ They continued roaming, as mentioned, was mostly due to them seeking better grazing land for their cattle, as well as opportunities to survive. Many of these *trekboere* later became part of the Great Trek, a mass migration of some 15 000 whites who moved into the interior away from British colonial domination to establish independent states.³⁰ However, historian C. Bundy states that land was not as freely available to these travelling farmers as there were always skirmishes with the indigenous people. Many of these landless farmers became *bywoners*³¹

²⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 10.

²⁷ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*, pp. 17-19.

²⁸ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 34.

²⁹ L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, pp. 45-48.; M. Wilson & L. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume I: South Africa to 1870*, p. 406.

³⁰ M. Wilson & L. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume I: South Africa to 1870*, p. 406.

³¹ Literally translated as by dwellers or tenants or squatters on another man's land. There were two different types of *bywoners*: those who worked for the farmer (hired hands) and also rented a small part of the land for his own farming

(sharecroppers/tenants) on other farmers' property. Their possessions, which they had to bring with them from the Cape, were very rudimentary if not scarce and the poorest among them were entirely impoverished.³² Many practiced a mixed economy of sharecropping, transport riding and hunting allowing them to keep a relative sense of independence.³³

Ross explains that in 1795, the British invaded the Cape Colony ensuring that their link to India, for trade purposes, remained open and unchallenged. This was a strategic move, as Britain was at war with France.³⁴ This invasion ended the DEIC period and an influx of British immigrants to the Cape in what became known as the first British occupation (1795-1803) followed by the second British occupation (1806-1910).³⁵ In particular in 1820, Britain, trying to rid itself of its own growing numbers of poor, paid and arranged for them to be shipped off to the various colonies of the Empire.³⁶ South Africa became one such colony³⁷ to which large numbers of these impoverished immigrants were shipped.³⁸ Most of these British immigrants became urban dwellers, while the majority of *Boere*³⁹ remained in the countryside or rural areas. In his brief history, M.S. Geen mentions a group of poor-white woodcutters in the Cape forests, many of whom had British surnames.⁴⁰ It must be kept in mind that not only Dutch and British immigrants came to South Africa, but also a wide selection of other Europeans, including German, French and Polish immigrants.⁴¹

Under British rule a ridged class system was put in place with power residing with the white elite and by the start of the nineteenth century poverty became more visible in the Cape. The increased

purposes; and there were those who were just labourers and just worked the farmer's land. Both were able to live on the farmer's land. *Bywoners* were thus, farm hands who might or might not have "owned" small shares of a farm. They are also referred to as sharecroppers.

³² C. Bundy, *Poverty in South Africa Past and Present*. Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2016, pp. 32-33.

³³ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 9.

³⁴ R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, p. 35.; L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, pp. 51-52.

³⁵ Z. Magubane, 'Poverty, Race and Land: The Carnegie Study on Poverty in 1930s South Africa' *Oppositional Conversations*, 29 March 2022, <<http://www.oppositionalconversations.org/current-issue-land/2022/3/7/poverty-race-and-land-the-carnegie-study-on-the-poor-white-question-in-1930s-south-africa>>, Accessed: 24 August 2022.

³⁶ Z. Magubane, 'Poverty, Race and Land: The Carnegie Study on Poverty in 1930s South Africa' *Oppositional Conversations*, 29 March 2022, <<http://www.oppositionalconversations.org/current-issue-land/2022/3/7/poverty-race-and-land-the-carnegie-study-on-the-poor-white-question-in-1930s-south-africa>>, Accessed: 24 August 2022.

³⁷ J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 30

³⁸ Z. Magubane, 'Poverty, Race and Land: The Carnegie Study on Poverty in 1930s South Africa' *Oppositional Conversations*, 29 March 2022, <<http://www.oppositionalconversations.org/current-issue-land/2022/3/7/poverty-race-and-land-the-carnegie-study-on-the-poor-white-question-in-1930s-south-africa>>, Accessed: 24 August 2022.

³⁹ Now often called Afrikaners – they consisted of a mixture of the first immigrants to the Cape. Most of them were from Dutch origin, but there were also French and Germans who made up a large portion.

⁴⁰ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*, p. 197.

⁴¹ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 213.

migration of impoverished immigrants from Britain and people from the rural Cape hinterlands added to a group of often homeless and unemployed people. Against a background of an emerging middle-class elite, this white poverty was further enhanced. The 1820s saw the first “moral panic” about the uncontrollability of the lower classes.⁴²

A Developing Problem

In 1834, slavery was abolished in the Cape, which created a panic, especially after reports were received stating that the British colonial government would not send money to South Africa to compensate the former slave owners for their losses. The Cape was a small and poor society and thus, the confiscation of property (enslaved people) caused real misery and resulted in the need for many to sell their possessions at cost in order to survive, which brought many to beggary.⁴³

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century, two streams of white emigrants left the Cape Colony. The first was the above-mentioned *trekboers* who immigrated into the interior of South Africa for better pastures and land from the seventeenth to the early eighteenth century. These were usually small family groups who did not move far away. The second group was the above-mentioned *Voortrekkers*⁴⁴ who undertook the Great Trek⁴⁵ in the first decades of the nineteenth century to move away from British influence and rule, as well as a pervasive sense of being marginalised by the British colonial government since 1806. The *Voortrekkers* moved northward⁴⁶ in groups of families with many more joining the Great Trek between 1835 and 1845.⁴⁷ It is important to add that economically they did not go forth to find a new society, but continued to perpetuate an old one. This combined with isolation would result in a major cause of poor whiteness in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴⁸ By the start of the nineteenth century, these settlers, mostly of Dutch origin, began to identify themselves as different and by the start of the twentieth century, many associated themselves as Boers and later Afrikaners (an Afrikaans speaking white person). However, in discussing the issue of poor whites in South Africa, it is important to note that Afrikaners made up the largest section of the white population and thus, the large majority of

⁴² A.B. Teppo, “The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town”, D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, pp. 26-27.

⁴³ A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, pp. 123-124.

⁴⁴ Forward or front movers.

⁴⁵ The Great Migration.

⁴⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 144-145.

⁴⁷ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 161.; M. Wilson & L. Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa Volume II: South Africa 1870-1966*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971, pp. 406-407.

⁴⁸ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 182.

poor whites were Afrikaans-speaking.⁴⁹ There were also other poor whites who were English-speaking, but were never as numerous or visible as the Afrikaner poor, only making up approximately one-fifth of the white poor population.⁵⁰

The relationships between the Afrikaner and the British were often very strained as Anglicisation and British imperialism became the main ideologies in the Cape's urban areas. This enforced British culture and symbols such as emblems, fashion, architecture, food and so called polite conversation. According to Giliomee, the Afrikaner had hardly any advancement to boast of and were mainly perceived of as a rural, isolated and relatively backward people with only a few who had received a rudimentary education. There was also no military resistance when the British had taken over in 1806, which resulted in feelings of social impotence by the Afrikaner along with a sense of superiority by the British. Furthermore, the British intended to anglicise or "civilise" the language, the schools and the churches and introduced philanthropy in terms of the enslaved and indigenous populations. This was problematic for many Afrikaners and as a result increasing numbers left the Cape and migrated northward.⁵¹ This movement resulted in them becoming a very insular and isolated people. The migrations were dangerous and challenging, with many clashes with the indigenous peoples.⁵² Many Voortrekkers lost their lives as a result of these encounters, as well as succumbing to diseases, the harsh environment and other obstacles. These different parties travelled in different directions and so the Afrikaners began settling across the wider expanse of what is today South Africa, especially in the central and northern regions.⁵³ In the mid nineteenth century, they established two Independent *Boer*⁵⁴ Republics: the OFS in 1852, and the ZAR in 1854.⁵⁵ During this time land was relatively easily obtained and came into the hands of many white men who lacked the energy, capital or efficiency to develop it and make it profitable.⁵⁶

⁴⁹ I. Abedian & B. Standish, "An Economic Inquiry into the Poor White Saga", *Southern Africa Labour and Development Research Unit: Working Papers*, No. 64, 1985, p. 19.

⁵⁰ H. Giliomee, "'Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief': The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 605.

⁵¹ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 194-199.; R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, p. 39.; L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 68.

⁵² The Bantu speaking people is a collective name for the Black people in South Africa who originate from a number of different clans and tribes with their origins in the Niger-Congo region.

⁵³ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 118.

Also of interest some parties went up a lot further into what is today other African countries. Angola is one such country with a very distinctive Afrikaner community who was influenced and developed differently to those who remained in South Africa.

⁵⁴ Another name the Afrikaners use to refer to themselves, also literally meaning Farmer.

⁵⁵ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 131.

⁵⁶ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 183.

It must be mentioned that for many years, both the Cape Colony and the two Boer Republics overlooked the deterioration of a large section of the European population.⁵⁷ Before the middle of the nineteenth century, most people took the prevailing British view that poor whites only had themselves to blame. It was their moral deficiencies and inability to overcome a lack of enterprise that caused this destitution. It was only in the second half of the nineteenth century that the authorities concluded that the poor deserved help as their problems were not only of their own making.⁵⁸

Before the mineral discoveries at the end of the nineteenth century many landless poor whites lived and worked on farms owned by wealthier whites. These *Bywoners* held a respected position in society and there existed very little to their appearance, clothes, homes and lifestyles. These wealthier whites were able to produce enough to have a surplus to help their poorer, landless counterparts, however, by 1870 this would all change and the *bywoners* descent into poverty was rapid.⁵⁹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most Afrikaners were subsistence farmers who only produced enough for themselves and acquired the few necessities they needed. Continued crop failure led to insolvencies thus, the poor man had to sell everything to pay his debt and many were driven off the land. The increase in the number of poor whites can be attributed to the greater concentration and commercialisation of farming and a series of disastrous economic slumps, and natural challenges. Many were unable to transition into a cash economy and market orientated farming, moreover, they were not prepared to take risks or modernise. The larger and wealthier farmers quickly snatched up their land and many poor whites found themselves in positions of labourer or *bywoner*.⁶⁰ Eventually the day arrived where access to land became even scarcer.⁶¹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, most of the white poverty was found in the rural areas. This was worsened by the global economic recession (1865-1869) that had an impact on wine

⁵⁷ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*, p. 197.

⁵⁸ H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 601-602.

⁵⁹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 48-49.; R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 6.

⁶⁰ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, pp. 328-329.; H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 609.

⁶¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 186.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 45.

exports and the price of wool, which saw a banking crisis that had both local and international implications. Through agricultural improvements and capital accumulation, well-to-do farmers led directly to the ruin and impoverishment of their poorer neighbours. This depression led to further poverty.⁶² Evidence of this is apparent in a letter written in 1851 by a Mr Gerb in Amsterdam which describes the “bitter poverty” of the poor whites in South Africa.⁶³

The term “poor white” first began appearing in South African newspapers⁶⁴ and official records after approximately the 1860s, even though poor whites had existed in earlier colonial times. Reports suggested that there was a growing class of landless poor who were forced to scrape together a living for themselves any way they could. In districts such as Albany and Fort Beaufort, in the Cape interior, there were reports of poor whites in a state of destitution, described as “almost naked and completely penniless”, as well as “skin and bone specimens, moving like spectres from tombs”.⁶⁵ In his seminal article Giliomee claims that “poor white” was a term that appears to have originated in the American South.⁶⁶ By the 1880s the difference between land owning farmers and the poor landless white became evident and the term gained new meaning.⁶⁷

Soon after the founding of the independent Boer Republics (1852 and 1854), mineral wealth in the form of diamonds was discovered in 1867 in Kimberley.⁶⁸ This discovery completely transformed the economy⁶⁹ and created different types of poor whites. Landless rural poor, small town, low skilled, low paid wage earners, as well as the lumpenproletariat element.⁷⁰ However, at the end of the 1870s, drought and the Ninth Xhosa War hit the Cape’s economy. According to A.

⁶² C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 106.

⁶³ A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 125.

⁶⁴ The *Alice Times* appears to be one of the first newspapers that printed events regarding poor whites in society, but it soon became a more common occurrence in other small towns.

⁶⁵ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 116.; D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 328.

⁶⁶ H. Giliomee, “‘Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief’: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 602.

⁶⁷ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 49.

⁶⁸ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, pp 106-107.

⁶⁹ M. Golden, “Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change”. *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁷⁰ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 104.

Grundlingh, this was followed by a boom in the South African economy, which in turn saw the worst trade depression during the nineteenth century. Fortunately, in 1886, gold was discovered on the Witwatersrand leading to another boom, and the leading economic state in South Africa shifted to the Transvaal.⁷¹ Regardless, a third of the Afrikaner population, mostly rural landless farmers or *bywoners*, were never affected by the economic expansion and this was to develop into a crisis in the next century.⁷²

With these mineral discoveries, the uncomplicated Afrikaner society was suddenly forced to face cosmopolitan communities and various other cultures. It became an unequal struggle for the Afrikaner because of the complicated economy which was accompanied by severe competition for land and ultimately wealth. This was a traumatic experience as the Afrikaners' whole world changed from an isolated and uncomplicated mostly rural farming existence with limited educational opportunities. It thus had a huge impact on their identity.⁷³ The mineral discovery also resulted in social changes among Afrikaners. As mentioned previously there was little difference after 1870 the *bywoner*, *trekboer*, white farm labours and former land owners, became the unemployed lumpenproletariat in the rural areas.⁷⁴

Many rural poor whites were unprepared and thus insufficiently capable to adapt to the new modern economic conditions. There was no continuity between what they knew and the new capitalism, modern transportation and world trade and the language of business was also strange to them.⁷⁵ Their subsistence existence resulted in many poor farmer unable to adjust to the new, fast growing capitalistic economy.⁷⁶ The discovery of precious minerals resulted in the creation of new urban areas that required food and the need for commercialised farming increased, which caused many farmers who had *bywoners* occupying their land to ask them to leave so the land

⁷¹ A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1986, p. 184.; C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, pp 106-107.

⁷² M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

⁷³ J.J. de Klerk (red.), *Die Diens van Barmhartigheid en die Nederduiste Gereformeerde Kerk: 'n Diakonologiese Studie*. Kaapstad: NG Kerk Uitgewers, 1990, p. 85.

⁷⁴ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 49.

⁷⁵ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 41 & 47.

⁷⁶ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 187.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 45 & 48.

could be fully utilised.⁷⁷ Furthermore, *bywoners* were usually more expensive than black labourers.⁷⁸ The increased movement of the population stimulated the rising prices and demand for goods.⁷⁹ Thus, pastoral farming land was replaced by commercial farming.⁸⁰ This saw the end to traditional economic operations for the poor farmer.⁸¹ Land became more profitable and scarcer, and the sharecroppers evicted either became tenants working directly for the farmer as labourers or move to the urban areas to try eke out a living.⁸² Many farmers replaced human labour with machines, resulting in more landless poor.⁸³ As indicated, most of these landless poor moved to the cities and this would be a continuous migration which will be discussed in more detail.⁸⁴

During the 1880s and 1890s, a large rural population who had limited education were described as destitute and unemployable and were unskilled or barely skilled.⁸⁵ Those that moved to the urban areas – cities and towns – where there was mining to be done (Kimberley or Johannesburg) attempted to improve their economic conditions. However, these areas became breeding grounds of white poverty.⁸⁶ Many of these rural white people were accustomed to living in isolated farming areas. Now they were forced into an urban, cosmopolitan area, with little or no skills. The ZAR spent a third of its budget on poor relief. The two presidents of the Boer Republics, M.T. Steyn and P. Kruger, felt that the absentee landlords and mining capitalists had little sympathy for the Afrikaner poor who would become a destitute proletariat.⁸⁷

⁷⁷ A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, p. 185.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 86.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 45.

⁷⁸ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 5.

⁷⁹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 195.

⁸⁰ J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 21.

⁸¹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 45.

⁸² L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 82

⁸³ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 195.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 46.

⁸⁴ A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, 185.

⁸⁵ H. Giliomee, "'Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief': The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 601.

⁸⁶ A.N. Pelzer, "Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899", *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 126.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 50.

⁸⁷ H. Giliomee, "'Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief': The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 603.

With the founding of the two Boer Republics and the discovery of wealth, the British began their expansion into South Africa and sought to annex the Boer Republics and bring the Afrikaners under British rule and dominance once more. In 1877, the British attempted to annex the ZAR and this resulted in the First Anglo Boer War (1880-1881)⁸⁸ breaking out. The Afrikaners won the war and re-established their independence. However, the developing gold industry soon brought many more immigrants to South Africa, a development that would soon challenge and change the *Boer* independence.⁸⁹

From 1890, the appearance of poor whites, especially in the rural areas and those moving to the urban areas, caught the attention of responsible people who realised that it was manifesting into a problem.⁹⁰ In 1890, the anxieties of the poor white class also manifested in the Cape. Historian A.N. Pelzer mentions a newspaper article from 1892 which reports on a large number of *bywoners* (sharecroppers/tenants) and their plight and tragedy in the districts of the Cape Colony.⁹¹ Soon, these conditions and anxieties spread north to the Republics.⁹² In the 1890s, a number of newspapers and government reports began to discuss the poverty among the burghers.⁹³ It was during this time that the general public became aware that there was a section of society that was living under less favourable conditions and the term *arme blanken/armblanke* (poor white) became a widely used term from the 1890s onwards.⁹⁴ For example, the term *arme blanken* (poor whites) has been used constantly in the Transvaal newspaper *De Volksstem* (The people's voice) since 1893. The Editor warned of the potential dangers for the future.⁹⁵ Similarly, the Cape newspaper *Onsland* (Our country) posed the question: "Is our poor white issue due to peculiar South African conditions or to causes which South Africa has in common with other countries?"⁹⁶ Pelzer affirms that the best sources were the opinions of people who travelled, witnessed and experienced the poor whites' hardships.⁹⁷ David Wilson travelled throughout the Republic in 1880,

⁸⁸ Also known as the First War of Independence, The Transvaal War or The Transvaal rebellion.

⁸⁹ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, p. 27.

⁹⁰ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26.

⁹¹ A.N. Pelzer, "Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899", *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, pp. 126 & 128.

⁹² C. Bundy, *Poverty in South Africa Past and Present*, p. 47.

⁹³ H. Giliomee, "'Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief': The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 603.

⁹⁴ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 328.

⁹⁵ A.N. Pelzer, "Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899", *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 134.

⁹⁶ A.N. Pelzer, "Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899", *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 134.

⁹⁷ A.N. Pelzer, "Die 'Arm-Blanke' in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899", *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 132.

and had a very poor impression of the economic situation. He described the country as being in a “state of squalid poverty... hardship... Money was very scarce...”.⁹⁸ The poor-white problem was treated as an urban phenomenon. During the 1890s, a Rand Relief Committee reported on the people of Vrededorp.

...most of them seem starved, they live from blood and guts discarded at the slaughtering-places, they exchange their clothes for food, children go naked.⁹⁹

The Cape Minister of Agriculture, John X. Merriman, wrote a long article in *De Volksstem*, about the conditions of the poor whites and stated that in the 1880s, in order for the white population to survive, the poor whites would have to be assisted and forced to return to the cultural ways of the *volk* (folk/nation/people).¹⁰⁰ Merriman believed that whites deserved to dominate, they were, as he termed it, “the garrison of civilisation”, but it would need to be a “healthy” white group.¹⁰¹ Readers responded to Merriman’s article by stating that there was an increased influx of poor whites to the urban areas, while another suggested that if possible these poor whites should be kept in the rural areas. Another found that these poor whites were desperately leaving behind what they knew to go to the urban areas to find work, especially on the mines, but were refused due to them being Afrikaans.¹⁰² There are also a number of different cases, from across South Africa, in the newspaper correspondence whereby individuals and groups requested help from the government with regards to the increasing number of poor whites.¹⁰³ A combination of the discovery of precious minerals, capitalistic mining exploitation, the influx of skilled immigrants with modern business concepts, the expansion of the railway and changes in the rural areas further added to the growing poor-white problem. Many poor whites hoped that the mines and railways would also offer them employment opportunities, but this was to no avail.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 133.

⁹⁹ H. Giliomee, “‘Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief’: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 603.

¹⁰⁰ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 185.; A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, p. 135.; A. Grundlingh, “Are We Afrikaners Getting too Rich? 1Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s”, *Journal of historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), 2008, p. 148.

¹⁰¹ H. Giliomee, “‘Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief’: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 605.

¹⁰² A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, pp. 135-136.

¹⁰³ A.N. Pelzer, “Die ‘Arm-Blanke’ in die Suid Afrikaanse Republiek Tussen die Jare 1882 en 1899”, *Historiese Studies*, 2(4), 1941, pp. 136-137.

¹⁰⁴ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 41 & 46.

Factors which pushed the poor whites from the rural to the urban areas remained relatively the same during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁰⁵ Backward or very rudimentary farming methods and political conditions became less important. The main causes were natural disasters such as droughts, animal diseases, epidemics and plagues, as well as market conditions. Many lost their livestock and land becoming displaced as agricultural producers. As mentioned, the first group of people who were seriously impacted were the *bywoners* who then formed the bedrock of a growing white poor.¹⁰⁶ These causes will be explained in more detail in chapter eight.

The British were determined to dominate South Africa and in particular the mineral wealth. At the end of the nineteenth century, the British proposed to P. Kruger, the then president of the ZAR, to reform the ZAR franchise requirement. They hoped to gain more control and to remain in the mineral wealthy region. However, when he refused, it was just another step closer to the outbreak of the Second Anglo Boer War in 1899. The ZAR and the OFS had an agreement to support each other in times of war. The burgher revolt in the Cape and the prospect of wealth in the interior were the final straws which resulted in war.¹⁰⁷ In essence, this was a war between Afrikaner Nationalism and British Imperialism which lasted nearly three years (1899-1902).¹⁰⁸ It became the policy of the British government to destroy Afrikaner culture.¹⁰⁹

The *Boers* had the upper hand during the first phase of the Anglo-Boer War and were able to seize various strong holds. However, with the subsequent arrival of British troops, the superior numbers led to the eventual defeat of the Afrikaner military commando forces. The *Boers* used guerrilla tactics and thus, the War was prolonged, but it was the British strategy of the scorched earth policy which finally secured their victory. This involved burning homes and crops, salting the earth, as well as slaughtering livestock and destroying much of the rural countryside when Boer commandos refused to lay down their arms and surrender.¹¹⁰ The *Boer* women and children were

¹⁰⁵ Many of these factors were the same for the blacks. Thus by the time the poor whites finally arrived in the urban areas there already existed a number of poor blacks working as low or unskilled labour, earning a low wage and living in slums.

¹⁰⁶ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 5.; C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, pp. 106-107.

¹⁰⁷ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 239-250.

¹⁰⁸ R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, 1999, p. 72.

¹⁰⁹ J.H. van Wyk, "Should We Blame Calvinism for the Development of Apartheid in South Africa? A Perspective from Reformed Churches in South Africa: A Case Study", *In die Skriflig*, 50(1), 2016, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2155>>, p. 2.

¹¹⁰ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 213.

left homeless and herded into concentration camps, where over 26 000 died.¹¹¹ The *Boers'* supplies were drastically reduced and with their families dying in the concentration camps, they finally surrendered in 1902 with the signing of the Peace of Vereeniging on 31 May.¹¹² According to J.H. Van Wyk, today these actions would be regarded as crimes against humanity.¹¹³ Some of the Afrikaans novelists, selected for this study, personally experienced these camps and the after effects of the War. The majority of poor whites had a shared history that included ancestry who had either been *trekboers* or part of the Great Trek and had suffered the extreme losses of the Anglo Boer War. After the War many returned home to nothing – they were unable to resettle on their land and joined the reservoir of unskilled urban labour, along with the destitute black farmers.¹¹⁴

Poor whites had certainly existed before 1899 and the Second Anglo Boer War, however, the outcome and aftermath only aggravated the growing crisis. Their numbers drastically increased thereafter and pushed them into the spotlight. With the increase in the number of poor whites, the problem also became more prominent as a result of the migration of the poor towards the urban areas, which had also multiplied. As mentioned, the poor whites had previously been contained in the rural areas where they had made a meagre living off the land, lived on small plots of land or as *bywoners*. Those who finally went to the urban areas were initially able to use their rural skills, but with industrialisation taking place many became wage labourers.¹¹⁵ Each year after the War the indigency grew graver.¹¹⁶ During the post-war Reconstruction period more poor whites moved from the rural areas to the urban areas.¹¹⁷ However, with the turn of the twentieth century, a number of misfortunes took place as well.¹¹⁸ These misfortunes resulted from what historian Charles van Onselen refers to as the “Hand of God” (natural disasters outside their control) and the “hand of Man” (caused by themselves or by men).¹¹⁹ This led to many of the poor becoming

¹¹¹ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *Nuwe Geskiedenis van Suid Afrika*, p. 290. Black South Africans were not spared similar treatment and an estimated 20 000 also succumbed in the concentration camps.

¹¹² R. Ross, *A Concise History of South Africa*, pp. 72-74.; L.M. Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, pp. 141-143.

¹¹³ J.H. van Wyk, “Should We Blame Calvinism for the Development of Apartheid in South Africa? A Perspective from Reformed Churches in South Africa: A Case Study”, *In die Skriflig*, 50(1), 2016, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2155>>, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 610.

¹¹⁵ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 329.

¹¹⁶ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181

¹¹⁷ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ Droughts and epidemics to mention a few.

¹¹⁹ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 321. “The hand of God and the hand of Man” will be discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

destitute, while many others fell into abject poverty. It was the first time that the local church and politicians officially acknowledged and recognised the problem.¹²⁰

The urbanisation of white South Africans, especially poor whites, was regarded as their second Great Trek.¹²¹ The migration of poor whites to the urban areas began as a trickle, however, this trickle soon became a flood of migrating poor. This increase was so dramatic that by 1936, half of the white population was in the urban areas. Historian Floors van Jaarsveld explains that urbanisation appears to have taken place in three waves. The first (1886-1920) was encouraged by mining activity, although there had been those who left the rural areas before 1886. Approximately 70 000 Afrikaners left the rural areas between 1911 and 1921 to go to the cities. The second wave (1920-1948), and the largest migration, was a result of depression, drought and increased industrialisation. Between 1926 and 1936, there were almost 15 000 whites moving per year. The first three decades of the twentieth century saw the problem at its worst. The final wave (1948 to the present) took place due to industrial development and economically prosperous years. By 1951, 79% of Afrikaners were urbanised.¹²² Many poor whites hated living in the urban areas and longed for the simplicity of the rural areas. The city was huge and the way of life very different and many found it difficult to cope and adjust.¹²³

A large number of women and girls went from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of work in order to send money home.¹²⁴ Women's wages and employment would become essential to keeping the family from starvation even though this went against the image of the ideal Afrikaner woman, but it was a necessity.¹²⁵ Those who arrived in the first two waves suffered the most and they were unable to obtain skilled and semi-skilled jobs, as they lacked the qualifications. They had no relatives to help set them up or help them find work and they had no experience of or access to trade unions. Many were unable to speak or understand English, which had become

¹²⁰ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26.

¹²¹ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 4.

¹²² F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, pp. 309-310.; H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 612.

¹²³ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁴ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 219-221; E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, pp. 29-30.; A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, p. 186.

¹²⁵ S.E. Pretorius, "Poor Whitism: The Fictional *Volksmoeder* in South African Novels, 1920s-1940s", *Historia*, 64(1), 2019, pp. 65-90.

the language of the trade of industry. Thus, they had to compete with the blacks for the low paying, unskilled menial work,¹²⁶ resulting in thousands living in abject poverty.¹²⁷

The urban areas, as mentioned, did not offer much more to the poor whites. Between 1875 and 1904, approximately 400 000 white immigrants entered South Africa. Thus, by the time the poor whites from the rural areas made their way to the urban areas, many of the skilled and semi-skilled positions had been filled by immigrants and English speakers, who often had the advantage of a better education.¹²⁸ The mines, situated in the major urban areas, required skilled labour, as well as a large amount of unskilled labour to ensure profitability. Skilled miners came from Britain, America and Australia.¹²⁹ Black Africans were employed at a very low rate in unskilled positions such as miners and thus, there was no place for the poor white Afrikaner in the urban areas.¹³⁰ Although the mines were short of unskilled workers they were reluctant to employ poor whites. Henning Klopper, a trainee clerk on the railways, was told point blank that the labour of blacks was favoured over that of Afrikaners.¹³¹ Poor whites wanted to be paid more than the blacks. It was argued that blacks were paid less because they did not have a family in the urban area to care for.¹³² The migrant black labour force could be controlled by pass laws and made to work harder and for longer without fear of them forming associations for collective action as according to law this was illegal.¹³³ In 1903, poor whites were employed by the mines at a higher pay grade than the blacks for unskilled work. However, paying poor whites more resulted in less profits and it was found that they did not work as hard as the blacks.¹³⁴ Poor whites could not be employed on the mines in skilled positions because they lacked the experience, and for a number

¹²⁶ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 68.; H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 605 & 612.; C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 310.

¹²⁷ M.S. Geen, *The Making of the Union of South Africa: A Brief History 1487-1939*, p. 197.; A.W. Stadler, "The Union of South Africa, 1910-1961: White Consolidation and Black Awareness. The Period 1939 to 1948" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1986, p. 268.

¹²⁸ H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 605.

¹²⁹ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, pp. 15 & 71.

¹³⁰ H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 606.; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 197.

¹³¹ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 65.

¹³² R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 5.; In many cases only black men came to the urban areas to work leaving their family on the land to earn a second income, later the 1913 Land Act would result in many more blacks moving to the urban areas.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Onderzoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 55.

¹³³ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, p. 150.

¹³⁴ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 87.

of years, English-miners held the top jobs and were paid much more.¹³⁵ However, in 1907, poor whites were employed as scab labour during the mining strike of that year. They worked in the mines and later through training, education and political awareness and consciousness, slowly started to enter the higher ranks.¹³⁶

Van Onselen explains that many poor whites were able to at first use their rural skills in the urban areas, but due to the fast pace of development and industrialisation, and due to their own work pride and views that certain jobs were only for blacks, many fell behind. Therefore, they competed with other whites, blacks and machines for work.¹³⁷ For several years Afrikaners avoided the unskilled labour market, first in the countryside and then in the towns and cities.¹³⁸ Many became self-employed. There were a few who tried to make their fortunes by purchasing a diamond claim and becoming a digger, however, many sold their claims after falling further into poverty.¹³⁹ Some poor whites became wood cutters, supplying the towns with fuel, but they were eventually replaced with coal.¹⁴⁰ Between 1880 and 1910, many used to work as transport riders using their oxen and wagons, while others became cab drivers, but they were soon replaced by trams and the railway.¹⁴¹ Others used their skills at brickmaking to provide clay bricks for the expansion and post-War reconstruction, but the market for bricks often fluctuated and became congested. In later cases, larger companies took trade from the smaller independent Afrikaner and with their machines were able to make the bricks faster and cheaper.¹⁴² Others became tanners, builders,

¹³⁵ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, 71 & 86.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 198-199.

¹³⁶ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 87.; C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, pp. 310 & 332.

¹³⁷ C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 111.; C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, pp. 10-11, 25, 314-315.

¹³⁸ C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 310.; C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, pp. 111-112.

¹³⁹ C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 311.

¹⁴⁰ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 52.

¹⁴¹ C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, pp. 313-315 & 321.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 87.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 52.; A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, p. 186.; J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 24.

¹⁴² L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 52-53.; C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, pp. 315-325.; A. Grundlingh, "Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899" in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, p. 186.

bakers and brewers.¹⁴³ Poor white women started their own laundries to wash clothes, but competed with blacks and Chinese.¹⁴⁴ Others went to work in factories such as those making clothes.¹⁴⁵ During the first twelve years after South Africa was declared a Union in 1910, Afrikaner workers formed a proto revolutionary mass, but by 1930, a quarter of all Afrikaners were seen to be in need of some type of assistance.¹⁴⁶ The urban poor whites became the “Poor Whites”, a group or class that were perceived of as requiring state assistance.¹⁴⁷

Over time, the poor white class began to settle and the downtrodden proved they were not crushed. Many moved up the ladder to be replaced by the next wave of poor whites. Later they began to settle down. They were overcoming their illiteracy and started getting educated and trained.¹⁴⁸

Addressing the Problem

The end of the nineteenth century saw a growing feeling in government and broader society that all was not well.¹⁴⁹ The poor-white problem became the most pressing social issue in Afrikaner politics during the twentieth century. Before the well-known work on the poor-white question was done by the Carnegie Commission in 1932, which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five, the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) had already been busy responding to the problem long before. In the 1850s, the DRC recognised the growing poverty of the poor whites.¹⁵⁰ The response started from the 1880s with extended synodical work regarding the care of the poor through the founding of a number of church institutions, which focused on a number of different aspects.¹⁵¹ The mineral discoveries created a competitive and complex situation in South Africa which

¹⁴³ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁴ C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 290.

¹⁴⁵ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 222 & 252. L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa III. A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, pp. 18-20.

¹⁴⁶ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 185.

¹⁴⁷ C. Bundy, *Poverty in South Africa Past and Present*, p. 48.

¹⁴⁸ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 614-615.; A. Grundlingh, “Are We Afrikaners Getting too Rich? 1Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s”, *Journal of historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), 2008, p. 145.

¹⁴⁹ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 103.

¹⁵⁰ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 603.

¹⁵¹ R. Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media, SUN PReSS, 2017, p. 92.

disrupted rural Afrikaner society¹⁵² and it was the DRC who first responded to this new reality.¹⁵³ The defining of poor-white poverty as an urgent social problem can be traced to the synodic discussions of the Cape DRC in 1886.¹⁵⁴ More people were migrating from the rural areas to the urban and industrial areas and thus, the poor whites became more noticeable.¹⁵⁵ In 1893, Reverend B.P.J. Marchand published a series of eight articles in *De Volksbond* entitled “Our poor, what can be done for them?”¹⁵⁶ Prior to this he and his parish had been involved in founding schools for poor white rural children to save them from a life of poverty.¹⁵⁷ In the same year Marchand was one among a group of Cape DRC ministers who issued a manifesto warning that those whites with no or only a rudimentary education were doomed to remain as basic labourers.¹⁵⁸ The end of the nineteenth century and the start of the twentieth century saw the search for solutions to poverty.¹⁵⁹ In 1892, Merriman, who was at this time Minister for Agriculture in the Cape Government, drew attention to the growing poverty of a large section of the population.¹⁶⁰ In 1893, he had a conversation with Reverend A. Murray, the moderator of the DRC Synod, convened a church conference in Stellenbosch. The conference focused on the need for better education and establishing working communities to provide employment for the poor whites.¹⁶¹ It focused on the acute crisis of rural poverty among its own members.¹⁶² Similarly, in the 1897 sitting of the Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly the growing poor-white problem received a lot of attention and the plight of the poor whites was debated.¹⁶³

¹⁵² J.J. de Klerk (red.), *Die Diens van Barmhartigheid en die Nederduiste Gereformeerde Kerk: 'n Diakonologiese Studie*, p. 85.

¹⁵³ R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, p. 68.

¹⁵⁴ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologiese Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26.

¹⁵⁵ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 321.

¹⁵⁶ J.J. de Klerk (red.), *Die Diens van Barmhartigheid en die Nederduiste Gereformeerde Kerk: 'n Diakonologiese Studie*, p. 87.

¹⁵⁷ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 603.

¹⁵⁸ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 607.

¹⁵⁹ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁰ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

¹⁶¹ R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 69-70.

¹⁶² C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

¹⁶³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologiese Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26. C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181

In many colonial destinations it was believed that the concern of white poverty intensified internationally. During the 1880s and 1890s, whites needed to be prevented from losing caste and ensuring a dominant white community.¹⁶⁴ According to Bundy, towards the end of the nineteenth century, class attitudes regarding poor whites changed. The concern was now directed to alleviating the problem. He argued that this could be linked to the altered perceptions of the British who underwent a considerable restructuring of attitudes towards poverty and unemployment and rethinking the appropriate response to them. This rediscovery of poverty broadened into a dramatic reinterpretation of causes and the nature of impoverishment. From being viewed in terms of moral failure by individuals, the view now became one which regarded them as a product of the physical and economic environment.¹⁶⁵

In 1906, the Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly appointed a select committee to investigate and report on the poor-white question. F.S. Malan was appointed as the chairman of this Committee, which reported that the number of poor whites was increasing and would continue to do so unless a solution could be found. Furthermore, it indicated that the majority of poor whites in the urban area longed to return to the land/farm/rural areas.¹⁶⁶ In the Committee's opinion, the main cause of the poor white condition was a lack of proper education and training, which rendered them victims of circumstance. Thus, it was considered that education was needed to educate, prepare and save the children of poor whites.¹⁶⁷ Most poor whites they found were unskilled and thus, received a low wage.¹⁶⁸ Suggestions such as industrial schools and employing the younger generation of poor whites in public works programmes, as civil servants or in the mines were made.¹⁶⁹ With regards to those living or wanting to live in the rural areas, it was suggested that labour colonies such as the one the Dutch Reformed Church had implemented in 1889 in Kakamas be considered.¹⁷⁰ The Committee presented a number of conditions and plans about how this could be applied.¹⁷¹ It felt solutions to the poor-white problem needed to be found,

¹⁶⁴ H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 602.

¹⁶⁵ C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 119.

¹⁶⁶ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*. Cape Town: Cape Times, 1906, pp. ii-iii.

¹⁶⁷ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, pp. iv-v.

¹⁶⁸ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, p. vi.

¹⁶⁹ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, pp. v-vi.

¹⁷⁰ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, p. vii.

¹⁷¹ House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, pp. vii-x.

but felt that by just providing land was too expensive and unrealistic. Therefore, in the end they advocated for training, education, public service employment and labour colonies.¹⁷²

In the same year in the Transvaal Colony, a Commission was appointed to investigate indigency that existed among the Europeans and to report and provide recommendations.¹⁷³ It is interesting to note that “indigency” was used to replace the term poor whites. Again, these people were divided into those who were poor by extenuating circumstances (the hand of God) and those who were poor through their own fault (the hand of man).¹⁷⁴ The Indigency Commission examined social and economic causes, as well as methods which sought to bring indigents to a means by which they could care for themselves, temporary assistance and regular charitable relief to those who could not support themselves.¹⁷⁵ The report was divided into five sections: A historical survey of events; the effects on the social and economic conditions in the presence of blacks; the permanent and underlying causes of indigency in the rural area; the causes in the urban areas; and lastly recommendations.¹⁷⁶ Some recommendations included assistance with employment, education and training, certain specific relief, as well as adjusting and modifying laws.¹⁷⁷ Through its investigation, the Commissioners travelled throughout South Africa and were thus able to report that the problem was not isolated.¹⁷⁸ They also concluded that help would only alleviate certain instances, but would not eradicate the problem. They also commented on the growing increase of poor whites and also opposed the resettlement of poor whites on land as a solution.¹⁷⁹ It is interesting to note that the Transvaal Indigency Commission reported that *bywoners* had become an inferior and separate class of white society.¹⁸⁰ In 1908, the Free State Government also appointed a Commission and committee to address the growing issue.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*, p. xi.

¹⁷³ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*. Pretoria: Government Printing and Stationery Office, 1908, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ *Indigency Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, pp. 4-5.

¹⁷⁶ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, p. 6.

¹⁷⁷ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, pp. 197-202.

¹⁷⁸ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, p. 198.

¹⁷⁹ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, pp. 198-199.

¹⁸⁰ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 6.

¹⁸¹ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26.

However, in time these Afrikaner poor also began to stand-up for themselves. By 1907, with the introduction of self-government for the Transvaal, a crowd of unemployed Afrikaner and English whites marched to Pretoria to put pressure on the Colonial Secretary, Jan Smuts, to employ whites at a fair and decent wage. Pressure was also put on political representatives to provide relief work and many entered into jobs in public works. The loyalty of the poor whites belonged to whoever would provide for their needs and this gave them a small, but limited amount of power. Each political party who wanted their votes and support knew the key was finding employment for them.¹⁸²

After the devastating effects of the Anglo Boer War and the increased movement to the urban areas, the DRC's response to the poor-white problem became more organised and deliberate. In 1915, the Cape Synod called a synodical Commission called the "Internal Mission", and by 1919, it developed into "The General Poor-White Commission". In 1916, Reverend A.D. Luckhoff, who would also play an important role in the Carnegie Commission investigation, was appointed the organising secretary. Several important conferences were held that dealt with the poor-white problem. These conferences provided insight into the problem as well as the DRC's response to it. The first "Poor white Congress" was held on 22-23 December 1916 in Cradock and was entitled "The needs of the rural areas and the move to the cities" and focused on the scope, reasons for the poverty and possible solutions. It was attended by 225 delegates, including professors, government officials, the editor of *Die Burger*, future Prime Minister Malan, as well as representatives of the DRC and other Afrikaner reformed churches. At this conference, poor whites were defined as whites who were poor in the material sense, as well as personal development. Reference was also made to their European decent and how the condition of white poverty was "unnatural".¹⁸³

In 1922, another conference was held in Stellenbosch which focused on poverty and education. In 1923, another was held in Bloemfontein, "The Joint Congress regarding the Poor-White Question", which had a broader focus and was attended by delegates from the government, women's organisations and the three Afrikaner Reformed Churches. Prominent speakers

¹⁸² H. Giliomee, "Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939", *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 614-615.; B. Freund, "The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa" in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xvi.

¹⁸³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

included General J.B. Hertzog and Malan.¹⁸⁴ After the conference, Malan wrote a series of influential editorials and also produced a brochure which had a huge impact. The later Carnegie Commission's report cites this pamphlet several times.¹⁸⁵ In the same year a Drought Commission was appointed to investigate the cause of the growing problem of the poor whites in South Africa.¹⁸⁶

Prior to 1924, the DRC had felt they were responsible for the relief of the poor. Provincial governments gave grants, but it was the Church that administered them. As indicated, the poor-white problem would also increasingly impact party politics as each sought the votes of this growing group of people and wanted to solve the issue.¹⁸⁷ The Rand Rebellion of 1922 gave the NP Government the impetus to use the poor whites to launch a campaign against the existing rule of the South African Party under Jan Smuts. In 1923, Smuts did not attend the Joint Congress regarding the Poor-White Question, although he had a personal invitation and the NP used this to their advantage as well.¹⁸⁸ However, in 1924, when the Pact Government¹⁸⁹ came into power, they promised that the ordinary white person would enjoy a civilised standard of living. Under the Pact Government the multi-party Commission on "Old Age Pensions and National Insurance" under the chairmanship of B.J. Pienaar was appointed. They examined some of the causes of the poor-white problem and possible solutions. However, with the start of the Great Depression in 1929, the government was not able to fully act and had to cut back on its expenditure.¹⁹⁰ In 1929, when the Wall Street crashed in the USA, South Africa did not immediately feel the effects of the depression because they had very few investments in the US. However, the price of wool and maize began to fall. Wages dropped significantly and unemployment and bankruptcies soared. Employment became a scarce commodity. Large sums of money were sent out of the country by investors, which further aggravated the situation.¹⁹¹ Profits from exports were

¹⁸⁴ Both would become Prime Minister of South Africa.

¹⁸⁵ R.R. Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 70-71.; Anonymous, *Gesamentlike Kongres oor die Arm Blanke Vraagstuk in die Raadsaal te Bloemfontein op 4 en 5 Julie 1923*. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1923, p. 3.

¹⁸⁶ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Onderzoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26. Also see chapter eight for the extent drought played as a cause of poor whitism.

¹⁸⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Onderzoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26-27.

¹⁸⁸ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Onderzoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 26.

¹⁸⁹ A coalition of the Afrikaner republican National Party and the Labour Party.

¹⁹⁰ J. Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931-1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, pp. 517-518.

¹⁹¹ D. Oakes, (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 333.

drastically reduced, while imports became very cheap.¹⁹² Due to low prices for their livestock and crops many farmers fell into debt from which they were unable to recover and South Africa's farming was placed on a knife's edge.¹⁹³ However, South Africa soon left the gold standard and this resulted in an economic boom, which resulted in the government of the time, the United Party or Pact Government maintaining power.¹⁹⁴ However, agriculture remained depressed and this reinforced the gap between rural and urban and the plight of the poor white.¹⁹⁵

For several decades, Afrikaner politicians, writers and churchmen watched with growing alarm as a segment of the white population slid generation after generation into utter poverty.¹⁹⁶ During the first half of the twentieth century there was a lot of propaganda by Malan's NP regarding the "swart gevaar" (black danger) on the poor whites.¹⁹⁷ Being a poor white meant being poor, but also a change in class position. Many felt they had lost their self-respect as a "white".¹⁹⁸ Poor whites had very close contact with blacks both in the rural and urban areas and worked and even lived with them side-by-side. The fear was not only of the "mixing" of the races,¹⁹⁹ but that these poor people would unite and create a poor class which would cause social unrest.²⁰⁰ These poor whites were regarded so abject in their poverty and so wanting in their resourcefulness that they stood "dangerously close" to the blacks in many regards.²⁰¹ This was perceived as a threat to white supremacy and power.²⁰² Many poor whites could be found sharing the same overcrowded and

¹⁹² J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, p. 175.

¹⁹³ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 283.

¹⁹⁴ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 29.; J. Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 536. A coalition of the South African Party and the National Party. This further led to the formation of the Purified National Party under Dr D.F. Malan who would go on to win the 1948 election and start apartheid.

¹⁹⁵ B. Freund, "The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa" in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xxi.

¹⁹⁶ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

¹⁹⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 27.

¹⁹⁸ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 15.

¹⁹⁹ Those in positions of authority tried to prevent this to keep the white race pure and to continue their supremacy ideology allowing them power.

²⁰⁰ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 28 & 51-52.; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 180. B. Freund, "The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa" in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xviii.

²⁰¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

²⁰² L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 37-38.

squalor slums as blacks.²⁰³ This became a big concern for Afrikaner Nationalists²⁰⁴ as they strove to ensure segregation of these two groups.²⁰⁵ It became important for them to emphasise that all whites were equal, regardless.²⁰⁶ It was on the issue of race that poor whites, white workers, white farm owners and wealthier whites found a common way to articulate diverse class interests.²⁰⁷ Poor whites were kin to the land-owning and wealthier whites by race, but they were also kin to the blacks by their economic circumstances.²⁰⁸ According to De Kiewiet, “their poverty separated them from one; their pride separated them from the other.”²⁰⁹ However, whites were never equal, not in terms of class nor status – Anglophone and Afrikaner.²¹⁰ Thus, the landlessness and lack of industrial skill of the poor whites and black were very close, too close...²¹¹ Whites were not all privileged in the same way.²¹² It became a national crisis and it became necessary to insert a racial pride into the poor whites.²¹³ Poor whites were made to believe that racial identity was more important than their poverty.²¹⁴ The success of Afrikaner nationalist politicians during the early years of the twentieth century in mobilising Afrikaner solidarity across class lines in defence of the poor whites must be noted.²¹⁵ Blacks were regarded as the whites’ “number one enemy”.²¹⁶ It was from the end of the nineteenth century through to the first half of the twentieth century that the poor-white problem became noticeably visible. A set of intersecting ideas regarding poverty, health and the “dangers” of mixing races meant that the poor-white problem was about to be “discovered” and “defined” in the twentieth century.²¹⁷ It needs to be mentioned that the discovery

²⁰³ B. Freund, “The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa” in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xvi

²⁰⁴ Afrikaner Nationalism started in the 1870s in South Africa. It was the British imperial interventions, the annexation of the Transvaal in 1877 and the subsequent revolt in 1880-1881 which triggered a nationalist response among Afrikaners across South Africa.

²⁰⁵ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 64-73, 185, 218 & 224.

²⁰⁶ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 18.

²⁰⁷ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 19.

²⁰⁸ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 182.

²⁰⁹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 194.

²¹⁰ J. Hyslop, “Workers Called White and Classes Called Poor: The “White Working Class” and “Poor Whites” in Southern Africa, 1910-1994”, in D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2020, p. 28.

²¹¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 197.

²¹² D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 3.

²¹³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 53.

²¹⁴ J. Hyslop, “Workers Called White and Classes Called Poor: The “White Working Class” and “Poor Whites” in Southern Africa, 1910-1994”, in D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 27.

²¹⁵ B.K. Murray, “The Union of South Africa, 1910-1961: White Consolidation and Black Awareness. The Period 1924 to 1939” in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1986, pp. 259-260.; C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 117.

²¹⁶ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 19.

²¹⁷ C. Bundy, *Poverty in South Africa Past and Present*, p. 46.

of the poor-white problem occurred at a time when white supremacy was increasing and the need to dominate the black majority could only be done if the lowest rank of poor whites could maintain a certain standard.²¹⁸ Thus, the poor-white discovery overlapped with other ideological redefinitions, such as Afrikaner identity and nationalism.²¹⁹ Giliomee and Mbenga explain that the government would struggle with the poor-white problem well into the second half of the twentieth century.²²⁰ During the first half of the twentieth century, the poor-white question dominated politics and it had a variety of consequences.²²¹

As is evident, the Union of South Africa Government was determined to “save” the poor whites and reincorporate them back into the *volk*. A number of committees and commissions were appointed to help address and “solve” the problem. Government would assist poor whites through legislation, a social welfare system and state-owned enterprises to provide employment, including public works and civil servants.²²² The poor whites needed to be protected from threats such as poverty, unemployment, racial mixing, black domination and the fall of white supremacy.²²³ However, the poor whites were also not without power. They had the right to vote and used and abused this right to get the help they needed.²²⁴ It was under the Pact Government that poor whites received a number of jobs from the state such as policemen, foresters, soldiers, railway sector and post office employees.²²⁵ Eventually, concessions were made and the Mines and Work Act (1911),²²⁶ Apprenticeship Act (1922), Civilised Labour Policy (1924), the Wage Act (1925) The Mines and Works Amendment Act (1926) and The Customs Tariff Act (1927), among others, all protected white workers by excluding blacks from a number of skilled and unskilled jobs.²²⁷

²¹⁸ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 601-602.

²¹⁹ C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism” in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 120.

²²⁰ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 185.

²²¹ Some historians point to the poor-white problem as one of the factors that led to segregation and the apartheid policy.

²²² The 1913 Land Act would force a number of blacks off the land, it further prevented farmers from having more than five families on their land forcing the farmers to employ poor whites. Job reservation also took place, where certain jobs were reserved especially for whites. Some state owned enterprises which were established to employ whites included: *Spoornet* (Transnet), *Yskor* (Isacor) and Eskom (Escom and Evkom).

²²³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 27.

²²⁴ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 57.

²²⁵ B. Freund, “The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa” in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xx.

²²⁶ Although this Act reserved the more highly skilled work for whites, it was predominantly English speaking skilled and experienced immigrants who got the work and not the desperate, unskilled Afrikaners.

²²⁷ J. Seekings, “‘Not a Single White Person Shall Be Allowed to go Under’: Swartgevaar and the origins of the South African welfare state, 1924-1929”, *The Journal of African History*, 48(3), 2007, p. 383.; I.M. Phillips, “The ‘Civilised

These Acts sought to reserve certain work for whites only, as well as to ensure civilised wages which would raise poor whites to “civilised” or western standards.²²⁸ Thus, protecting white living standards.²²⁹ The government and some municipalities tried assisting by setting aside labouring jobs, such as work on the railways and roads, for “whites only”.²³⁰ The Pact Government wanted to keep the poor whites in the rural areas and thus, launched programmes to help the farms through education and subsidies.²³¹ This was a popular idea which was also evident in the Cape of Good Hope House of Assembly’s appointed select committee to investigate and report on the poor-white question. In 1906, ideas were sought to keep poor whites in the rural area and encourage them to return to the rural area from the urban centres.²³² These included among others financial help, stabilising of product prices, agricultural resettlement, emphasis on production, price and import management, and the development of local industries.²³³ However, many poor white were no longer interested in a life in the rural areas.²³⁴ Other businesses²³⁵ would also be formed and would ultimately help to lift the poor whites up.²³⁶ Furthermore, opportunities needed to be made for poor whites such as training and education, work reservation was implemented to accommodate the unskilled poor whites and they were also protected in the new industries.²³⁷ Most of the Afrikaner leaders after the formation of the Union realised the need to help the poor whites. It was imperative for the Afrikaners’ struggle for survival. Many politicians such as Malan, also believed it was the *Christelike plig* (Christian duty) of Afrikaners to care for their fellow poor. Furthermore, he believed the “native question” lay at the heart of the poor white issue and thus industrialised segregation was essential to avoid competition, while protecting white labour became vital.²³⁸

Labour Policy’ and the Private Sector: The Operation of the South African Wage Act, 1925-1937”, PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 1984, p. 5.; J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, p. 172.; R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 26.

²²⁸ J. Seekings, “Not a Single White Person Shall Be Allowed to go Under’: Swartgevaar and the origins of the South African welfare state, 1924-1929”, *The Journal of African History*, 48(3), 2007, p. 383.

²²⁹ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 56.

²³⁰ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 44.

²³¹ J. Seekings, “Not a Single White Person Shall Be Allowed to go Under’: Swartgevaar and the origins of the South African welfare state, 1924-1929”, *The Journal of African History*, 48(3), 2007, p. 383.

²³² House of Assembly, *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*. Cape Town: Cape Times, 1906, p. 1.

²³³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 28.

²³⁴ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 17.

²³⁵ Volkscas, Saambou, ISCOR, ESKOM and Sanlam to mention a few. A. Grundlingh, “Are We Afrikaners Getting too Rich? 1Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s”, *Journal of historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), 2008, p. 145.

²³⁶ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 14.

²³⁷ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 27-28.

²³⁸ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, pp. 618-619.

The Carnegie Commission report, which will be discussed in chapter five, was completed in 1932 and would play a major role in future decisions regarding poor whites. The DRC had invested time and money into it and was waiting for the findings so solutions to the problem could be sought. Three study Commissioners, R.W. Wilcocks, J.R. Albertyn and H.F. Verwoerd,²³⁹ were appointed by the DRC with the aim of studying the Carnegie Commission report. At a meeting in Cape Town in 1934, sub-commissions were appointed to analyse the Carnegie Report and their findings were to be sent to the three study Commissioners.²⁴⁰ P.W. du Toit explains that this resulted in 99 recommendations and in 1934, a national congress was organised by the *Armsorgraad* (Poor Care Council) and the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa held in Kimberley.²⁴¹ The conference received a lot of media attention with the plea that government and church should unite to address the poor-white problem. The result was a 314 page report on the proceedings, including mood, debates and speeches, which was published. This resulted in the urgency and need for action being emphasised. Poverty was essentially compared to sickness, which with developments and evolution could be eradicated.²⁴² Verwoerd challenged the views of the Carnegie Commission and many DRC leaders felt he was trying to separate social work far too much from religion.²⁴³ Dr W. Nicol, chairman of the Conference, stated that the inquiry was completed and that it was now time for action. Statistics on the number of poor whites were provided, showing that between the 1916 Cradock Conference, 80 000, and the 1934 Kimberley Conference, 250 000, poor whites existed, which revealed that without action this problem would only get bigger. What is of interest is that the “native” (black) problem is also addressed and that the need to solve the poor-white problem was seen to then lead to helping the other races.²⁴⁴ It was deemed an important congress, so-much-so that the proceedings were printed and published.²⁴⁵ Vosloo states that right after the National Congress concluded it was

²³⁹ DRC leaders were opposed to having him attend. He was South Africa’s first professor of sociology and social work, who advocated American sociology and case-based social welfare.

²⁴⁰ R. Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*, p. 97.

²⁴¹ P. du Toit, *Verslag van die Volkskongres oor die Armblankevraagstuk Gehou in Kimberley, 2-5 Okt, 1934*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1934, p. 3.

²⁴² R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, p. 75.; P. du Toit, *Verslag van die Volkskongres oor die Armblankevraagstuk Gehou in Kimberley, 2-5 Okt, 1934*, p. 5.

²⁴³ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 527.

²⁴⁴ P. du Toit, *Verslag van die Volkskongres oor die Armblankevraagstuk Gehou in Kimberley, 2-5 Okt, 1934*, p. 13.; R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 76–77.

²⁴⁵ P. du Toit, *Verslag van die Volkskongres oor die Armblankevraagstuk Gehou in Kimberley, 2-5 Okt, 1934*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers Beperk, 1934.

followed by a church conference with the aim of reprioritising the churches' principles. The theme was "Christian care of the poor" and the means to do so.²⁴⁶

In 1939, The First Economic Congress of the People was held in Bloemfontein. The focus had changed from primarily social welfare and spiritual rehabilitation of the poor whites to the spiritual and cultural standing of the Afrikaners. The poor white-problem was redefined as the Afrikaner problem and Afrikaner capital was regarded as a solution to the problem. The Afrikaner *volk* had become more aware of their position and supremacy and would not allow the issue of poor whiteness to destroy its position. The 1934 congress examined the problem, whereas the 1939 congress reflected on the problem and did not discuss methods of solving it.²⁴⁷ After leaving the gold standard there was an economic boom and by 1939 there was an expansion of employment opportunities, especially in the manufacturing industries. Between 1932 and 1939, more than 10 000 whites were employed. According to L. Pretorius the poor-white problem had virtually disappeared by 1939 and the Second World War (1939-1945) saw further economic growth.²⁴⁸

In 1950, The Second Economic Congress of the People was held again in Bloemfontein and the end of the poor-white problem was announced. Although poverty still existed among whites it was no longer regarded an issue or a problem that needed solving. The leaving of the gold standard and the doubling of the gold price in the 1930s cannot be stressed enough. It made the funds available to solve the poor-white question. The NP also ensured that by this time they had positioned themselves, using the poor whites and the poor-white problem, to gain power of a more economically stabilised and white South Africa.²⁴⁹

The National Congresses and the church conference are important events and reveal the significance of the Carnegie Commission report and the extent to which the government and DRC would go to, to stem the tide, with a number of other conferences, articles and legislation playing

²⁴⁶ R. Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*, p. 100.

²⁴⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 68-71.

²⁴⁸ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 71-72.

²⁴⁹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 75-76.

a role.²⁵⁰ The Carnegie Commission would play a critical role in the future decision making in South Africa, not only in terms of poor whites, but also the rise of Afrikaner supremacy.²⁵¹

According to Giliomee, the poor-white problem would become the most pressing social issue in Afrikaner politics in the first half of the twentieth century until it was replaced by the search for a new approach to the racial problem.²⁵²

It is interesting to note that according to Giliomee, Afrikaner poverty remained critical until the early 1940s.²⁵³ The poor whites of the 1920s and 1930s were never saved, but rather “died out”.²⁵⁴ Their children received a better education and thus were equipped to find better employment opportunities.²⁵⁵ Between 1933 and 1938, the unemployment figure for whites decreased exponentially.²⁵⁶ The Second World War absorbed the remaining white unemployed and the major problem came to an end just before the start of the apartheid regime in 1948.²⁵⁷ However, there would always be fragments of the poor-white problem prevalent which slowly began to reappear again after democracy in 1994.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁰ R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 78-81.

²⁵¹ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, pp. 515–537.

²⁵² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 315.

²⁵³ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 615.

²⁵⁴ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 652.

²⁵⁵ H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die opkoms van ’n moderne gemeenskap*, p. 11.

²⁵⁶ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 14.

²⁵⁷ A. Grundlingh, “Are We Afrikaners Getting too Rich? Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), 2008, p. 145.; H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 652

²⁵⁸ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 652.; D. Langner, (red.), *Gebroke Land: Armoede in die Afrikaanse Gemeenskap Sedert 1902*. Brandfort: Kraal-Uitgewers, 2009.; A. Grundlingh, “Are We Afrikaners Getting too Rich? Cornucopia and Change in Afrikanerdom in the 1960s”, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 21(2-3), 2008, p. 148.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Brief History of the Poor Whites in the American South

As made apparent in the Introduction, the poor-white problem was not limited to South Africa or an isolated occurrence. Across the Atlantic Ocean, the United States of America faced its own poor-white problem and had its own poor white history, which was more obvious than that of the South African case. In all countries and in every period, there is a caste of people who due to physical or mental handicaps, as well as a lack of economic opportunity or desire, fall into poverty. Poor whites existed in the Northern states, however, it was in the South where the problem was the biggest.¹ It was ironically in the Southern Slave States where the poor-white underclass was formally acknowledged.² It needs to be noted that no one agrees about the origins of the poor whites. Some believe they are the descendants of the colonial indentured servants, others suggest they are part of a lazy, degenerate and unfit population and some believe they never existed as a poor white class at all.³

Early White Poor

As was the case in South Africa, the white population was not indigenous to the USA. Where the San and the Khoi Khoi were the first people in South Africa, in the case of the USA, these were the Native Americans or American Indians. These first people also lived off the land as hunter gathers and some planted crops. The Native Americans had a hierarchy within their clans. There were often fights between clans and people were taken as enslaved people to serve the other tribes. Many whites immigrated to the USA from Britain and other European countries such as Spain, Germany and France.⁴ The differences between whites and the natives caused the whites to consider themselves as superior and the land as unoccupied. Although there were many clashes with the natives, this feeling was again exasperated when slavery was formally introduced in 1619. Like South Africa, race became a factor which added to class in the hierarchy of the society. Whites dominated, but within the hierarchy, where class existed, the poor whites were a problem. In theory, they were regarded as the dominant and superior race, however, in practice they had sunk even lower than the native people and enslaved people.

¹ O.P. Chitwood, F.L. Owesley & H.C. Nixon, *The United States: From Colony to World Power*. Princeton: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1954, p. 369.

² E.J. Bottomley, "Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa", PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 12.

³ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 177.

⁴ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 30-38.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1964, p. 2

The history of the poor whites in North America starts in the 1500s, from the very first attempts at permanent settlement and colonisation.⁵ Two English writers, both named Richard Hakluyt, promoted the idea of English colonies to spread English glory and fortify the Protestant religion against the Spanish Catholics who had mostly settled in Florida and kept looking for means to profit from the land.⁶ Although there were a number of different whites⁷ who had landed in North America to set up colonies, it was the British who were the first intent on mass colonisation for exploitation. At the time, the English were jealous of the Spanish riches that they brought back from the New World.⁸ Although Roanoke “failed”, the British re-established their colony at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607.⁹ The location, although easily fortified, was not ideal. It was surrounded by swamps, too close to the mouth of the river and thus, at high tide salt water backed up to the town trapping the garbage and “human waste” settlers.¹⁰

Like South Africa, the colonialists also came into conflict with the indigenous peoples. For many years there was low-level guerrilla warfare between the British and Native Americans.¹¹ The early American colonialist considered the indigenous people as “barbaric”.¹² According to J.W. Harris, both groups took captives and turned them into enslaved people.¹³ However, the Indians were at first regarded as a source of food and information. Not unlike South Africa, trade took place between the colonisers and the Native Americans and the trade in deer skins in particular made the British very wealthy.¹⁴

The British had a dual agenda when it came to colonising: reducing poverty in Britain by exploiting the new lands as well as transporting idle and unproductive people to the colonies.¹⁵ Thus, with British colonisation came the transference of a number of British cultures, traditions and outlooks. The class system was one such idea.¹⁶ N. Isenberg asserts that this class system evolved from

⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. xiv.

⁶ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 4-6.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, New York: McGraw Hill, 2002, p. 8.

⁷ Norse, Spanish, Portuguese and French to name a few.

⁸ G.D. Crothers, *American History*, p. 2.

⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 8.

¹⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 7.

¹¹ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 17

¹² J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 30.

¹³ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 4 & 9.

¹⁴ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 8 & 17.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 20 & 36.

¹⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 1.

¹⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. xv.

agrarian notions regarding the potential of land, the value of labour and concepts of breeding.¹⁷ Land and class were closely connected and remained the measure of social mobility,¹⁸ with land being regarded as a source of wealth. Those who did not own land had little chance to escape servitude and the bottom ranks.¹⁹ Therefore, it was land that separated rich and poor – the poor were landless and had nothing to pass on.²⁰ Thus, the bulk of the poorer settlers and the Native Americans would be excluded from land ownership, confining them to the lower class of society.²¹ Between the land-owning class and the poor whites there also existed the yeoman class. Neither exceptionally rich or dirt poor. They were a type of middle class. They could own land, some enslaved people and livestock.²² They aspired for more, but the lines between poor whites and yeomen were never ridged and they shared a number of similarities in terms of culture.²³

In the eyes of the colonist, America was viewed as a fertile land full of promise, possibility, opportunity and gold.²⁴ American land was regarded as huge and wasted: it was waiting to be exploited, it was wealth not yet realised, its natural resources were to be turned into valuable commodities which would make Britain wealthy.²⁵ It was also considered a means for Britain to thin out its poor population and prisons. It was believed that Britain's expendable people who would be unloaded and their labour would germinate the wasteland. Interestingly, the British view of wasteland or waste applied to people as well. The new colonies would also require "waste people"²⁶ as well.²⁷ These were the "offal" of British people, who were disposable, idle and did not contribute to the homeland. People who were an eyesore and drain on society who were to be the bulk of the labour force.²⁸ America would become a workhouse for them and the hope was that there would be relief on the poor left in Britain and the poor who went to America would be

¹⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 5.

¹⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. xvii.

¹⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 14.

²⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 35.

²¹ J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 31.

²² F.L. Owsley, *Plain Folk of the Old South*, p. back cover.; D. Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South", *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, pp. 811 & 813

²³ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 17.

²⁴ G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 2-3.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 17.

²⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 19.

²⁶ "Waste people": Men and women who were criminals, highwaymen, whores, rebels, vagrants, convicts as well as indentured servants – those with overwhelming debts or who sought a "better" life by selling their freedom.

²⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 2, 19 & 22. Wasteland meant undeveloped, idle land, in biblical terms desolate and unattended. Land waiting to be made useful. Waste was unrealised wealth. This notion of waste was applied to the people as well.

²⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 10, 13 & 20-21.

better bred up and industrious or useful.²⁹ This would be a “cure” to the “plague of poverty” and the poor could be “purged” from Britain and ultimately, they would become an economic asset.³⁰ According to M. Wray, these people were the precursors to what would become the poor whites in the USA.³¹ However, Britain was not the only nation to do this. Harris points out that towards the end of the seventeenth century France had also claimed a role in colonising what would become North America. The French had previously tried and failed³² by sending colonists that included soldiers, smugglers, prisoners and other undesirables and a small number of indentured servants to the region.³³

It needs to be mentioned that some of these people, especially indentured servants³⁴ were able to work their time and lift themselves out of poverty, with some also becoming wealthy.³⁵ However, most of these people did not change their ways and social mores were practically non-existent. They wallowed in sluggish idleness and nothing inspired them to work, not even starvation or the dream of finding gold. The early British settlement was run like a prison camp,³⁶ with too many goldsmiths, glass workers and gentlemen and not enough farmers who were needed for the long term survival of the colony.³⁷

It was only with the introduction of tobacco as a crop that the economy started to boom and ultimately saved the colony from ruin.³⁸ One such company, the Virginia Company, who had sold the idea of colonisation, pleaded for more indentured servants and labourers to be sent from Britain and thus, most of the tobacco workers came from England, spreading across the countryside. Obtaining more people from Britain and by increasing the population through expanding families became essential.³⁹ Tobacco crops depleted the soil quickly and large tracts of land were left eroded and useless. The planters used the Native American techniques to plant the tobacco weed and once the soil was no longer fertile, they moved to the next piece.⁴⁰ Many

²⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 21-24.

³⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 21-22.

³¹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 17.

³² J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 4 & 30-33.

³³ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 32.

³⁴ These included the poor of Britain, farm labourers, clerks, textile workers, accountants and children of the gentry.

³⁵ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 11, 19 & 29-30.

³⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 25.

³⁷ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 7.

³⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 26.

³⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 34-37.; J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 10-12.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 12-14 W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 15. The Native Americans grew tobacco on a small scale as it was mostly used in medicine and for ceremonial practices. The planters grew it on a large scale causing irrefutable damage.

poor whites ended up on these depleted infertile tracks of land. Land was also not distributed equally, which further increased the class divide. Those who paid their own passage to America before 1616 were given one hundred acres. After 1616, those who paid their own way only received 50 acres. The head-right system was practiced – the more people in a planters' group, the more land was allocated. As a result, contract or indentured servants found it difficult to escape their low status,⁴¹ and over time this became even more difficult. With the need to increase profits, as well as make use of the wasteland, the first African enslaved people were brought to English America in 1619 to work the land. K.L. Merritt argues that slavery would play a huge role in American life, especially in the South. It was in the antebellum South⁴² where the majority of African-Americans⁴³ were found, which led to accusations and the theory that a reliance on slavery led to the creation of poor whites.⁴⁴ By the start of the eighteenth century, indentured servants declined and there was a steep rise in the number of African enslaved people that were imported.⁴⁵ This reliance on enslaved people rendered free white labour superfluous and produced a group of whites unable to find work or land and a group that could not afford enslaved people themselves.⁴⁶

As maintained by Isenberg, class divisions were firmly entrenched by the middle of the seventeenth century, with a widening gap.⁴⁷ The year 1630 marked the first large migration from Britain with the aim of establishing a permanent community. Most were Puritan families who made the journey to New England tempted by land ownership.⁴⁸ However, in 70 years' time, indentured servants did not have much chance of owning their own land. They needed to become tenants or move elsewhere. Additionally, the most promising land was never equally available to all. The royal surveyors ensured that large, wealthy planters had the first choice of new, undeveloped land. Thus, the larger tracts became more scarce and landed in the hands of a concentrated few.⁴⁹

⁴¹ M.R. Mell, "Poor Whites of the South", *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 156.; J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 15.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 26.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.

⁴² This refers to what was deemed the south before the Civil War (1861-1865).

⁴³ Black Africans who had been captured and shipped to the USA and sold as slaves.

⁴⁴ K.L. Merritt, "A Second Degree of Slavery: How Black Emancipation Freed the Deep South's Poor Whites", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Georgia, 2014.

⁴⁵ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 23-24.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 28.

⁴⁶ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 28.

⁴⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 29.

⁴⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 41.

By the eighteenth century, more people were coming to America from Britain and Europe and America's own population was also growing.⁵⁰ Expansion into America increased with the lack of available land in Virginia. By 1663, King Charles II of England had issued a colonial charter empowering the fortification of the settlement and governing of the colony of Carolina.⁵¹ However, it would be on the basis of class that land would be allocated.⁵² There were already poor white families living in Carolina who were squatters and not legitimate patent holders. These poor Virginians, many who were former indentured servants, were regarded as refuse and "lazy lubbers".⁵³ The poor-white squatters, unstable government and the difficult environmental terrain led to Carolina being divided in 1712 and again in 1732. The South prospered with their new plantation crop, rice,⁵⁴ but North Carolina would become known as "Poor Carolina". It was a swampy refuge for the "dangerous" poor and landless. It became the "first white trash colony".⁵⁵ Its commercial opportunities were limited due to the soil, climate and lack of good ports.⁵⁶ According to Isenberg, it was regarded as "worthless land" and equally "worthless settlers".⁵⁷ Generally, these poor tried to make a living off the land or resorted to smuggling.⁵⁸

One of the first people to have written about the poor whites of the American South was William Byrd. In 1728, on the orders of King George II of England, Byrd led a technical expedition into the swamps and backwoods of North Carolina and Virginia. This was done in order to chart the dividing line between the two colonies. After his travels, Byrd compiled two versions of his "adventure", entitled *Secret History* and *The history of the dividing line betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*.⁵⁹ In his travels, in the remote periphery of Anglo-Saxon society, he encountered the poor white and describes them as follows:

In roofless cattle pens and burrows covered only with tree bark, Byrd unearthed an array of 'indolent wrenches' with 'custard complexions' who practiced their vices publicly and their

⁵⁰ M.R. Mell, "Poor Whites of the South", *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 155.; J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 39.

⁵¹ Which was named after himself.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 19. J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 15-16.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.

Carolina would be divided into three: North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia.

⁵² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 43-44.

⁵³ Meaning stupid and clumsy oafs. North Carolina would also become known as Lubberland. N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 46.

⁵⁴ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 17.

⁵⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁶ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 37.

⁵⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 50.

⁵⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 52.

virtues in intense privacy; who lived in a 'dirty state of nature' and were alternately subjected to 'gross humours' and 'a lazy creeping habit' that kept them squatting on the frontier.

This was the picture of the poor whites he painted and soon after he began to ponder the reasons for their existence.⁶⁰ Here he encountered a man who had a skilled trade, processed good land and who was healthy, yet preferred to live in a home without a roof. Byrd's observation was that this was the "wretchedest scenes of poverty", where the little work done was performed almost entirely by the poor females.⁶¹

Byrd contemplated their idleness and was convinced that it was their "lubbers' blood" that accounted for their disposition.⁶² He was one of the first to find environmental and generic reasons to explain the reason for the poor white. Living near a swamp, the climate, diseases and unhealthy diet were some reasons that persisted into the twentieth century and can even be seen in the later Carnegie Commission's investigation.⁶³ He also describes their appearance as different from other whites: "lost noses and palates, hideously deformed, flat noses..."⁶⁴ These poor whites were viewed as different, odd and backcountry curiosities.⁶⁵ Byrd's idea was to reform this "wilderness" by draining the swamp and replacing the lubbers with Swiss-Germans settlers.⁶⁶

Accounts by others regarding the poor whites described them as "the meanest, most rustic and squalid part of the species". In 1737, North Carolina's Governor, Gabriel Johnson, and a passing traveller in the 1770s referred to them as "ignorant wretches... strange outlandish folk".⁶⁷ Again, they were described as different with ghastly complexions, visible sores on their bodies, missing limbs, teeth, palates and noses who wore "cotton rags" and were "enveloped in dirt and nastiness".⁶⁸ This was done mostly to distinguish them in terms of other whites. Contemporary

⁶⁰ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 3.

⁶¹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 21-22 & 32.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 53-54.

⁶² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 54

⁶³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

⁶⁴ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 54.

⁶⁵ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 17.

⁶⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 55.

⁶⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 55.

⁶⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 55.

observers believed they were “evolving/de-evolving”, in the process of creating a new strange breed.⁶⁹

Harris states that by 1730, the European population in America was on the move for a number of reasons, mostly due to land. They moved from the coast, up rivers, into the interior forested backcountry. British Colonies expanded north, south and west, flourished economically and saw an increase in the population. North America was becoming a land of multiple peoples and by the middle of the eighteenth century, the expansion became relentless.⁷⁰

The third part of the original charter of Carolina, which was initially issued by King Charles II, would become Georgia. Georgia was different from Virginia and the Carolinas. It was a new opportunity for poor whites.⁷¹ James Oglethorpe, the founder of Georgia, was an ex-military man who used Georgia to try and reconstruct class relations and rescue the poor. He claimed it would “breed up and preserve our own Countrymen” and he refused to permit slavery as well as alcohol and aimed to replace the reliance on indentured enslaved people. Thus, his idea was to protect the “vulnerable planting class”.⁷² It would be a free labour colony where the disadvantaged would receive a fair chance. Georgia was regarded as a charitable venture. It would act as a barrier against Spanish Florida and be a middle ground between the wealth of South Carolina and the poverty of North Carolina.⁷³ There would be no large-scale plantations and no squatting by poor whites. Parliament in England supported the operation and it was overseen by a board of twenty trustees.⁷⁴ It was mostly populated by Scottish Highlanders, German, Swiss and French Huguenots.⁷⁵ However, the prohibition of enslaved people and alcohol did not last and by 1750, the right to own enslaved people was granted, a planter elite quickly rose and many lost their land, which acted as collateral.⁷⁶

⁶⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 56.

⁷⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 35, 39 & 49.

⁷¹ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 41.

⁷² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 47.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 46.

⁷³ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 41.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 56-58.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 22 & 32.

⁷⁴ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 56-58.

⁷⁵ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 42.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 58.

⁷⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 62-63.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 23, 30 & 190.

Not unlike South Africa's inwards migration, the frontier continued to move westwards and it was in the backcountry where whites became isolated from people, news, market goods and owned very few servants or enslaved people. There were many differences among the people.⁷⁷ Wray explains that elites closed opportunities and hoarded land and other resources, fewer free whites were able to achieve upward mobility and the landless free whites increased in size, therefore, many chose to settle on the frontier and outlying zones, living a nomadic life.⁷⁸ An Anglican minister, Charles Woodmanson, described these people as "...very poor – owing to their extreme indolence... They delight in their present low, lazy, sluttish heathenish, hellish life, and seem not desirous of changing it."⁷⁹

Regardless of this isolation and desolation, colonists felt the strongest connection to Britain because of regional and family ties. Initially, the majority of white colonists regarded themselves as English or British. However, due to the change in their environment, their cultures and societies were very different. It was difficult to duplicate the same ways of life and the white population became a creole people, conscious of a European heritage, but born in America.⁸⁰ Much of Britain's way of life was emulated by the colonies. Empire was a matter of material culture and political power that shaped British America.⁸¹

Thus, initially much of their way of life was based on what they knew and brought with them, but the change in environment, the way of life and the news from their "mother countries" also changed the people, their outlooks and their future. By the second half of the eighteenth century, much of North America was made up of British colonies. American political leaders were disillusioned by British corruption.⁸² New taxes, administrative reforms, evangelical revolts and acts saw a number of colonies declare their independence from Britain. Ultimately, the Declaration of Independence was signed in 1776, and the War of Independence⁸³ (1775-1783) was fought by those who wanted their freedom and by the British and those loyal to them.⁸⁴ Poor whites made up the majority of those who served in militias and armies that repelled British forces.⁸⁵ The

⁷⁷ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 42 & 48.

⁷⁸ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.

⁷⁹ R.R. Beeman, *Evolution of the Southern Backcountry: A Case Study of Lunenburg County, Virginia, 1746–1832*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984, pp. 23, 100–101.

⁸⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 18-19 & 38-39.

⁸¹ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 48-49.

⁸² J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 50.

⁸³ Also known as the Revolutionary War, but for the purposes of this study will be called the War of Independence.

⁸⁴ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 52-56.

⁸⁵ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 39.

patriots finally won, and colonies became states.⁸⁶ It would only be later through migration, war, purchases and acquisitions that North America would become “united” as we know it today.

A Developing Problem

With the creation of the United States of America on 4 July 1776, it made the existence of a geographical “South” possible. These states were different in population, culture, economy and had a keen interest in the continuation of slavery, as their economy was based mostly on agriculture.⁸⁷ The land-owners regarded themselves as patriarchs and guardians of inferior blacks and poor whites, guardians of civilisation.⁸⁸ Thus, they argued that blacks were not equal and were morally and intellectually inferior, who could only lead productive lives under a white master. Thus, the need to stress white supremacy to ensure power and control was vital and therefore there needed to be some unity with the poor whites.⁸⁹ The Declaration of Independence and so-called “equality” had a very different reality for the poor whites.⁹⁰ In the wake of the Revolution, economic prosperity had actually declined for most Americans.⁹¹ It was after the War of Independence when the poor whites were formed into another class. They would become a group who were unsuccessful, could not afford good land or participate in the cotton industry. They were pushed to the edge of society and were trapped in a system that punished them for their economic disadvantage.⁹² Their place in the newly independent republic was uncertain and tenuous to say the least.⁹³ Thus, the nineteenth century held two extremes in terms of poor whites: those who suffered from poverty and malnutrition because they were lazy or those, despite their industriousness, had been pushed off the best land by planter greed.⁹⁴

Before the War of Independence, the whites in both the North and South were relatively the same – relatively poor migrants from Britain who worked hard to tackle the wilderness and they were

⁸⁶ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 65.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 89-90.

⁸⁷ W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 97.; J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877* pp. 65-68 & 75.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 21-33.

⁸⁸ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 179.

⁸⁹ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, p. 161.

⁹⁰ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. 60.

⁹¹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 105.

⁹² A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 10.

⁹³ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 18.

⁹⁴ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 178.

primarily a direct product of the soil.⁹⁵ In 1803, Louisiana was acquired from France and the US doubled in size. The problem populating this vast area was the poor education and antiquated farming techniques. Thus, the tenant farmers and sharecroppers who occupied the land were never taught the skills to develop the land and would also never own it.⁹⁶ It was in the antebellum (the period before the Civil War, 1861-1865) when society and ways of life changed and agricultural processes forced the landless whites off the land and confined them to isolated and poor patches of land barely suitable for subsistence farming.⁹⁷

By 1830, the poor whites had acquired the vote, however, there were very few politicians or leaders who took their needs, situation and position in society into account. Power relations remained unchanged, the age old equation between political control and economic wealth was left in place. Thus, the majority of the political power rested in the hands of the slave and plantation owners,⁹⁸ and while promises were made, they rarely materialised into action.⁹⁹ During the first half of the nineteenth century, the exception was David Crocket, a dedicated defender of squatter rights, himself having been a squatter. As a politician, he took up the cause of the landless poor whites. Although he owned enslaved people, he opposed slave owning planters who pushed squatters off their land, as well as the engrossment of vast tracts of lands by these large plantation owners.¹⁰⁰ The period 1805-1833 saw a number of poor whites and yeomen farmers obtain land through programmes such as the Georgia Lottery. Native American lands were distributed through this lottery scheme.¹⁰¹ However, the poor white was never the “poster child” of political equality.¹⁰² Poor whites stood as an anomaly in a society that equated white skin with independence and freedom.¹⁰³ K.L. Thomas explains that many poor whites allied themselves with the planters because they realised that the maintenance of white privilege was also the

⁹⁵ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 30 & 65. A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, pp. 33 & 43.

⁹⁶ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 31.

⁹⁷ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 25.

⁹⁸ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 18.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 113.; R.W. Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865”, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 33.

⁹⁹ G. Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South”, Washington: Buell & Blanchard, 1856, p. 1.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 132, 157. C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 183.

¹⁰⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 131.

¹⁰¹ J. Gigantino, New Georgia Encyclopaedia, ‘Land Lottery System’, <<https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/land-lotterysystem/w.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/poor-whites/>>, n.d. Accessed: 11 April 2022.

¹⁰² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 131.

¹⁰³ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 42.

maintenance of newly espoused democratic ideals of personhood resulting from the Revolution.¹⁰⁴ Due to limited education, the poor whites of the antebellum period resulted in very few being politically active.¹⁰⁵ The poor whites were deliberately kept uneducated by the master class and few had any chance to rise out of their poverty.¹⁰⁶ According to A.E. Thompson, these poor whites were rendered helpless due to poverty, a lack of education, trade skills, inadequate medical resources, landlessness and virtually no social status.¹⁰⁷ They had no schools, churches, town halls, stores or libraries. They could not write or even read the Bible. Most were always seriously ill with hookworm, malaria and rickets, all of which went untreated. Regardless, these were a proud free people with a sense of racial superiority.¹⁰⁸ The wealthier, land-owning class maintained enough of a relationship with poor whites and white labourers to prevent political unrest that could surface if these two subjected groups realised their common interests.¹⁰⁹ Similarly to South Africa, whites were united by their race and having a white skin made them one step above the blacks, however, they were divided by class and the plantation owners did not let them forget that¹¹⁰. However, like South Africa, their material and economic condition differed very little to that of enslaved people. Thus, poor whites were class conscious and as the antebellum period wore on, they became resentful of slave-owners, who were mostly the landowners.¹¹¹ According to Forret, unlike South Africa, racial appeals carried less meaning among poor whites than among whites from other classes and among many there was a sense of camaraderie with the blacks.¹¹² Furthermore, the variety of poor white and black relationships suggested that race was limited in its power to unite Southern whites across the class lines.¹¹³ Bolton, however, argues that although there were connections between the poor classes, it was the nature of the lives of poor whites that limited the unifying potential of factors such as kinship.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁴ K.L. Thomas, "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 9 & 31.

¹⁰⁷ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 6.

¹⁰⁸ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ K.L. Thomas, "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 126.; See chapter 9.

¹¹¹ P.H. Buck, "Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South", *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 54.

¹¹² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 19.

¹¹³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 18.; See chapter nine.

¹¹⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 52.

Thus, the period before the Civil War can be regarded as the time of the “Old South” or the antebellum period and the period after the Civil War can be regarded as the time of the “New South” or postbellum period.¹¹⁵ Merritt argues that although poor whites existed, as soon as whites landed on the shores of the USA, the idea of a separate class of whites mainly came to the forefront during the period between the two wars. The poor whites were generally defined as owning neither enslaved people nor land and just before the Civil War they comprised approximately one-third of the South’s white population. These poor whites generally had very few opportunities to rise above their economic situation.¹¹⁶

The War of Independence removed barriers which previously prohibited migration and thus, there was a flood of poor whites moving westwards, but still always on the periphery.¹¹⁷ The western territories were believed for all intent and purposes to be American colonies.¹¹⁸ The poor whites moved because they hoped for land, a better living and more freedom.¹¹⁹ Yet, land ownership remained a scarce commodity to the poor white, as land meant power and wealth and since many poor whites did not own land, it meant they had few means of climbing the social ladder.¹²⁰ Historian C.C. Bolton claims that the acquisition of land remained elusive to the poor whites and many were forced into casual work or farmed as tenants/sharecroppers on surplus land of other landowners.¹²¹ There were many more non-slave holders who either owned little tracts of land or no land at all.¹²²

Moreover, slavery, increasing commercialised farming and the credit based economy all limited the economic opportunities of the poor whites. Agriculture moved toward marketable crops causing more landless people and the vicious cycles of credit and debt, ante – and post-bellum, ensnared many in poverty, many lost their land and never recovered.¹²³ Large plantation and slave owners bought the mortgages of small farmers, forcing more off the land to become

¹¹⁵ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, p. xi.

¹¹⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 3 & 9.

¹¹⁷ G.D. Crothers, *American History*, p. 71.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 117-120 & 260.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 106.

¹¹⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 105.

¹¹⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 3.

¹²⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. xvii, 30 & 106.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, p. 31.

¹²¹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 11.

¹²² M.R. Mell, “Poor Whites of the South”, *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 157.; G. Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South”, p. 2.; R.W. Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865”, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 32.

¹²³ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 11, 15 & 24.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 4.

squatters and tenants.¹²⁴ Agricultural poverty had become so desperate that many landless farmers sought any source of alternative employment.¹²⁵ Thus, many poor whites worked as casual labour when they could find work, at times alongside enslaved people,¹²⁶ working as farm labourers, farm tenants, artisans, factory or mill workers, railroad workers, miners and stock drivers. Wage labour by poor white women and children was also not unusual, it involved not only household work, but also as farm labourers, hired hands, in mills and factories. Slavery meant that long-term employment was hard to find.¹²⁷ Many historians agree that non-free labour prevented the establishment of a regular wage system and it was not only on the land that poor whites competed with enslaved people for work, but also as artisans and factory workers.¹²⁸ Many poor whites had no choice but to take on piecemeal work, which usually referred to any work outside of the realm of agriculture. Cotton mills did offer a new opportunity and stable income to many poor whites, especially women, however, some of these workers were later replaced by enslaved people.¹²⁹ As was the case in South Africa, it was felt necessary to keep the poor whites in the rural areas.¹³⁰ In the cases where poor whites worked in a mill, a mill town was created. Like and unlike South Africa, the upper classes did not want the urban areas to be corrupted by the poor whites, but camouflaged their self-interests by claiming to save the poor whites from the temptations of urban life.¹³¹

Slavery not only regulated white labour to a supplemental status, usually seasonal, but also kept wages of the white labourers very low.¹³² Poor whites were a convenient, supplemental labour force, a temporary expedient to draw upon in times of need and usually paid a small wage in cash or goods.¹³³ According to Merritt, slavery drove the wages of Southern labourers below that of

¹²⁴ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 177.

¹²⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. xi.

¹²⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 149.

¹²⁷ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 8, 10-11, 15, 33 & 38-39.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 12 & 23.

¹²⁸ M.R. Mell, "Poor Whites of the South", *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 158.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 212-214.; H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 33.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 4.; R.W. Griffin, "Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865", *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 26.

¹²⁹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 40-41.

¹³⁰ R.W. Griffin, "Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865", *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 28.

¹³¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 19.; R.W. Griffin, "Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865", *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 36.

¹³² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 17 & 99.; R.W. Griffin, "Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865", *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 31.

¹³³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 41.

their Northern counterparts.¹³⁴ It has been argued that poor whites avoided certain work because of the stigma attached as “nigger work”, but most were only too happy to obtain any work with an income regardless of how small.¹³⁵ In essence, as historian E.D. Genovese argues, slavery as an economic system condemned poor whites to more than financial baseness, it also condemned them to “social marginalisation”.¹³⁶

Many small farmers who were thwarted in their efforts to become land-owners also moved to new counties westwards.¹³⁷ Due to work being fleeting and hard to find, those who did not have some form of land were very mobile, moving from place to place seeking some kind of income, some only becoming temporary residents.¹³⁸ Poor whites owned very little and thus, it was easy for them to pack up and move.¹³⁹ The poor whites had limited choices, remaining on the fringes of plantation society as low-paid landless agricultural workers, they headed for the least desirable land in the sand hills and pine barrens, became semi-skilled wage workers in factories or moved with the frontier.¹⁴⁰ Farmers also did not want to employ poor whites because they claimed they were unreliable and likely to move.¹⁴¹ Therefore, it was not unusual for poor whites to shift back and forth between the farm and mill. The mobility postponed a sharp break between rural life and provided the mill workers with a firm sense of alternative opportunities.¹⁴² Those untethered to the land formed part of the ever expanding population of landless squatters heading west.¹⁴³ As the white frontier moved westwards, there was no automatic guarantee that there would be land or economic success for the poorest of the new white arrivals. Many poor white families moved westwards seeking economic opportunities.¹⁴⁴ Most of those who did move west were unable to

¹³⁴ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 4.

¹³⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. xi.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 5.; P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 44.

¹³⁶ E.D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965, p. 23.

¹³⁷ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 177.

¹³⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 7, 33 & 70.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 5 & 29.

¹³⁹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 34.

¹⁴⁰ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 177-178.

¹⁴¹ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 62.

¹⁴² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 98.

¹⁴³ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 105.

¹⁴⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 7 & 12.

improve their economic status.¹⁴⁵ The image they portrayed was pathetic and striking to travellers and observers, but it was not new. The poor white resident of the frontier was the updated version of William Byrd's "lazy lubber".¹⁴⁶ Both Isenberg and Bolton agree that the westwards settlement held positive images of free land, hardworking settlers who would build the nation from the wilderness.

However, in reality the lands of the west were not free during the antebellum period. The best lands were settled and the Homestead Act (1862), granting free land to settlers, remained in congressional debate for over eighteen years.¹⁴⁷ Many landless poor whites in the antebellum period took advantage of the laws and customs that guaranteed the common rights of property. This prevented private property owners from usurping the common uses of land, such as fishing rights and the right for stock to graze on unfenced cropland. It was felt that this belonged to all citizens.¹⁴⁸ The poor whites had a very loose definition of property rights and believed in the right to use unimproved land.¹⁴⁹ The Pre-emption Act of 1841¹⁵⁰ saw some landless poor whites gain land, not the best land that had already been snatched up, and the land available was limited in space and time. Some, however, did not simply have the capital to purchase land no matter how cheap it was.¹⁵¹ Land prices also became too expensive for many poor whites and the Species Circular Act of 1836¹⁵² made it even more difficult as land had to be transacted in gold or silver.¹⁵³ Most poor whites kept moving, but were never able to obtain the land they sought. Therefore, the dreams of the poor whites to own land in the west were met with obstacles, many from the federal government's land distribution plan and without a homestead law, were unable to compete with economically powerful individuals.¹⁵⁴ By 1850, 35% of the population in the new South-western States owned no land of their own and those who were tenants could easily be reduced to

¹⁴⁵ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 70.

¹⁴⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 106.

¹⁴⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 149.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 66.

¹⁴⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 4.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 41.

¹⁴⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 10.

¹⁵⁰ The Pre-emption Act of 1841 permitted squatters who were living on federal government owned land to purchase up to 160 acres at a very low price (not less than \$1.25 per acre) before the land was to be offered for sale to the general public.

¹⁵¹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 112.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 74.

¹⁵² An executive order issued by President Andrew Jackson requiring that payment for the purchase of public lands be made exclusively in gold or silver.

¹⁵³ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 3-4.

¹⁵⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 82.

squatters. Many of those who made the migration for new land never broke into the landowning class.¹⁵⁵ These people lived off the grid, squatting down anywhere, rarely attended church or school, and remained a symbol of poverty.¹⁵⁶ Historian J.W. Flynt declared that many of the squatters pushed ahead of settlement and illegally occupied land.¹⁵⁷ They were pushed off the land by oncoming plantations,¹⁵⁸ and in some cases they became tenants/sharecroppers, but there was no security for them.¹⁵⁹ Ultimately, it was the poor whites that moved poverty westwards.¹⁶⁰

Due to the commercial, intensive plantations, as was seen with the tobacco fields in Virginia, a lot of land became “worn-out” and the soil exhausted which resulted in the planters moving to new land and leaving the old fields with very little to offer the poor whites who settled on them. Thus, it was the land that no one wanted, usually unproductive land, where the poor whites could be found.¹⁶¹ The poor whites mostly resided in the rural isolated areas of the South comprising of thickly forested areas, along marshy shores, amid mountainous terrain, sandy barrens and the backcountry.¹⁶² They had no school, church, library, town-hall or store. If they became ill, a family member or neighbour would try to do some healing with herbal remedies.¹⁶³

Already from the 1830s, abolitionists put forth the idea that poor whites of the South were victims of the immoral slave economy as they were pushed to the margins with no means of economic viability or social advancement.¹⁶⁴ Helper stated that five million poor whites suffered a “second degree slavery” as a result of living in a slave society. It was land and enslaved people that were important signifiers of social status and thus, poor whites who had neither, were regarded a

¹⁵⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 107 & 112. Squatter in this instance refers to: A person who illegally occupies land he does not own.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 71.

¹⁵⁶ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 2.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 4.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 107.

¹⁵⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 4.

¹⁵⁸ M.R. Mell, “Poor Whites of the South”, *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 157.

¹⁵⁹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁶⁰ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 83.

¹⁶¹ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 22.; M.R. Mell, “Poor Whites of the South”, *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 157.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Vol. 1, p. 260.

¹⁶² W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 23.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 104-105.; P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 42.

¹⁶³ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 178.

¹⁶⁴ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 18.

distinct economic class.¹⁶⁵ Helper compared the lives of poor whites and enslaved people as follows:

As a general rule, poor white persons are regarded with less esteem and attention than negroes, and although the condition of the latter is wretched beyond description, vast numbers of the former are infinitely worse off. A cunningly devised mockery of freedom is guaranteed to them and that is all.¹⁶⁶

He further stated, that it was a small, but wealthy group of slaveholders who controlled politics and dominated the economy, lording over the South, describing this as “a disgrace and curse to humanity”.¹⁶⁷

Bolton affirms that poor whites and enslaved people were the backbone of the antebellum South’s work force, at times working side by side with enslaved people for the benefit of others. They also experienced similarly deprived material circumstances with substandard housing, poor food and scanty clothing.¹⁶⁸ Poor whites and black enslaved people who picked alongside each other for the benefit of wealthy plantation and slave owners met on similar grounds of poverty and dependency. Poor white freedom became blurred.¹⁶⁹ Ironically, in some situations, enslaved people lived in better material conditions than white labourers because they were considered property worthy of being protected in a paternalistic system.¹⁷⁰

F.L. Olmsted agreed with Helper and was shocked by the poor whites’ conditions. He commented on their ignorance, poverty, and desperation. He too was convinced that the poor whites were worse off than enslaved people and described them as ignorant and immoral, as well as indolent and unambitious.¹⁷¹ *The North Star*, an abolitionist newspaper, stated that the effects of slavery were not beneficial to poor whites and “The slaveholder knows wherein lies his power to enslave one class and trample upon another.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 33.

¹⁶⁶ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, pp. 32-33.

¹⁶⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 105.

¹⁷⁰ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 30.

¹⁷¹ F.L. Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*. New York: Knopf, 1861, pp. 44 & 84.

¹⁷² J.G. Palfrey, “American Slavery. It’s Effects Upon the Non-Slave Holding Population of the South”, *The North Star*, 10 March 1848, p. 4.

However, those who supported slavery viewed the poor whites in another light. Secessionists and pro-slavery apologists viewed the poor-white problem as heredity defects and “bad blood”.¹⁷³ Sociologist and slave holder Hundley argued that the root of poor whiteness was not due to the slave system, but due to “tainted blood”.¹⁷⁴ He believed, like many others, that their poverty was as a result of laziness and voluntary choices made by those beyond the help of respectable Southern society.¹⁷⁵ He claimed that poor whites chose to live in distinct and isolated places; that they did little farming and survived mostly from hunting and fishing; and described them as superstitious, lazy, illiterate and perpetually drunk. Their poverty was of their own making and choices.¹⁷⁶ By 1860, Hundley was of the group who rejoiced that the poor whites had remained mostly rural.¹⁷⁷ His ideology appealed to many and even many Northerners who opposed slavery saw the poor whites of the South as a dangerous breed.¹⁷⁸

It was argued by some that many of these poor whites de-evolved and had fallen below African enslaved people on the “scale of humanity”.¹⁷⁹ By the 1850s, during the debates of westward expansion and slavery, many Northerners used the poor whites’ condition as “proof” of the debilitating effects of slavery on free labour. It closed opportunities for non-slaveholding whites in a free market economy. Slavery was seen to crush ambition and poor whites were regarded as helpless victims thereof.¹⁸⁰ Contemporary Commissioner of Maine and editor of the *Washington Republican*, George Weston, wrote in his famous pamphlet entitled “The poor whites of the South” that the poor whites were “sinking deeper and more hopelessly into barbarism with every succeeding generation”.¹⁸¹ Observers remarked about their appearances, often labelling them as a distinctive race to “decent” whites. Many were emancipated, ragged, dirty, barefooted, with a ghostly, yellowish white tinge to their waxy complexion, their hair cotton white and called tallow and the children looked permanently aged and deformed with distended stomachs. It was believed that there was no possibility of improvement or social mobility nor of escaping the stigma.¹⁸²

¹⁷³ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 18.

¹⁷⁴ D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 274.

¹⁷⁵ D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 274.

¹⁷⁶ D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, pp. 259-274.; I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, pp. 9-13.

¹⁷⁷ D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 258.

¹⁷⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 3.

¹⁸⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 136.

¹⁸¹ G. Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South”, p. 5.

¹⁸² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 135-136.

The connotation that surrounds the poor white has not changed. Regardless of the cause of their poverty, they have always been perceived as separate and different. In the current South, the phrase means a person with little or no property who has low social standing because of certain negative attributes such as irresponsibility, laziness and shiftlessness. This was the same in the antebellum period.¹⁸³

In the US, poor whites had a number of derogatory names and connotations assigned to them.¹⁸⁴ Poor “white trash” was the most enduring insult of all. According to Isenberg, the term “white trash” first began appearing in print from the early 1820s, but by the 1850s, it had gained in popularity.¹⁸⁵ Chitwood *et al*/state that in some cases, it merited the designation.¹⁸⁶ “Squatter” and “cracker” are also terms that were adopted from English notions of idleness and vagrancy and were again commonly used in print.¹⁸⁷ The names assigned to the poor whites and their connotations developed and changed over time, but, all were derogatory.¹⁸⁸ Unlike in South Africa, where the poor whites were pitied, the poor whites in the South were loathed.¹⁸⁹ A.E. Thompson argues that these negative depictions of poor whites in the antebellum period are very much like those of today in the twenty-first century.¹⁹⁰

There have been many causes and reasons for the poor-white problem.¹⁹¹ Some schools argue that it was through their own doing, idleness and laziness, while other schools argue that the reasons go far beyond this.¹⁹² In the antebellum South, the distinction was made between whites who were poor and poor whites.¹⁹³ Whites who were poor were regarded as suffering from depressed economic circumstances, poor whites were usually regarded as quantitatively poor and possessed of deficiencies in moral character.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸³ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ These will be discussed further in chapter seven.

¹⁸⁵ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 135.

¹⁸⁶ O.P. Chitwood, F.L. Owesley & H.C. Nixon, *The United States: From Colony to World Power*, p. 369.

¹⁸⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 107.

¹⁸⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 135.

¹⁸⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 149.

¹⁹⁰ A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹¹ Some of the causes will be examined in chapter 8.

¹⁹² G. Weston, “The Poor Whites of the South”, p. 2.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 137.

¹⁹³ This is similar to what was later discussed by Wilcocks in the Carnegie Commission.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 74, 80, 139.

¹⁹⁴ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 9.; K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, pp. 18-19.

By 1860, there were eight million whites in the South and Professor J.E. Cairnes estimated that approximately five million were poor whites, making them more than half the population. These were people whom Cairnes regarded as "...in a condition little removed from savage life, eking out a wretched substance by hunting, by fishing, by hiring themselves out for occasional jobs, by plunder."¹⁹⁵ The Civil War was fought over the issue of slavery and the westwards expansion of states. The constitution protected slavery, but could be changed with a two-thirds majority. Therefore, the slave states began to feel threatened with the increase of non-slave states.¹⁹⁶ Helper believed that ending slavery would be in the economic interests of poor whites¹⁹⁷ F.L. Olmstead expressed that Northerners traced the essential reasons for Southern poverty and backwardness to slavery. Many believed that slavery kept the South poor and its people lazy.¹⁹⁸ It was argued that winning the War and ending slavery would liberate the enslaved people, but also the poor whites.¹⁹⁹ Slavery was regarded as a hindrance to development and resulted in the near absence of a middle class and the decay of work ethic. Plantation slavery had exhausted the soil and there was very little enterprise and improvement between Southern Slave States. The South was regarded as different and distinct and the poor whites were "othered".²⁰⁰ The argument that slavery was based on black inferiority and that blacks were only fit for labour lost its power due to the circumstance that the poor whites found themselves in.²⁰¹ Poor whites interacted with slaves, some even helping them to escape. Thus, their behaviour and mere presence was a threat to the tranquillity of the enslaved population.²⁰² It was feared that without a total victory, the poor whites would outbreed the elite class, and if corrupted by the North, overwhelm them at the ballot box.²⁰³

¹⁹⁵ J.E. Cairnes, *The Slave Power: Its Character, Career, and Probable Designs*. New York: Carleton, 1862, pp. 54-55.

¹⁹⁶ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 67, 70, 92-94, 170-178.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 95-100.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 1*, pp. 102-107 & 203-206.

¹⁹⁷ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁸ F.L. Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, pp. 8, 11 & 19.

¹⁹⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 159.; S.V. Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865", *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 39.

²⁰⁰ H. Coombs, "Poor, Deluded, Ignorant Masses": A Study of the Poor Non-Slaveholding Whites of the Antebellum South", Undergraduate dissertation, University of Bristol, 2021, pp. 8-10.; J. Winders, "White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in Postbellum US South", *Cultural Geographies*, 10, 2003, p. 46.; A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 8.

²⁰¹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 105.

²⁰² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 107-110 & 184.; S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 179.

²⁰³ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 163.

Many poor whites enlisted in a Confederate company.²⁰⁴ According to Hart, the poor whites felt they had a good and logical reason to fight – “a white man was always a white man, and as long as slavery endured, the poorest and most ignorant of the white race could always feel he had something to look down upon.”²⁰⁵ It was this acceptance of white supremacy that motivated them to accept slavery and this sense of racial superiority is what they fought for during the War.²⁰⁶ The Conscription Act of 1862 saw too many poor whites joining the War, however, the unfair policy sparked grievances and due to the poor conditions whereby their suffering became intolerable, many deserted to return home to take care of their families.²⁰⁷ By the outbreak of the Civil War a number of yeomen and struggling whites had become part of the downward mobile trend, swelling the poor white population.²⁰⁸ The Civil War saw many poor whites who had trouble making an existence under “favourable circumstance” barely surviving. The families of those poor men who remained in the Confederate army had to rely on the charity of neighbours to sustain them. This was mostly complex as many poor whites had lived on the precipice. Those who were removed due to the War meant that many were left behind unable to make a living from the land, families and were destitute.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, Wartime inflation eroded wages, wages had increased during the War, but so had food which had become a scarce commodity because many planters continued planting non-food crops such as cotton.²¹⁰ Flynt explains that those left behind were often inflicted by home guards and Confederate cavalry searching for deserters who would in turn pillage and loot from the poor.²¹¹ Although aid was given, the number of poor whites increased. Although those in the rural areas suffered greatly, it was the poor whites in the urban areas where the suffering was the worst. No food for home consumption was produced and starvation led to riots.²¹² Numerous attempts at helping the poor whites and their suffering took place, but there were too many grievances to address.²¹³

²⁰⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 181.

²⁰⁵ A.B. Hart, *The Southern South*. New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1910, p. 40.

²⁰⁶ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 179.

²⁰⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 159 & 162-165.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 44.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 35.

²⁰⁸ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 12.

²⁰⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 39 & 40.; S.V. Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 45.

²¹⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 39-40.

²¹¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 39.

²¹² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 40-42.

²¹³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 44.; S.V. Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 43.

Many poor whites were encouraged to join the War effort by the fear of dropping to the level of enslaved people.²¹⁴ There were attempts to frighten them into supporting disunion, warning that freeing the enslaved would drive down their wages to starvation levels.²¹⁵ Some poor whites refused to support the slaveholder's cause and thus, the slaveholders bullied, scared them and used violence to force dissenters.²¹⁶ The Civil War exacerbated class tensions because the poor always sacrificed more and were usually hit the hardest.²¹⁷ It was often remarked that it was a rich man's War, but a poor man's fight.²¹⁸ Forret and Flynt explain that the planting elites emphasised the "superior" status of the poor white on the basis of their race and the need to keep the enslaved in their place. Poor whites were warned if the enslaved people were freed, planters would be rich enough to leave and they would be left reduced to degrading servitude.²¹⁹ Most poor whites had little choice, but to support the War as they were at the mercy of the master class.²²⁰ However, the North won the War in 1865, and slavery was abolished.²²¹

Addressing the Problem

In some cases, the War had done very little to change the lives of poor whites and this remained so for a number of years. Many continued as common labourers, hired hands or tenants after the War ended.²²² The first few months after the War saw a continuation of starvation and anarchy.²²³ By December 1865, five hundred thousand poor whites were in a state of starvation. Much of the help they received came from the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, which assisted all impoverished people. Some took advantage of the system, while others rejected it.²²⁴ Thompson explains that the Southern States were agricultural and comparatively underdeveloped or backwards in comparison to the industrialised North. Furthermore, they lagged behind in their industrial efforts, economic progress and social improvements.²²⁵ The South relied on an

²¹⁴ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 162.

²¹⁵ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 6.

²¹⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 35.

²¹⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 173.; S.V. Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865", *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 48.

²¹⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 44.

²¹⁹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 18.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 45.

²²⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 35.

²²¹ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 228-229.

²²² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 181-182.; J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 34.

²²³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 46.

²²⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 35.; S.V. Ash, "Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865", *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 49.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Vol. 2. New York: McGraw Hill, 2002, p. 388.

²²⁵ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 43.

extractive plantation economy, particularly cotton.²²⁶ The tenant system, which emerged after the War, continued to exploit the relationship between poor whites and blacks. Like South Africa, by encouraging racism on the part of the poor whites and in a sense prohibited the development of a cross-racial working-class consciousness.²²⁷ The number of white poor increased after the War, as well as the consequences of their poverty. The Civil War did not drastically change the lives and status as poor white. Although some saw the start of a decline into poverty and lost what they had before the War, due to poor farming methods and a one-crop agricultural system,²²⁸ the economic systems that was built after the War did offer new employment opportunities and, in some cases, there were minor improvements over pre-War conditions. Although slavery had ended racism continued. Later segregation and Jim Crow Laws would be implemented in the USA, however, unlike South Africa it was never in an attempt to help or save the poor whites. That is not to say the poor whites did not benefit to some extent.²²⁹

After the War, some urbanisation and industrialisation took place.²³⁰ Thus, the poor whites were absorbed into the economic system, whereas before the War their economic isolation was as complete as their geographical seclusion.²³¹ Manufacturing establishments increased and thousands were employed in new industrial jobs, although they were not paid great sums in these positions and remained poor. Between 1865 and 1900, the poor whites gradually entered the economic system as wage earners.²³² They were finally able to compete in a free labour economy.²³³ In 1870, the largest number of whites who were mobile without personal wealth were industrial labourers and artisans.²³⁴ However, the majority of poor whites remained rural and by 1930, little more than 17% of America's manufacturing wage earners lived in the South.²³⁵ In some cases, poor whites could compete for work on the land that was formerly done by enslaved

²²⁶ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 27. J. Winders, "White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in Postbellum US South", *Cultural Geographies*, 10, 2003, p. 56.

²²⁷ K.L. Thomas, "Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 13.

²²⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 33.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 98.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A history*, Vol. 1, pp. 173-183 & 260.

²²⁹ F.G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, pp. 215 & 220

²³⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, pp. 33-34.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*, p. 127.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Vol. 1, p. 308.

²³¹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 37.; P.H. Buck, "Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South", *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 42.

²³² J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 37.

²³³ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 6.

²³⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 182.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 54-55.

²³⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 46.

people, but also competed with them as tenants and sharecroppers.²³⁶ This was the case with many “new” poor whites. Their bond to the land was too great and thus, they remained.²³⁷ The Civil War did result in economic changes for the South, however, many factors continued as before. There was much continuity between the political and economic worlds of the ante – and post-bellum South. Dependence and economic hardship still remained an ongoing factor and their political “voice” could still be thwarted. The commercialised agricultural system and credit-based exchange, which were the economic formula for poverty, engulfed the South following the War.²³⁸ S.V. Ash asserts that some travelled North beckoned by opportunity into the Union territory to search for work.²³⁹ Again, the poor whites moved around after the War in an effort to find their place in society, the dream of landownership had not died.²⁴⁰

Although plantations remained after 1865, many large ones continued with commercialised farming, while many others were split and divided for farm tenancy. There were more white farm tenants, but more black sharecroppers. Life continued as such into the twentieth century and it was only with the introduction of new farming methods and equipment in the middle of the twentieth century that factors changed. Mostly the poor whites continued producing small harvests for sale and subsistence crops. New industries did slowly draw workers from the land.²⁴¹

The period 1870-1910 saw the issue of poverty move from a community problem to a national one, exacerbated by the end of slavery.²⁴² The new Reconstruction legislation that was introduced in 1866/8 was to aid the poor of all races. The General Assembly of each county had to make provisions, but the law provided no guidelines. Thus, it was mostly poor houses, alms-houses or county homes that were designated to address the problem. There was corruption and wretched care.²⁴³ However, they gave more interest in the poor’s plight than the planter regime ever did. Boards of public charity saw to the welfare and health of the poor. Sadly, many poor whites rejected the help offered due to their racism.²⁴⁴

²³⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 48.

²³⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 55.

²³⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 131-132.

²³⁹ S.V. Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 52.

²⁴⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 50-51.

²⁴¹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 44-46.

²⁴² W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 65.; A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 43.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 18-19.

²⁴³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 53-54.

²⁴⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 35-36.

Ring explains that the “Southern problems” began after Reconstruction and occurred alongside the more familiar sentimental symbols of national reconciliation.²⁴⁵ Poor whites would figure prominently in the debates over Reconstruction.²⁴⁶ Most Americans understood what was meant by the “Southern problem”: the phrase represented an image of a backwards, poverty stricken region that stood in contrast to the rest of the nation.²⁴⁷ The South’s poor whites were seen as a blight upon the entire country by the Northerners. They saw it as a direct result of slavery that was not merely a sectional problem, but constituted a national calamity.²⁴⁸ National efforts were made by reformers to modernise the South in the early twentieth century as part of the process of nation formation. A number of institutions and people began to draw attention to the region’s poverty, backwardness, and distinctiveness. Many of the problems had come from the antebellum period. These efforts often consisted of collaboration between the Rockefeller philanthropies, the Carnegie Corporation, the Southern Education Board, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, among other groups and institutions. At the start of the twentieth century, the South was targeted for what they described as “readjustment” and “upliftment”, although the interest in Southern problems existed in the years before the turn of the century they persisted beyond World War I.²⁴⁹ Isenberg argues that the problems of the South were seen to go deeper than the War itself. Poverty and vagrancy were permanent fixtures among the poor whites.²⁵⁰

The fact that poverty and progress seemed to exist simultaneously in the South remained a paradox.²⁵¹ Ring affirms that the South remained backwards and that this was mostly attributed to its history. It had not developed in the same way as the North. It had wealth, but its people lacked the skills to utilise and industrialise it. Thus, the paradox of the South was that it was blessed by nature with immense wealth, however, its people as a whole were the poorest in the country.²⁵² Agents of the Freedmen’s Bureau reported that many poor whites had made no attempt at progress or to better themselves. Yet there were still those who tried to distinguish between the poor whites.²⁵³

²⁴⁵ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 176.; J. Winders, “White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in Postbellum US South”, *Cultural Geographies*, 10, 2003, p. 57.

²⁴⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 19

²⁴⁸ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 8.

²⁴⁹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012, pp. 3 & 19.

²⁵⁰ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 178.

²⁵¹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 20.

²⁵² N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 22, 24 & 133.

²⁵³ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 178-179.

In 1890, two events occurred that proved that changes in rural or farm life were needed. The value of manufactured goods was higher than that of agricultural goods and the US Census Bureau declared that there was no more empty land to be settled and thus, the frontier was closed. Industrial life was taking over rural life and there were more people found in the urban areas.²⁵⁴ In 1908, the President of the time, T. Roosevelt, created the Commission on Country Life, which was tasked with investigating rural or farm life and making recommendations to improve it. Professor L.H. Bailey served as the chairman.²⁵⁵ Roosevelt was aware of the need for good farmers. The Commissioners who served on this report did so without compensation.²⁵⁶ They investigated country life or rural life as a whole and examined the major problems and how these could be addressed.²⁵⁷ They recommended effective cooperation among farmers, new schools focusing on country life and better communication, including roads and posts, as well as improved sanitation, all of which were regarded as the immediate needs.²⁵⁸ As most poor whites lived in these areas, this assistance would ultimately benefit them.

In summary, during the antebellum period, there was a national fixation on rural life and people, seen as backwards, unenlightened, premodern and regressive. The view persisted after the Civil War.²⁵⁹ The poor-whites' problem became known as the "new race question".²⁶⁰ Poor whites were mostly illiterate and suffered from a number of ailments and thus, they were considered below the status of the "superior" white society, a race and class of their own.²⁶¹ A wave of educational reform and training seemed to be the solution. Emphasis was placed on industrial training, education, and public health and was inflicted upon the poor whites during the first half of the twentieth century.²⁶² It was not only the poor whites on the land, but also those in factories and mills who suffered, these included women and children. Children were sent to work rather than to

²⁵⁴ State Historical Society of Iowa, "Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission", 1909, <<https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-sources/rural-life-modern-age/special-message>>, 2022. Accessed: 21 October 2022.

²⁵⁵ Country Life Commission, *Report of the Country Life Commission and Special Message from the President of the United States*. Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress (2nd Session), <https://www.fca.gov/template-fca/about/1909_Report_of_The_Country_Life_Commission.pdf>, 1909. Accessed: 21 October 2022, p. 77.

²⁵⁶ Commission on Country Life, *Report of the Commission on Country Life*. New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1917, pp. 9-10.

²⁵⁷ Commission on Country Life, *Report of the Commission on Country Life*, pp. 13-15.

²⁵⁸ Country Life Commission, *Report of the Country Life Commission and Special Message from the President of the United States*. Senate Document No. 705, 60th Congress (2nd Session), <https://www.fca.gov/template-fca/about/1909_Report_of_The_Country_Life_Commission.pdf>, 1909. Accessed: 21 October 2022, p. 13.

²⁵⁹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 50.

²⁶⁰ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 135.

²⁶¹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 198.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 90.; P.H. Buck, "Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South", *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 45.

²⁶² N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 129 & 137.

school to obtain an education. This resulted in the poor white becoming increasingly uneducated and backwards. Between 1880 and 1910, manufacturers noted that at least 25 percent of cotton textile workers were under the age of sixteen.²⁶³

The image of Southern backwardness occurred during a period of increased industrialisation, political consolidation, urbanisation, and overseas expansion that developed at the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth centuries. Poor whites were a special target of attention and anxieties.²⁶⁴ The number of poor whites increased over the nineteenth century into the twentieth century, as the “Cotton Empire” slowly began to fall, impoverishing more and more yeomen farmers causing them to lose their land and enter the ranks of poor whites. The question was: What should be done with the growing population of backwards poor whites? Poor whites jeopardised the white civilisation and its “superiority”.²⁶⁵ It posed a danger to political and social institutions.²⁶⁶ Reformers were worried that poor whites were sinking to the level of poor blacks and also shared similar characteristics. Their evolution was called into question.²⁶⁷ Isenberg explains that some believed the only “cure” was intervention and that the genealogical link had to be cut. Thus, the period of eugenic sterilisation began.²⁶⁸

In the mid-nineteenth century, the works by Charles Darwin²⁶⁹ were published. His theory of “survival of the fittest” and evolution would play a major role in the decisions made regarding the American poor whites in the twentieth century.²⁷⁰ Pseudoscience, concealed as hereditary science, provided Americans with a convenient way to naturalise class and racial differences. At the centre of the argument were the poor whites.²⁷¹ Academics, doctors, scientists, journalists and legislators of the evolutionary theory, or the science of eugenics, advised that degenerates not be permitted to reproduce. Blood lines needed to be culled and by 1931, twenty-seven states had legalised sterilisation. World War I had fuelled the eugenics campaign by “bringing out” the poor whites as recruits. Recruits from the South had lower IQ scores and some exhibited stunted

²⁶³ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 198.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 147-149, 152 & 162.; R.W. Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865”, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, pp. 28-30.

²⁶⁴ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 6.

²⁶⁵ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 12.

²⁶⁶ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 135.

²⁶⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 137-139.

²⁶⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 181.

²⁶⁹ *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871)

²⁷⁰ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 54 & 69.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 174.

²⁷¹ S. Currell & C. Cogdell (eds.), *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and America Mass Culture in the 1930s*, pp. 2-3.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 176.

bodies. Sterilisation was regarded as a civic duty which would protect the nation from being “swamped with incompetence”.²⁷² Eugenicians focused heavily on poor whites with the aim to demonstrate their inferiority.²⁷³ As maintained by S. Currell and C. Cogdell, the Depression created an awareness regarding social problems and extreme poverty, which fuelled eugenic beliefs. It was also mentioned that an increase in welfare costs and decrease in state revenue was set to bankrupt the USA if it did not improve its people.²⁷⁴

In 1929, the stock market crashed, which triggered the Great Depression and 20% of the American labour force was out of work.²⁷⁵ Previous depressions also affected the poor the worst. The Depression was associated with waste –wasted land, “wasted life and human waste”.²⁷⁶ Poverty was springing up everywhere in the form of shanty towns on the edge of the cities. According to P.S. Boyer, income from farming fell by over 50% from 1929 and in 1933, agricultural markets faced collapse.²⁷⁷ Between 1929 and 1932, forced land sales doubled in the South and sharecroppers and tenants were cut off from credit. No one wanted to lend money to people who had almost no chance of paying it back. Families shared houses, wore rags and did not have enough to eat, as was discovered by the Red Cross in 1930. In the urban areas, it was not much different and the unemployed were told that there were no mill jobs available unless someone died.²⁷⁸ Although the Great Depression affected the whole of the United States, it was the South that personified many unique rural features that continued to set it apart from the rest of the nation. It was only with modernisation and technical innovation later in the twentieth century that things began to change.²⁷⁹ By 1938, the South represented the number one economic problem for the USA. During the 1930s, the poor whites remained at the forefront of the American consciousness and saw a number of different initiatives put in place to help the poor, such as the food stamp plan. The poor, and especially the poor whites, were also receiving much more attention from academics, journalists and people in power.²⁸⁰ Psychological reconditioning and educational

²⁷² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 188-203.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 19 & 66-67.

²⁷³ A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 14.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 66.

²⁷⁴ S. Currell & C. Cogdell (eds.), *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and America Mass Culture in the 1930s*, p. 4.

²⁷⁵ G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 220-201.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 206.

²⁷⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 209.

²⁷⁷ P.S. Boyer, *The Oxford Companion to United States History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 20-21.

²⁷⁸ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 380-381.

²⁷⁹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 134.

²⁸⁰ R.L. Moran, “Consuming Relief: Food Stamps and the New Welfare of the New Deal”, *Journal of American History*, 97(4), 2011, pp. 1001-1022.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 206-207 & 213-230.

reform became paramount. Labour had social meaning, however, the South remained caught in a primitive state of mind with its refusal to appreciate the value of work. However, there were many people returning to the rural areas and the lands to find refuge and work to support themselves, although there was a 60% decline in farm incomes from 1929-1932.²⁸¹ Although the twentieth century had come, people were still moving to try to alleviate their poverty.²⁸²

To counter the effects of the depression, the government implemented the New Deal from 1933 to 1939. It was a series of financial reforms, regulations and public works programmes that put in place new constraints and safeguards on the banking system, as well as efforts to re-inflate the economy. These included a number of major federal agencies and programmes, some of which continued after the New Deal ended. They provided help, support and assistance to the unemployed, farmers, the elderly and youth and focused on the 3 Rs – Relief for the poor and unemployed; Recovery of the economy; and Reform of the financial system.²⁸³ Thompson argues that the New Deal policies helped some, but in other cases left others worse off.²⁸⁴ Once World War II broke out that the US economy, both industrial and agricultural, truly began to improve.²⁸⁵ Poor whites received very little attention during the War and it was only in the 1960s that a revival of awareness of poverty and the so called “War on Poverty” began.²⁸⁶ However, poor whites remained a component of American society into twenty-first century.²⁸⁷

The effort to uplift the Southern population, particularly poor whites, was in many ways a domestic American civilising mission. Thus, in both South Africa and America, a transnational rhetoric and exchange of ideas revolved around harnessing the power of a backwards rural economy and educating its citizens. In the first half of the twentieth century there was a recognition that the poor-white problem had global ramifications and was not solely the “problem” of a single country.²⁸⁸ The noticeable population of poor whites, as well as poor blacks created transnational

²⁸¹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 207 & 213-214.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History, Vol. 2*, p. 639.

²⁸² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, pp. 213 & 216.

²⁸³ C. Berkin, C.L. Miller, R.W. Cherny & J.L. Gormly, *Making America: A History of the United States, Volume 2: Since 1865*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2005, pp. 725-738.; F. Bateman & J.E. Taylor, “Franklin Roosevelt, Federal Spending, and the Postwar Southern Economic Rebound”, *The Journal of the Economic and Business History Society*, 20, 2002, pp. 71-83.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A history, Vol. 2*, pp. 646-659.

²⁸⁴ A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, pp. 43-46.

²⁸⁵ R.J. Jensen, “The Causes and Cures of Unemployment in the Great Depression”, *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 19(4), 1989, pp. 553-583.; G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 203-208.

²⁸⁶ A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 47.

²⁸⁷ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*.

²⁸⁸ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 155-156.

discussions and resulted in a global circuit of expert knowledge and reform. The connections between the Carnegie Corporation, Columbia University and South Africa are a prime example and are the focus of the next chapter.

The Carnegie Corporation was interested in South Africa and believed white Southerners could offer guidance to South Africans on the “race problem.”²⁸⁹ An exchange of visits between the USA and South Africa created a transnational network that moved in both directions.²⁹⁰ However, the most urgent problem in South Africa at the time was that of poor whites. Whereas reformers in South Africa struggled with the problem of maladjustment, reformers in the American South faced the problem of readjustment. USA reformers offered advice and expertise and American experts in their fields were also involved in the investigation. However, it was felt that the comparisons to be drawn between the Union of South Africa and the United States were limited. Subsequently, this has later been proven to be a rather narrow view.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 699.

²⁹⁰ These included people such as: E.G. Malherbe, R.W. Wilcocks, C.T. Loram, C.W. Coulter and K.L. Butterfield, amongst others.

²⁹¹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 155-160.; E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Carnegie Commission

The Carnegie Commission's investigation into the poor-white problem in South Africa is one of the best examples of South Africa and the USA coming together regarding the poor-white question that "haunted" both countries and in which both sought solutions. The presence of poor whites gave rise to the view that poor whiteness was an international phenomenon.¹ Moreover, probably the best-known primary work done on the poor whites is that conducted by the Carnegie Commission (1929-1932).² Andrew Carnegie, a wealthy Scottish-American, founded his philanthropic organisation in 1911. It was established to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding and to do "real and permanent good".³ The financial power of the Carnegie Corporation meant that it could develop and sustain major programmes outside the USA.⁴ According to M. Golden, the South African inquiry was a product of its hybrid character. However, before the establishment of the corporation, Andrew Carnegie had already made several generous gifts to a number of different South African communities for the construction of libraries and later, Carnegie Corporation funding also helped support technical training of Coloureds and Asian students.⁵ At the time, South Africa was still part of the British Commonwealth and thus, they were able to qualify for funding from the Carnegie's education and social research projects.⁶

As mentioned in chapter one, the recognition of the poor-white problem had global ramifications. The superiority of the "white man" was not a new or unique characteristic or view, but rather a legacy of colonial policy. Thus, poor whites in the colonies needed to be regulated in order for the claim to hold merit.⁷ Solving the poor-white problem had more to do with preparing them for

¹ J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 38.

² L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 25.

³ M. Nassimbeni, "Building Resilient Public Libraries with Carnegie in South Africa (1927-2012): Regularities, Singularities and South Africa Exceptionalism", *IFLA 2014 Lyon*, 2014.; Carnegie Corporation, *Annual Report 1996*. New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1996, p. 13.

⁴ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 485.

⁵ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁶ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 30.

⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 155 & 160. It is no coincidence that in both regions the fascination and interest in the poor-white problem coincided with the rise of apartheid and Jim Crow.

participation in civil society to “whiten” them culturally and socially and legitimate their participation in white social society. Thus, removing them from the darker “inferiors”, with whom they had more in common,⁸ and rehabilitating them because of their biological “superiority” was a prime concern.⁹ E.G. Malherbe commented about this in a 1921 article he wrote while studying at Columbia University. In the article, he further called for the establishment of a National Bureau of Education and a thorough study on the poor-whites question.¹⁰ The article was later published in the *Cape Times*. In the article, Malherbe stated:

Today we have over 100 000 so-called poor whites living in our very midst... a menace to the self-preservation and prestige of our white people... the cumulative result of some maladjustment of our society in the past.¹¹

Thus, the fact that poor whites existed in a number of different regions and countries led to transnational discussions and reflected a global circuit of expert knowledge and reform.¹² It was these circuits of knowledge production that made it possible to compare the poor whites of South Africa and the American South.¹³ Comparisons became pertinent because both countries were capitalist societies whose white domination kept blacks in economic servitude. Ultimately races existed side-by-side and were expected to maintain a separation that was rigid and hierarchal and it was the threat that the poor whites posed to the racial hierarchy that was described and dealt with in similar ways between the two countries. As Magubane points out, South Africa was regarded a “close replica” of the American South.¹⁴

By 1923, a joint conference on the poor-white question in South Africa requested government attention and intervention to this growing problem. The idea that a solution needed to be sought for the poor-white question through scientific study was not new. During this joint congress regarding the poor-white question, it was proposed that the government take practical steps to find a solution using scientific guidelines and that a permanent advice council, based on the

⁸ Socially, economically and in a sense culturally.

⁹ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 706.

¹⁰ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 30.

¹¹ E.G. Malherbe: “Educational Research: A Plea for a Bureau”, *Cape Times*, 18 June 1921.

¹² N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 156.

¹³ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 692.

¹⁴ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 692.

Council for Trade and Industry, be established.¹⁵ This proposal was supported by the DRC Synod in 1927, where it was decided to approach the Carnegie Corporation for financial assistance to research the poor-white question.¹⁶ Soon after Dr D.F. Malan, Minister of Internal Affairs, Welfare and Education, also sought the support of the government.¹⁷

However, prior to the Carnegie Corporation's involvement in South Africa, regarding the poor-white problem, links between South African intellectuals, academics and policy makers and the Carnegie Corporation existed. The Carnegie Corporation wanted to play a significant role in linking the modernising elites of the world. Thus, a cadre of transnational intellectual activists was created and nurtured, who would in turn have a set of specific set of ideas and theories that arose from their common experiences, which would shape policy processes and outcomes both nationally and abroad.¹⁸ According to Magubane, Columbia acted as a training ground, where graduates were instilled with these ideas, theories and experiences.¹⁹ The major link was Columbia University (especially the Teachers College). Links between the Carnegie Corporation and Columbia University existed in both a financial and personal form.²⁰ The Carnegie Commission "carved out" spaces for the production and exchange of theoretical models, research paradigms, as well as intellectuals.²¹ The way in which the problem was defined and the solutions that follow were made by these transnational intellectual activists.²² It was the Carnegie Corporation and Columbia University who funded projects, study tours and research centres that cultivated transnational institutional connections and created a network of people who took the discourse on poor whiteness from theory to the practical form of policy making.²³

¹⁵ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 30.

¹⁶ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 30-31.

¹⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 30.

¹⁸ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, pp. 693-694.

¹⁹ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 694.

²⁰ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 694.

²¹ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 692.

²² Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 692.

²³ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 693.

The president of the Carnegie Commission at the time, Fredrick Keppel, was a former Dean of Columbia College. Keppel and his colleague, J. Russel, also a former product of the Teachers College, encouraged former students to develop certain research projects and staffed existing projects from the Columbia University network. Many projects were a result of this network.²⁴ M. Carney,²⁵ a faculty member of the Teachers College, played an instrumental role in the culmination of the funding and eventual execution of the Commission. She was the first member to visit South Africa and became close to the large party of white South African students drawn to the Colleges' various programmes.²⁶ One such student was C.T. Loram²⁷ who would become one of the most powerful figures in South African education. It was Carney and Loram who convinced Keppel to visit South Africa.²⁸

In 1927, the president of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, Keppel and secretary James Bertram, visited South Africa to explore possibilities for grants.²⁹ For a month long, they travelled throughout South Africa's four provinces and were feted in all the major cities by South Africa's highest officials in business, politics and education, including the Prime Minister J.B.M. Hertzog and the former Prime Minister General J.C. Smuts.³⁰ During the visit, shared and familiar aspects were pointed out to them.³¹ Upon his return to the USA, Keppel recommended the \$500,000 be allocated for education grants in Central, East and South Africa. It was stipulated that the bulk of this money was intended for the Union of South Africa and that the grant beneficiaries would be whites.³²

²⁴ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 486.

²⁵ Carney was an authority on rural school development and had a strong interest in comparative and international education. HSe was an active participant in the debate on black training and education.

²⁶ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 695.

²⁷ Loram's dissertation was published as a book, *The Education of the South African Native*, it examined how the segregated industrial schools in the South could be used as a model for "Bantu" education in South Africa.

²⁸ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 696.

²⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. i.; E.J. Bottomley, "Transnational Governmentality and the 'Poor White' in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 79.; M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

³⁰ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

³¹ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 489.

³² M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

As mentioned, it was at the DRC's conferences in Cradock, Stellenbosch and Bloemfontein that the need for a more scientific approach was called for.³³ From different sides, it was suggested that the Corporation should fund an investigation into the poor-white problem in South Africa.³⁴ The late Andrew Carnegie had bequeathed an amount entitled "The Dominions and Colonies Fund", which he stipulated was to be used for social and educational research. Under the Statute of Westminster, South Africa still remained a Dominion and thus, the country still qualified for the funding.³⁵ The production of knowledge about poverty with the aim of promoting social action reflected Andrew Carnegie's personal outlook "to better the world".³⁶ The date of the first formal letter to the President of the Carnegie Corporation requesting support for the Poor-White Investigation was 10 January 1928.³⁷ In the letter, it stated:

We feel convinced that the objects the late Mr Carnegie had in view in creating the Trust cannot be better served than in the way we suggest.³⁸

According to Malherbe, one of the Commission members and a former graduate of Columbia, the idea of an intensive scientific investigation into the poor-white question came from him.³⁹ He initially suggested the project to Keppel during his 1927 tour.⁴⁰ Malherbe presented Keppel with a research proposal for investigating white poverty in South Africa. He was convinced that by applying scientific methods to the problem and gaining first-hand knowledge would be instrumental in making a correct diagnosis. He was also adamant that the results be published and made available. Malherbe became Keppel's principle contact in South Africa.⁴¹ It was also Malherbe that persuaded Keppel, who arrived in South Africa thinking of a project dealing with the black race, that the poor-white problem was "the most urgent problem".⁴² Malherbe referred

³³ R. Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*, p. 95.

³⁴ R.R. Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, p. 72.

³⁵ J.R. Cowlin, "Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948", M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 33.

³⁶ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 484.

³⁷ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 483.

³⁸ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 483.

³⁹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD thesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 30.

⁴⁰ C. Soudien, "Ninety Years of Social Science Research into Poverty: Revisiting the HSRC and the Carnegie Commission", *Review: Publication of the Human Sciences Research Council*, 17(1), 2019, p. 4.

⁴¹ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 696.

⁴² N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 157.

him to the already mentioned article he had written in 1921 for the *Cape Times*. In the article, Malherbe focuses on the increasing number of poor whites and the need for research and investigation of the causes in order to find solutions.⁴³ Malherbe and Loram, Director for Education in Natal at the time, were part of a group of educated experts, or as Keppel referred to them, “key men” from across the world who shared the interest of spreading educational ideas of the social-reform minded American Progressive movement. All three of them played an important role in founding the Carnegie Commission on poor whites.⁴⁴ It was, however, F.S. Malan, former Minister of Education and a key figure in the Cape DRC, who made the official request of financial support on behalf of all sections of the community. Thus, the possibility of the Carnegie Corporation funding the inquiry into poverty received much attention in both countries.⁴⁵ The Carnegie Corporation provided £4000 for the investigation into the poor-white question⁴⁶ and also paid for the printing.⁴⁷ However, the Carnegie Corporation did not fund it in its entirety. The DRC and South African Government, as well as several other non-government organisations also contributed to the funding that enabled some of their own members to participate in the inquiry.⁴⁸

In the beginning of the twentieth century there was an unease within American society over the incidence of poverty across racial groups, the ethics of “ruthless” and “wasteful” natural resource use and the rapacious values of citizenship, which became the focus of a range of studies. Institutional and intellectual connections also played a role as to who became advisors.⁴⁹ Keppel’s key men, mostly experts in education from the Columbia University’s Teachers College, were promoters for modernism and their confidence in the natural and social sciences fused into the popular themes of the time: the British Imperial Mission, American Expansionism and shared Anglo-Saxon racial identity. It was an inferred commitment to a global colour line or global whiteness. It was thought that if these countries shared the idea of white superiority, they also shared the idea of white vulnerability and decline. Poor whites were the evidence of this

⁴³ E.G. Malherbe, “Educational Research: A Plea for a Bureau”, *Cape Times*, 18 June 1921.

⁴⁴ E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 79.

⁴⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. i.; M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 489.

⁴⁶ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 31.

⁴⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. i.

⁴⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. ii-iv.; R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, p. 73.

⁴⁹ M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, pp. 488-489.

sentiment.⁵⁰ The Carnegie Corporation was particularly interested in South Africa since it believed white Southerners could offer guidance to South Africans on the “race problem”.⁵¹ One such advisor was Dr C. Templeman, who was a member of the Union Government, but had studied in the USA and spent time in America examining their Black educational institutions. His time in the USA was reflected in his views regarding segregation. Templeman was appointed as one of the local Carnegie trustees advising on the poor-white project. Common problems were identified and shared solutions were sought. Both countries had poor whites that they feared would lead to the decline of the white civilisation.⁵² The Carnegie Commission was a pivotal development and incited comparative studies between the USA and South Africa.⁵³ Therefore, during the 1920s and 1930s, a dense network of transnational links between the two regions were formed.⁵⁴ However, the Carnegie Corporation was not only interested in funding the project, it also forged ties that linked the Corporation to Columbia University and South African academics and policy makers.⁵⁵

The first Carnegie inquiry focused on the poor-white question in South Africa, a topic that had resonances within Afrikanerdom, highlighted social divisions within the European population and defined common ground between the two nations.⁵⁶ The study was to become a model for future inquiries⁵⁷ and would be inter-disciplinary and field-based, involving cooperation between parties. In 1928, a group of trustees consisting of Sir Patrick Duncan (Minister of Internal Affairs, Education and Health until 1924), Dr Loram and Sir Carruthers Beattie (Vice Chancellor of the University of Cape Town) was appointed to manage the Carnegie Commission’s activities,⁵⁸ as well as a Management Council. The latter also included seven members from the DRC, three from the Department of Mines and Industry’s Council for Research Grants and five additional members

⁵⁰ E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 79.

⁵¹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 156.

⁵² M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, pp. 488-489 & 491.

⁵³ M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 494.

⁵⁴ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 157.

⁵⁵ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 694.

⁵⁶ M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 489.

⁵⁷ M. Golden, “Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change”. *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

⁵⁸ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 31.

representing the state departments.⁵⁹ The Executive of the Joint Board included: Senator F.S. Malan (member of the Cape DRC's Commission regarding General Poor Care) as Chairman, Dr C.T. Loram of the Research Grants Board, Reverend A.D. Luckhoff of the DRC, as well as Professor R.W. Wilcocks of the Research Grant Board and professor of psychology at Stellenbosch University.⁶⁰ Thus, although the Carnegie Commission enjoyed the cooperation of the government departments, churches, universities and the schools, it was still an independent commission and was not beholden to these institutions in the formulation of its findings.⁶¹ However, the idea of the study, the funding, the appointed staff, the assumptions that underwrote how the problem was defined, the actions, the data collected, the conclusions and recommendations all bore a strong stamp of the Carnegie-Columbia connection. Thus, it ensured its influence was made.⁶²

Keppel made it clear that the inquiry would be a cooperative relation. With regards to the research, this cooperation took three forms: ideological, disciplinary and cross-national.⁶³ It was agreed that the investigation would involve a collaboration between medical science, and a number of social sciences, thus focusing on the question as a whole. Five disciplines were agreed upon: economics; education; medicine; psychology; and sociology. Each was to be represented by their own investigator, who would be involved in data collection and writing the report. To ensure cooperation and consultations, the project was located at the University of Stellenbosch and it was agreed that researchers would travel together during the data collection phase.⁶⁴ The Carnegie Corporation was concerned about quality assurance and thus, it was decided that interchanges should take place with American experts who had experience with similar issues. The external professional links would also imbue the South African study with US ideas.⁶⁵ The Carnegie Commission report states that membership in the Commission included a selection of local investigators with the "skill, knowledge and experience". Three trustees were appointed with

⁵⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. i.; R. Vosloo, *Reforming Memory: Essays on South African Church and Theological History*, p. 95.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 31.

⁶⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. i.; L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 31.

⁶¹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 31.

⁶² Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 694.

⁶³ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 490.

⁶⁴ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 490.

⁶⁵ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, pp. 490-491.

the role of administering the fund. The Joint Board provided structure so that the USA and South African interests were coordinated. In 1929, the Carnegie Commission's investigation of the South African poor-white problem was started and would be known as the "Carnegie Poor White Study". This was more than a sociological study, it would become a turning point in the political and social history of South Africa.⁶⁶

It needs to be noted that there was no representation of those who were being investigated, the poor whites, as part of the executive committee, trustees or investigators or commissioners.⁶⁷

The Carnegie Commission in South Africa was the first national poverty survey that could claim the status of a "scientific enterprise".⁶⁸ Five Commissioners and a number of assessors were appointed from different fields, including academia, the clergy, as well as political and welfare activists, to travel throughout South Africa between the period 1929-1932 and to interview a cross-section of the poor-white society.⁶⁹ Grosskopf claimed to have interviewed thousands of people; Wilcocks held 300 interviews with poor whites and 333 interviews with informants; Malherbe held 287 interviews with adult poor whites and 629 with informants; Albertyn interviewed 741 poor white families in 35 urban and rural areas; and Rothman visited 462 poor white homes.⁷⁰ The people they interviewed⁷¹ included *bywoners* or sharecroppers, hunters, woodcutters, labourers, itinerant or nomadic farmers, pioneering bushveld farmers, reef miners, diamond diggers and many others who were defined as "poor".⁷² The majority of these people were poverty stricken, Afrikaans-speaking descendants of the pioneer *Boers* and *Voortrekkers*. These interviews were conducted where the poor-white problem was at its worst. This included places such as George, Johannesburg, Knysna, Lichtenburg, Namakwaland, Oudtshoorn, Pretoria and Prince Albert.⁷³ It is also important to note that the investigation took place during the Great Depression and at the

⁶⁶ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 482.; M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.

⁶⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 32.

⁶⁸ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, p. 82.

⁶⁹ S.E. Pretorius, "Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950", M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 30.

⁷⁰ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 34.

⁷¹ These interviews are in the public domain.

⁷² D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 332.

⁷³ D. Langner (red.), *Gebroke Land: Armoede in die Afrikaanse Gemeenskap Sedert 1902*, p. 89.

end of a severe drought in some regions, such as the Karoo (a desert-like area). Thus, this could in turn show the poverty of the poor whites at its worst.⁷⁴

Poor whites were identified by the Carnegie Commission as people unable to adequately adjust to economic change in the countryside.⁷⁵ This was attributed to poor education as well as to psychological traits or a type of mentality that retarded adjustment.⁷⁶ This was mostly attributed to their isolation.⁷⁷ Wilcocks made the distinction that there were “poor whites” and “white poor” and these two differed. Poor whites lacked qualities such as intelligence, honesty, dependability and habits of industry, while white poor evinced no such shortcomings and characteristics.⁷⁸ E.L.P. Stals also makes the point that there are differences between “white poor” and “poor whites”. According to him, South Africa had always had poor whites since the arrival of whites. However, poor whites were different and represented a unique position in the white society. They were mostly Afrikaners and due to extraordinary circumstances, had become impoverished during the last half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twenty-first century.⁷⁹ This idea of “poor whites” and “white poor”, undeserving and deserving poor, was similarly experienced in the USA (see chapter four).

The general aim of the Commission was recommendations that would lead to the upliftment of the nearly 300,000 Afrikaners stuck at a level of poverty that threatened the future white political solidarity.⁸⁰ As already indicated, the five Commissioners were: J.F.W. Grosskopf, R.W. Wilcocks, E.G. Malherbe, W.A. Murray, J.R. Albertyn, M.E. Rothmann.⁸¹ Grosskopf was an interesting Commissioner. He had a variety of different qualifications. He wrote a number of short stories and plays and received the Hertzog Prize for Afrikaans Drama in 1926 and an honorary award from *SA Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns* (SA Academy of Science and Art) for film making in 1931.⁸²

⁷⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 154.

⁷⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. x-xi.

⁷⁶ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 519.

⁷⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 49.

⁷⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 74, 80 & 139.

⁷⁹ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 14.

⁸⁰ M. Golden, “Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change”. *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁸¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. ii.

⁸² Stellenbosch writers, ‘JFW Grosskopf’, <<http://www.stellenboschwriters.com/grosskopf.html>>, n.d. Accessed: 24 August 2022.

Many of these works were focused on the plight of the poor whites.⁸³ Another interesting Commissioner was M.E. Rothmann, who was the only named woman of the research group. Rothmann was a highly distinguished and qualified woman. She obtained a BA degree from the University of the Cape of Good Hope, became a teacher, but also wrote a number of books and articles that were an ethical didactic and made a unique contribution to Afrikaans literature and a cultural historic review of a bygone Afrikaans society.⁸⁴ M.E.R., her pen name, also received a number of awards: in 1953, she received the Hertzog Prize for her oeuvre of prose; the Scheepers Prize for Youth Literature (1961); the Tienie Holloway Medal for Cultural Literature (1970); and two honorary doctorates from the University of Cape Town (1951) and the University of South Africa (1973) inter alia for social work.⁸⁵

Interestingly, the bulk of the commissioners were separated from the poor whites by class, but united in Afrikaner Nationalism and committed to strengthening white political power by uplifting the poor whites.⁸⁶ It was considered that sociology was insufficiently developed in South Africa for a single local person to be appointed.⁸⁷ Furthermore, the Corporation was determined to have external professional links, which would infuse the South African study with intellectual ideas from the United States.⁸⁸ Thus, two American sociologists, Dr C.W. Coulter, a professor of sociology at Ohio Wesleyan University, and Dr K.L. Butterfield, a member of the Country Life Commission and rural sociologist, were also retained as consultants.⁸⁹ Both assisted with the Commission's research design, which reflected their belief that sociology as a science could form the basis for technologically informed social policies.⁹⁰ Although a more scientific approach was taken towards social ills⁹¹ as the inquiry not only gathered facts and statistics, it also considered the personal

⁸³ T. Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2015, p. 76.

⁸⁴ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 492.

⁸⁵ A. Shackley, 'Legends of Swellendam Series: M.E.R.', < <https://swellendam.com/legends-of-swellendam-series-2-m-e-r/>>, 20 August 2021. Accessed: 7 December 2022.

⁸⁶ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁸⁷ E.G. Malherbe, *Never a Dull Moment*. Cape Town: Timmins Publishers, 1981, pp. 119-121.

⁸⁸ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 491.

⁸⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. i.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 159.

⁹⁰ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 696.

⁹¹ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.; E.J. Bottomley, "Transnational Governmentality and the 'Poor White' in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 80.

stories and voices of the poor whites.⁹² Magubane actually claims that South African academic sociology was born out of the Carnegie Commission. It can trace its roots from where it borrowed many concepts about culture from American sociology, which in turn was a relatively new field shaped to meet the ideological needs of the post-Civil War “New South”. This was a moment of transnational connected histories.⁹³

The result was a five volume report issued in 1932. Volume one was an economic report that focused on poverty in the rural areas and migration from farms by J.F.W. Grosskopf. The second volume, edited by R.W. Wilcocks, was a psychological report on the poor-white person. Volume three was written by E.G. Malherbe and focused on education and the poor white. W.A. Murray presented a medical report on the physical conditions of the poor whites that formed volume four. The last and fifth volume was split into two and formed the sociological report. J.R. Albertyn focused on the poor white in society and M.E. Rothmann examined the role of mothers and daughters in the poor-white family.⁹⁴ The Carnegie Commission was the most interdisciplinary work of its time.⁹⁵ It was met with widespread praise, publicity and public discussion in journals, newspapers, among scholars and academics, private citizens, as well as government officials.⁹⁶ In each of the five volumes, the report was introduced with the 124 joint findings and recommendations. The different volumes focus on the reasons for the white poverty as well as the psychological traits of the poor whites.⁹⁷

⁹² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

⁹³ Z. Magubane, “The Interconnected Histories of South African and American Sociology: Knowledge in the Service of Colonial Violence” in F. Greenland & F.M. Göçek, *Cultural Violence and the Destruction of Human Communities*, pp. 77-94. Of interest: The Carnegie members focused primarily on the antebellum period when defining or examining the origins of the poor whites in the USA. The poor-white problem looked very different in the 1930s.

⁹⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

⁹⁵ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 35.

⁹⁶ M. Golden, “Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change”. *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁹⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

The editorial of *Die Burger* (a daily Afrikaans newspaper) favoured a national conference to mobilise support for the Commission's recommendations, emphasising the importance of protecting the poor white from falling behind.⁹⁸ The Carnegie Commission of Investigation united the whites in positions of power and those who were destitute.⁹⁹ It was a multi-year investigation that would ultimately influence policy makers, politicians and nationalists. However, Bottomley points out that the extent of the significance of the Carnegie Commission has been debated. Its legacy is complicated because of pressure from nationalist and religious groups among the Commissioners. There was also a disconnection between individual findings and the overall recommendation in the report, which was a political compromise.¹⁰⁰ The Carnegie Commission was in essence hostile towards state help and very much supported the church's role in addressing poverty through "social work", which was understood as simply the pastoral work of the church.¹⁰¹ Teppo claims that the report was crucial to the proposed solutions that were only developed later. The conclusions included concerns regarding nomadism, alcoholism and degeneration, all of which were seen as major problems leading to whites becoming poor.¹⁰²

Although the Commission's findings proved that the Commissioners were aware that there were also poor blacks, the belief was that solving the poor-white problem was the main aim and would in the long-term benefit other communities.¹⁰³ Thus, behind the poor-white problem lay the "native" question.¹⁰⁴ The Carnegie Commission was very much against South Africa becoming a welfare state in order to help the poor whites, but did not want "mixing" to occur. The Commissioners felt that it would be detrimental to hand the poor whites everything on a silver platter, as it would also not be a solution. A better remedy lay in education, the acquisition of skills and work opportunities in the urban areas.¹⁰⁵ They felt that segregation was not a solution and neither was permanent help in the labour market.¹⁰⁶ It was important for the poor whites to learn to help themselves and

⁹⁸ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

⁹⁹ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

¹⁰⁰ E.J. Bottomley, "Transnational Governmentality and the 'Poor White' in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa", *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 79.

¹⁰¹ J. Seekings, "The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 525.

¹⁰² A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, pp. 34-38.

¹⁰³ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 347-349.

¹⁰⁴ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 705.

¹⁰⁵ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 58-62.

¹⁰⁶ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 61-63.

improve their own conditions for long term success. This could be achieved through the assistance and help of the government, the church, a variety of organisations and educational institutions. Help needed to be minimal to ensure their own rehabilitation and was linked to the British Poor Law of 1834, which entailed incentives to self-development through work, forcing the poor into the labour market, enabling them to restore their self-respect and social usefulness.¹⁰⁷

Although the government had invested a lot into the Carnegie Commission it was not deemed an important topic for discussion in the 1933 parliamentary sitting. It was only in the 1934 House of Assembly debate that the Minister of Labour, Mr A.P.J. Fourie, thanked the Commission and promised government support.¹⁰⁸

In 1934 and 1936, Afrikaner activists used the poor-white report as a guide to creating blueprints and solutions at National Conferences.¹⁰⁹ The Carnegie Report emphasised that economic change would not be the solution and that it would all start with “psychological change” on the part of the poor white. Some of the recommendations included improving education, reducing isolation, focusing on the physical and psychological changes that the poor whites would need to undergo, increased subsidies and control of housing projects, temporary job reservation, adaptation to change, all of which would be possible through social upliftment. The state, church and outside organisations would all have a role to play.¹¹⁰ This was regarded as anti-modern and influential and upcoming people such as H.F. Verwoerd argued that “the state was the only power to address the poor-white problem properly.”¹¹¹ He was one of the people who advocated for a Department of Social Work and state assistance for the poor whites. As a result, the government began transforming grants for poor relief to social programmes.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 58-61.

¹⁰⁸ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 65.

¹⁰⁹ M. Golden, “Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change”. *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

¹¹⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I* Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

¹¹¹ P. du Toit, *Verlag van die Volkskongres oor die Armblankevraagstuk Gehou in Kimberley, 2-5 Okt, 1934*, pp. 30-38.

¹¹² J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 527.

The most pivotal and lasting results that came from the Carnegie report were a State Bureau of Social Welfare (a National Department of Social Welfare) and the training of professional social workers.¹¹³ It recommended that a department of social studies be created in a South African university in order to train future social workers and conduct research. The Department of Sociology and Social Work at Stellenbosch University was the first established in South Africa with Dr H.F. Verwoerd¹¹⁴ as its Head.¹¹⁵ The Carnegie Commission ensured that an American model of policy-orientated experimentation would come to pass in South Africa when it financed South Africa's Bureau for Education Research.¹¹⁶ Initially, it would fall under the Department of Labour, but in 1935 it became a standalone department.¹¹⁷ The National Bureau of Education and Social Research, which fell under the South African Department of Education, was established in 1929¹¹⁸ under Dr E.G. Malherbe.¹¹⁹ In 1933, the Corporation provided the Bureau with funds to allow it to expand into a major centre of social and educational research.¹²⁰ It was, however, Malherbe's work on the poor-white question that emphasised the need for scientific methodology of positivism and the view that human behaviour was subject to the same laws of cause and effect as natural science. The research done by the Carnegie Commission cemented the bureau's future. This Bureau would later be known as the Human Science Research Council (HSRC).¹²¹ Furthermore, the study resulted in formative approaches and practices; experts and expert driven knowledge; and credibility, legitimacy and the unquestioned superiority of the scientific method of the social sciences. It helped to set the discourse for a range of social sciences such as anthropology, sociology, criminology, philosophy and psychology. The Carnegie Commission report was a further example of what good research would need to explain and influence the curricula for developing university departments in the social sciences. Thus, it promoted the importance of good solid knowledge.¹²²

¹¹³ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results*: Carnegie Corporation. 2004.

¹¹⁴ Verwoerd was a former student of Wilcocks.

¹¹⁵ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 697.

¹¹⁶ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 697.

¹¹⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 66-67.

¹¹⁸ The same year the Carnegie Commission was started.

¹¹⁹ The commissioner reporting on education and the poor white.

¹²⁰ Z. Magubane, "The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 697.

¹²¹ HSRC. 'National Bureau for Education – HSRC', <<http://timeline.hsrc.ac.za/>>, n.d. Accessed: 31 August 2022.; HSRC. 'Who We Are: Our History', <<https://hsrc.ac.za/who-we-are/our-history/>>, n.d. Accessed: 31 August 2022.; C. Soudien, "Ninety Years of Social Science Research into Poverty: Revisiting the HSRC and the Carnegie Commission", *Review: Publication of the Human Sciences Research Council*, 17(1), 2019, pp. 3-4.

¹²² C. Soudien, "Ninety Years of Social Science Research into Poverty: Revisiting the HSRC and the Carnegie Commission", *Review: Publication of the Human Sciences Research Council*, 17(1), 2019, pp. 3-6.

Regardless of these recommendations, by the second half of the 1930s, South Africa had created the basis of a welfare state, with 20% of public expenditure budgeted for the new Department of Social Work. In the wake of the race debate, the welfare state was neglected almost entirely by both the liberal and revisionist protagonists.¹²³ South Africa continued to be a welfare state. The government preferred to focus on both public provision and rehabilitative social work in the form of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Poor Relief and Charitable Organisations between 1936 and 1937.¹²⁴ The government was able to assist the poor whites. After leaving the gold standard in 1932, it resulted in massive improvements in public finances, with the rising price of gold and the implementation of the “Excess Profits Tax” on gold mines, and thus tax revenues rose dramatically.¹²⁵

With the many similarities between South Africa and the USA, the Carnegie Commission of New York became interested in the problem of white poverty in South Africa.¹²⁶ The comparability of South Africa and particularly the American South arose from the fact that American policy makers and South African colonial officials had such close personal relationships and were dually deliberate in their efforts to collaborate in the formulation of policy. It was the close personal bonds which determined, shaped and directed exchanges and decision-making processes. In South Africa, as in America, the growth of poverty among hard-working, respectable whites undermined explanations in terms of moral character.¹²⁷ The Carnegie Commission was concerned with the analysis of poverty with two main goals: the alleviation of poverty in South Africa and the dissemination of the results as “useful” knowledge within the Northern States and the USA in particular, thus creating a heightened public consciousness of the region in the USA.¹²⁸ It can be argued that through the initiation, design and implementation of the studies, the strategies employed sought to reshape prevailing visions of the two countries.¹²⁹ It is important to note that many of the suggestions made to and by the Carnegie Commission were from experts from the

¹²³ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, pp. 515-516.

¹²⁴ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 534.

¹²⁵ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, pp. 535-538.

¹²⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 345-346.; M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 481.

¹²⁷ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 535.

¹²⁸ M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 482.

¹²⁹ M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, pp. 482-483.

USA, whereby American “solutions” were to be used to help a South African “problem”. US theories of rural upliftment that had been tested in the Southern States were used, as were conceptions of white poverty and techniques of racial uplift, especially with regards to health and education. The investigators were also issued a reading list, which included an American “Poor White Bibliography” and examined rural upliftment initiatives in other countries.¹³⁰

The Carnegie Corporation’s involvement in South Africa can also be seen in a larger project of expanding American influence and philanthropy in the English-speaking world and also promoting their culture as an alternative to British imperialism. Powerful foundations, such as Carnegie, Ford and Rockefeller were able to influence domestic and foreign policy.¹³¹ The Carnegie Commission’s recommendations entailed scientific charity that characterised the United States in the late nineteenth century and not the professional social work of the USA in the 1920s or the social policies of the New Deal. However, there are some authors who believe it was the Carnegie Commission’s findings and recommendations that contributed to factors of F.D. Roosevelt’s New Deal.¹³² The period after the report was finalised ushered in a struggle over the appropriate role of the state, church and social workers.¹³³ Thus, the USA was not always the best example of how to address the problem. However, the Carnegie Commission report may be used in certain cases as an American source as well. The project was viewed as a success and in 1933, the Carnegie Corporation planned a follow up study of the American poor whites under the leadership of Malherbe to investigate the parallels with South Africa.¹³⁴ However, this was set aside and never transpired.¹³⁵

The influence of the Carnegie Corporation could still be felt after the study ended. Between 1930 and 1934 74 South Africans undertook study trips to the USA under the “Carnegie Visitors Program”, Wilcocks, was one such person. Allowances were also made for American sociologists to visit South Africa. Furthermore, by 1924 there were 26 South Africans who were Columbia

¹³⁰ E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 80.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 159.

¹³¹ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 36.

¹³² M. Bell, “American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa”, *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 489.

¹³³ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 515.

¹³⁴ Parallels such as segregation, isolation, slavery, white on black violence, voting rights for blacks, to mention a few.

¹³⁵ E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 80.; J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 38.

University Teachers College graduates, but by the middle of the 1930s the number had increased to 70. These graduates¹³⁶ returned to South Africa took up important, as well as influential positions at universities, colleges and in government.¹³⁷

The Carnegie Commission was clear that the “poor white” phenomenon should not be treated as an isolated event but as a manifestation of influences and conditions prevalent in the social structure.¹³⁸ On reflection, there are many similarities in the histories of the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South. In both countries, whites came to the new land as immigrants and from the very outset there were poor whites. Poor whites faced difficulties with the native indigenous peoples in their quest to find land, living on the frontier. Many remained isolated, became illiterate and did not receive an education nor moved with the times and new developments. Mostly due to external factors, many were driven off the land, whether from commercialised farming or natural disasters. Those left on the land had to compete with blacks as enslaved people, labourers or sharecroppers. Some found that their only hope was to move to the cities or urban areas. Here again, they lacked the skills to compete with the blacks, the English immigrants or the urban folk. Many poor whites were forced to take on low wages for unskilled work. In both nations, the idea of education and training seemed to be the solution.

However, there were also many differences. America’s white population exploded and they soon became the majority race. In South Africa, the white population remained relatively small. Whites in America were divided by class, whereas the whites in South Africa were divided by class, but the main divide was between the English and Afrikaans citizens. Class divisions could not stand in the way of unity. The poor whites in the USA were treated with scorn and shunned, and the poor whites in South Africa were regarded as part of the *volk* (nation) and pitied. In regard to assistance, the USA focused on poverty as a whole, but in South Africa help was mostly aimed, with government support, at the poor whites. The most common cause of poor-white poverty in the USA was regarded as hereditary and therefore, the eugenics programme was easily embraced. They could be sacrificed for the good of decent white society. In South Africa, the cause of poor-white poverty was regarded as environmental thus, although eugenics was presented and discussed, it was never considered or implemented. It was believed that the poor whites could be saved and reincorporated into the nation. Although both nations embraced the

¹³⁶ Many referred to themselves as the TC club.

¹³⁷ Z. Magubane, “The American Construction of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 107(4), 2008, p. 694.

¹³⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. vi.

idea of white supremacy, the South Africans did so with the focus of helping to lift the poor whites at the expense of the blacks. In the USA, especially in the South, it was about proving they were the master race, but the poor whites were to remain a paradox. Thus, poor whites were a transnational problem that required “fixing”.

The importance and popularity of the Carnegie Commission also made it into the popular consciousness of the novels. The following quotes are evidence of this:

*Dis darem hoog tyd dat die Regering iets aan die armblanke, vraagstuk begin doen, veral nou dat die Carnegie, kommissie aan die saak roer!*¹³⁹

(It is high time the Government started doing something about the poor-white question, especially now that the Carnegie Commission is stirring the matter!)

*“... ons regering aan die ander kant probeer om ons oë te verblind met kommissies, onderstandwerkies en ander poginkies om ons armblankekwessies op te los.”*¹⁴⁰

(“... our government on the other hand is trying to blind our eyes with commissions, support works and other efforts/attempts to solve the poor-white issue.”)

In the final analysis, and for the purposes of this study, it is their daily lives and struggles that appear to be what was similar, while the way that each country went about “addressing” the problem is where the differences lie.

¹³⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 160-161.

¹⁴⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1965, p. 78.

CHAPTER SIX

The Novels and Novelists

It is important to remember that a serious novelist does not set out to produce a certain type of novel, only a good novel.¹ Due to influences that the novelist is not always aware of, this places them in a certain school, movement, genre, category or box. The historian has no choice other than to classify and group them so that the depth and range, the larger trends, influences and deviations within the movement can be apparent.² In order to understand the novel and its context, it is also important to understand the novelist. This chapter will examine the time period or *tydges* (atmosphere/context/environment) and writing movements in which the novels were written. These are important indicators that contribute to understanding what was being written at the time and how it was portrayed. This needs to be examined to understand what influenced and inspired the novelists and the novelists themselves also need to be discussed. Thus, each novelist will be examined by presenting a brief biography of their lives along with the style of their novels, structure and assumed reason for using the poor whites as the topic or source of their work along with the time period in which they lived. Thus, as mentioned earlier, this chapter will be a fairly lengthy chapter, as it covers both regions, with their two separate schools/movements and gives an overview of their respective novelists.

Chapter one underlined how vital historical criticism of the sources is. The trustworthiness or reliability of sources should never be merely accepted, credibility needs to be established, which enables the researcher to place the information in its proper perspective and draw the correct relevant conclusions.³ As stated, internal and external criticism becomes of importance. Determining the authenticity of the source and veracity of the information it contains, as well as the credibility and whether the information is indeed bona fide is critical.⁴ This chapter endeavours to take a critical approach ensuring that the content is analysed and tested using both positive and negative criticism.⁵ The first half of the chapter considers the Second Afrikaans Language Movement in South Africa, while the second focuses on the Second Renaissance Movement in the USA.

¹ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 5.

² J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 5.

³ G. Venkatesan, *A Study of Historiography*, p. 381.; M. Bucheli & R.D. Wadhvani (eds.), *Organizations in Time: History, Theory, Methods*, p. 313.

⁴ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, pp. 126-128.

⁵ R.J. Shafer (ed.), *A Guide to Historical Method*, p. 149.

The Second Afrikaans Language Movement

The South African novelists chosen for this study were all Afrikaans.⁶ This was because, as mentioned in chapter three, the majority of poor whites in South Africa were Afrikaans⁷ and although a broad range of academics and authors have written about the poor whites, the bulk of the novels written were by Afrikaans novelists.⁸

By the start of the nineteenth century, Afrikaners/*Boers* regarded themselves as different. They were no longer European, but “being of Africa”. This social psychology was reinforced by the British occupation of the Cape and later the two *Boer* Republics, as well as the British policy of Anglicisation once they had taken over all four states. A fully-fledged Afrikaner nationalism had emerged by 1870 as a social movement against British Imperialism. It was symbolised by their refusal to jettison their developing language and concomitant culture.⁹

The South African novelist chosen for this study forms part of the Second Afrikaans Language Movement. This Language Movement emerged after the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).¹⁰ Before that, the *Genootskap van Regte Afrikaners* (the Society for True Afrikaners) had been established in 1875¹¹ and dedicated its energies to standing for “*ons Taal, ons Nasie en ons Land*” (our Language, our Nation and our Land). This became the First Afrikaans Language Movement and it promoted the use of Afrikaans as a written medium and its utilisation in public domains, as well as advancing Afrikaner political interests.¹² It was part of the reaction to the injustice of the British annexation of the diamond fields in 1871.¹³ The First Afrikaans Language Movement (1875) contributed more to folklore than to literature,¹⁴ and petered out before the War broke out. In 1890, the *Zuid Afrikaansche Taalbond* (South African Language Association) was founded in Cape

⁶ Afrikaans developed from a number of European and African languages and is thus considered an African language and Afrikaners, although from white decent developed into a unique people/nation, are considered a white African tribe. K.M. Kamwangamalu, “The Language Planning Situation in South Africa” in R.B. Baldauf, & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004, p. 203.

⁷ J. van Wyk, *Nationalist Ideology and Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period, 1930-1940*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990, pp. 5-6.

⁸ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 7.

⁹ N. Alexander, “South Africa” in J.A. Fishman & O. Garcia, *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity: Disciplinary and Regional Perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 396.

¹⁰ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 83.

¹¹ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 1.

¹² P.T. Roberge, “Afrikaans” in A. Deumert & W. Vandenbusche, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*. Philadelphia: J. Benjamins, 2003, p. 26.

¹³ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 41.

¹⁴ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) IV*. Cape Town: National Commercial Printer, 1971, p. 606.

Town and delegates sought to decide on a language to rally the Dutch and Afrikaans speakers.¹⁵ In the Transvaal, one of the first advocates of Afrikaans as a written language was E.N. (Eugene) Marais, an intellectual genius, naturalist, lawyer, writer and poet. He used Afrikaans in his poems and debates and in 1890, when he was appointed editor of the newspaper *Land en Volk* (Country and Nation), he used Afrikaans and Dutch to attract subscribers.¹⁶

It was, however, the Second Language Movement that emerged in the early twentieth century that formed part of a general defensive reaction aimed at preserving Afrikaans, as well as Afrikaner values and traditions from the negative impact of British imperialism.¹⁷ The political and economic situation had changed after the Anglo-Boer War and the Afrikaner longed for freedom and independence.¹⁸ This Movement was essentially a reaction to the British High Commissioner Sir Alfred Milner's Anglicisation policy, which intended to transform the Republican Afrikaners into English-speaking colonists. Milner stated he wanted to "wipe out the last trace of Africanerism and damn the consequences."¹⁹ He was convinced that the period after the Anglo-Boer War was the perfect conditions to force all South Africans, black and white, to become "English". According to G. Dekker, Milner was arrogant enough to believe he could use the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* (mother of the nation) to achieve his goals of educating Afrikaner children in English.²⁰ This was probably one of the reasons Afrikaans parents refused to send their children to school. This occurred after the devastating effects of the Anglo-Boer War,²¹ at a time when Afrikaner nationalism was beginning to take shape and Afrikaners identified themselves with their own culture, traditions and religion, along with the effort to have their language officially recognised and acknowledged.²² Kowie Marais, a former judge and spokesman on Education for the Progressive Federal Party, stated that if it had not been for Milner's extreme measures, most Afrikaners would speak English, but due to his opposition to Afrikaans, he helped create the reaction.²³ The policy of Anglicisation struck at the heart of Afrikanerdom. Afrikaners resented this policy and saw it as a threat to their culture, language and identity, their very existence. Afrikaner

¹⁵ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 83.

¹⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 364.

¹⁷ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 83.; K.M. Kamwangamalu, "The Language Planning Situation in South Africa" in R.B. Baldauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*, p. 205.

¹⁸ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 11.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 75.

¹⁹ S. Swart & L.M. van der Watt, "Taaltriomf or Taalverdriet? An Aspect of the Roles of Eugène Marais and Gustav Preller in the Second Language Movement, circa 1905 – 1927", *Historia* 53(2), 2008, p. 134.

²⁰ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, pp. 35-36.

²¹ See chapter three.

²² J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 83.

²³ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 53.

resistance against Anglicisation is also considered one of the factors that contributed to the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War.²⁴

The advancement of an “own literature” became one of the main objectives of the Second Language Movement.²⁵ There was a close inter-relationship between Afrikaner identity, the language and literature.²⁶ A number of novelists, such as Eugene Marais, Jan Cilliers, Jakob Daniel du Toit and Louis Leipoldt, memorialised Afrikaner hardships such as the poverty caused by the Anglo-Boer War and increasing urbanisation during this period.²⁷ Afrikaans was perceived as a “bastard language” and in some cases, not even considered a “white” language.²⁸ This is evident in an incident when an Afrikaans trainee clerk on the railways, Henning Klopper,²⁹ tried to express himself in Afrikaans, his own language, and was told, “Don’t be a fool man, speak white”, referring to the English language.³⁰ The Afrikaans novels also reveal the precarious position of Afrikaners, with an implicit deprecation and fight for an “own language” being evident.³¹

While a relatively high percentage of Afrikaners were suffering as a result of poverty, the Second Afrikaans Language Movement was seen as a means to fight British Imperialism and unify the *volk* (Afrikaner people/nation).³² Hertzog remarked that the Afrikaners had to wage a language struggle “to stop considering themselves as *agterryers*”³³ (back riders).³⁴ Dr D.F. Malan, who would become Prime Minister, as leader of the NP in 1948, was influenced by Immanuel Kant, Johan Gottlieb and Arthur Schopenhauer. These German romantic nationalists attracted him because it gave language a central place and equated it to the state and nation. In 1904, he stated that the Afrikaner would become strong if united and that the best defence against Anglicisation was the realisation that the Afrikaner had their own heritage, religion, nationality, character and

²⁴ K.M. Kamwangamalu, “The Language Planning Situation in South Africa” in R.B. Baldfauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*, p. 202.; A. Grundlingh, “Prelude to the Anglo-Boer War, 1881-1899” in T. Cameron & S.B. Spies (eds.), *An Illustrated History of South Africa*, p. 192.

²⁵ J. van Wyk, “Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity”, *Theoria*, 77, 1991, p. 80.

²⁶ J. van Wyk, “Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity”, *Theoria*, 77, 1991, p. 79.

²⁷ P.T. Roberge, “Afrikaans” in A. Deumert & W. Vandenburg, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*, p. 30.

²⁸ J. van Wyk, “Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity”, *Theoria*, 77, 1991, pp. 83-85.

²⁹ He would become the founder and first chairman of the *Broederbond* (Brothers Association).

³⁰ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 65.

³¹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015.

³² J.A. Fishman & O. Garcia, *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity: The Success-Failure Continuum in Language and Ethnic Identity Efforts II*, pp. 15-16.

³³ This was a term from the commando days, it refers to attendants who provided assistance to fighters, usually unarmed Khoi and Africans.

³⁴ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 356.

language.³⁵ At the time most things seemed to be in English and Dutch was only taught in schools where the parents demanded it and the law only made concessions for Dutch where it made administration more effective.³⁶ However, it was the Afrikaners who were neither Dutch nor English who were against the Anglicisation policy. They believed the time had come for them to distinguish themselves.³⁷ Dekker explains that the *Christelik-Nasionale Onderwys* (Christian National Education) or the CNO private schools tried opposing Anglicisation with the financial support from parents and teachers, as well as with strong support from the Netherlands. The Dutch churches also preached about the dangers of Anglicisation.³⁸

Academics from all spheres rallied around this cause and argued passionately for Afrikaans to be elevated to the status of a language of culture. It formed part of a defensive reaction of preserving Afrikaner values and traditions. In 1908, Malan, then an ordained Minister of the DRC, made this evident in a statement he gave at a meeting of the Language Movement Conference in Stellenbosch:

Raise the Afrikaans language to a written language, make it the bearer of our culture, our history, our national ideals, and you will raise the People to a feeling of self-respect and to a calling to take a worthier place in world civilisation... A healthy national feeling can only be rooted in ethnic *volk* (nation/folk) art and science, ethnic customs and character, ethnic language and ethnic religion and not least, in ethnic literature.³⁹

He continues by adding that the language is born from the bottom of the heart of the nation, national history and lives in the mouths of the nation.⁴⁰ K.M. Kamwangamalu, in his chapter entitled *Afrikaans*, explains this kind of “nationalistic inspirational fervour” by focusing not only on language, but also on a specific call for ethnic art, science, character, custom, religion and literature, whereby numerous authors are encouraged to unite.⁴¹ Afrikaans was the key to “equality” with English. It needed to be developed and used in terms of politics, economics, law,

³⁵ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 365-366.

³⁶ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 35.

³⁷ P.T. Roberge, “Afrikaans” in A. Deumert & W. Vandenbusche, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*, p. 30.

³⁸ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 36.

³⁹ K.M. Kamwangamalu, “The Language Planning Situation in South Africa” in R.B. Baldfauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004, pp. 205-206.

⁴⁰ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 87.

⁴¹ K.M. Kamwangamalu, “The Language Planning Situation in South Africa” in R.B. Baldfauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*, pp. 205-206.

academically, and socially, as well as in educational institutions. It could be used as a cultural tool that could unite a large part of white South Africans.⁴² The feeling regarding the Afrikaans language is neatly encapsulated by N.P. van Wyk Louw's inscription on the Afrikaans Language monument:

Afrikaans is the language that connects Western Europe and Africa... It forms a bridge between the large, shining West and the magical Africa... And what great things may come from their union...⁴³

Dekker indicates that at the start of the twentieth century, South Africa had three languages: English, Dutch and Afrikaans. English was the language of the capitalists and was incomprehensible; Dutch was more a written language than a spoken language, however, very few people could speak or write in Dutch as this time. It was the language mostly used by the church.⁴⁴ Miems Rothmann (M.E.R. and also one of the Carnegie Commissioners) asserts this view by stating: "We never really knew the Dutch language, it was never really our language... It was an awkward tool... a foreign language for me, my mother and my grandmother."⁴⁵ Afrikaans was relatively new and developing and was not considered a recognised language, especially not a written language. According to some, the time was not ready for it. However, it was felt that something had to be done to stop the spread and domination of the English language and the threat of this was fought with the new emerging Afrikaans language.⁴⁶ It was the only language that the Afrikaners felt they could express themselves in and be spontaneous.⁴⁷ It needed to be transformed and grown into a vernacular and written form.⁴⁸

In 1905, Cape politician, Jan Hofmeyr gave a speech entitled *Is't ons Ernst?* (Are we serious about it?). He stated that the instruction of Dutch in Cape schools was so defective that no pupil could compose a letter in the language and thus asked if the Afrikaners were serious about

⁴² H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die Opkoms van 'n Moderne Gemeenskap*, p. 3.

⁴³ H.P. van Coller, "The Beginning of Afrikaans Literature" in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 262.

⁴⁴ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, pp. 36-37.; P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 2.; E. Botha, *Address by the Chancellor: Prof Elize Botha in Installation of Prof Elize Botha as Chancellor*. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 1998, p. 7.

⁴⁵ M.E.R., *My Beskeie Deel*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1972, p. 83.

⁴⁶ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁷ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ E. Botha, *Address by the Chancellor: Prof Elize Botha in Installation of Prof Elize Botha as Chancellor*, p. 7.

maintaining Dutch as a language?⁴⁹ The issue of language was also contested at universities across South Africa. After 1910 (the formation of the union of South Africa), most lectures were in either Dutch and/or English. However, by 1930, virtually no lectures were given in English at a number of South African universities.⁵⁰ Influential journalist, historian, writer, literary critic, arts patron, cultural leader, theatre critic and one of the leaders of the language struggle, G.S. (Gustav) Preller, was a staunch advocate of Afrikaans as a written language. He was a journalist at the newspaper *De Volkstem* (The National Voice) who sought to build the circulation of the newspaper. He believed turning Afrikaans into a written language was a key means of developing a distinctive nationality. He held that producing a “national literature” was not only the task of the church, school, learned people, but all Afrikaners.⁵¹ To the Dutch orientated Afrikaners, Afrikaans was a proletarian language, especially in the cities. Communication was essential to uplift the “ignorant” proletariat through communication with regards to newspapers, books and novels.⁵² Preller stated that Afrikaners were not serious about Dutch, which most could not speak without stammering. Thus, the written language had to evolve out of the spoken language – Afrikaans. The challenge was to develop the language from a spoken language to a written one.⁵³ Malan stressed that Afrikaans needed to become a written language because not doing so would only promote English. He felt it needed to be done now (the start of the twentieth century) because the Afrikaner nation was suffering a “national poverty”. According to him, the recognition of Afrikaans would solve this problem and hasten the development of a national literature.⁵⁴ According to N.P. van Wyk Louw, Afrikaans-language poet, playwright and scholar, it was a *broodsaak* (bread issue – a play on two Afrikaans terms *noodsaak* – necessity and *broodnodig* – badly needed or essential) to transform Afrikaans into the language of education and upliftment.⁵⁵ Professor E. Botha, a South African academic and literary critic, stated that without Afrikaans (the transformation and growth of the vernacular), the Afrikaners were powerless, of no consequence, doomed to poverty and backwardness/disadvantage, and one could almost say doomed to forsakenness/desolation.⁵⁶

During the Second Language movement, a number of enthusiastic young politicians, teachers, clergy, professors and professionals advocated the cause of the Afrikaans language and political

⁴⁹ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 365.

⁵⁰ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 363-364.

⁵¹ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 364-365.

⁵² J. van Wyk, “Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity”, *Theoria*, 77, 1991, p. 80.

⁵³ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 365.

⁵⁴ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 87.

⁵⁵ E. Botha, *Address by the Chancellor: Prof Elize Botha in Installation of Prof Elize Botha as Chancellor*, p. 7.

⁵⁶ E. Botha, *Address by the Chancellor: Prof Elize Botha in Installation of Prof Elize Botha as Chancellor*, p. 7.

empowerment, working towards the new language nationalism.⁵⁷ Under the Official Languages of the Union Act of 1925, which retroactively dated the language's official status to 1910,⁵⁸ Afrikaans officially became one of the national languages of South Africa, sharing equal status with English.⁵⁹ Its use in the public domain extended across government, law, education, media, commerce, administration, science and technology, as well as religion and the arts.⁶⁰ It was a mere 50 years between the First Language Movement and Afrikaans becoming an official language.⁶¹ Roberge asserts that the standard Afrikaans language, as it is today, developed in the period 1900-1930.⁶² It was during this time that the Afrikaans novelists selected for this study lived and wrote.

Well-known Afrikaans-language poet, essayist, dramatist and reviewer, J.F.E. (Jan) Cilliers believed that only literature steeped in the Afrikaner spirit and intelligible to Afrikaners would have an effect. He urged writers, novelists and poets to come forward stating: "We have a people to serve, we have a nation to educate, we cannot wait."⁶³ The Second Afrikaans Language Movement included a number of young novelists whose work was more natural and whose task it was to promote the language and develop the Afrikaans culture.⁶⁴ The topics chosen by the novelists centred around what was happening at the time. The novels can therefore be regarded as reflections of the time. The topics included the effects of the Anglo-Boer War, the climate, the land, the poverty, the urban evils, laws, the change of work and so on. By addressing these issues, these novelists formed part of either the Romantic and/or Realist literature genre. The novelists who formed part of the Second Language Movement wanted to bring pleasure through their novels, but also educate their readers. It presented the Afrikaner nation as developing from rural farmers to an industrialised community and thus, like other countries also undergoing unemployment, often presented the Afrikaners in the form of the poor white.⁶⁵

In the early 1930s, Afrikaans was established as a public, literary language and educational medium for poets and novelists, as well as historians, academics and other writers. There was a

⁵⁷ P.T. Roberge, "Afrikaans" in A. Deumert & W. Vandenbusse, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*, p. 32.

⁵⁸ M.C. Alexander, 'The 11 Languages of South Africa', <<https://southafrica-info.com/arts-culture/11-languages-south-africa/#>>, 2018. Accessed: 10 November 2022.

⁵⁹ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 55.

P.T. Roberge, "Afrikaans" in A. Deumert & W. Vandenbusse, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*, p. 15.

⁶¹ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 1.

⁶² P.T. Roberge, "Afrikaans" in A. Deumert & W. Vandenbusse, *Germanic Standardizations: Past to Present*, p. 31.

⁶³ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960, p. 20.

⁶⁴ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 92.

⁶⁵ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 17.

challenge in building a national literature with its own character. History was turned into novels, ordinary people now became heroes and everyday life became a present cohort in the novels. Thus, even the poor whites were to form part of the historical or realist novel⁶⁶ and from the end of the nineteenth century, the “poor-white question” became a “popular” topic. It was also during this time that the Afrikaner Language Movements were founded. Thus, many novelists chose to write about them as a topic.

Many of the South African, Afrikaans novels selected for this study were written by novelists who form part of what is referred to as the *plaasroman* (farm novel). These were novelists writing about farm life in the 1930s. These were a group of authors representing a distinct phase in Afrikaans writing with a meaningful overlap of ideas among the main figures.⁶⁷ This is evident in the similarities of the novels, especially with the cultural theme of the *plaasroman*.⁶⁸ The farm novel must be understood against the background of the dispossession and destruction brought about by the Anglo-Boer War. During the 1930s, the idea of an idyllic and productive farm existence was threatened by social developments. Drought, animal disease, pests, growth of industry, urbanisation and the appearance of an Afrikaans proletariat underscored the tenuousness of small scale, subsistence farming. Therefore, the spectre of poor-white destitution always haunted the *plaasroman*.⁶⁹ The “good natured” local Realism hung condescendingly over the genre for many years. In the midst of these developments, Realism would continue and the farm would retain its potential to be a site of symbolic contestation.⁷⁰ There exists a large number of farm stories from the 1930s in which vexed issues such as economic well-being, ownership, history and the future are not problematized. A rich vein of memoir literature in Afrikaans contains loving descriptions and nostalgic scenes of farm life.⁷¹ The farm remained a place of triumph and vulnerability, a place of happiness and anxiety and although in some novels the farm is lost, the characters always yearn to return back to the farm or rural areas.⁷²

⁶⁶ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 291.

⁶⁷ G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 309.

⁶⁸ G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, pp. 315-316.

⁶⁹ G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, p. 316.; P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, pp. 45-46.

⁷⁰ G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, pp. 316-317.

⁷¹ G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, p. 318.

⁷² G. Olivier, “The Dertigers and the Plaasroman: Two Brief Perspectives on Afrikaans Literature” in D. Attwell & D. Attridge (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South African Literature*, pp. 316-317.

The First *Plaasroman* Novelists of the Second Afrikaans Language Movement

This section will consider the following novelists that represent the *plaasroman* movement: J. van Bruggen; C.M. van den Heever; and lastly A.H. Jonker. They are discussed in chronological order and in addition to select biographical details, their literary works are be briefly considered.

Jochem van Bruggen was born in Groede in the province of Zeeland in the Netherlands on 29 September 1881.⁷³ As a child he was sickly, which left him with an awkward walk and speech impediment.⁷⁴ His father decided to move to South Africa when he was eight. Gold had been discovered in 1886 on the Witwatersrand and, like many other foreigners, his father decided to begin a new life on the Rand. Due to Van Bruggen's speech impediment, his parents' dream of him becoming a minister was dashed, however, with the move to South Africa, they hoped that he would become a mining engineer.⁷⁵

Initially, Van Bruggen was home schooled by his father, but was later sent to the *Staatsgimnasium* (States' gymnasium) in Pretoria. The manner in which his father had taught him the facts regarding the First Anglo-Boer War (1881) inspired him to write essays and later novels about this history. Poet, Nico Hofmeyr, was Van Bruggen's Dutch teacher and although Afrikaans was not yet an official language, he encouraged him to write in this new language. Van Bruggen wanted to become a poet, but his father was against this idea, arguing that this would not earn him a decent living.⁷⁶ Van Bruggen had grown up poor, he was one of six children and his father did not earn much as a Dutch teacher.⁷⁷

In 1899, when the Second Anglo-Boer War broke out, it meant an end to his studies. He joined a Boer commando voluntarily and was part of it for seven months until Johannesburg was captured. After the War ended he had to support himself. He could no longer become the mining engineer his parents had hoped for and thus went into service work.⁷⁸ He witnessed and experienced the after effects of the War and the impact it had on the Boers, which by this time he regarded as his own people. Van Bruggen wrote poetry about the poverty and hardships caused by the War and joined a choir and debating society as a means of expressing himself.⁷⁹ Like many of his

⁷³ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 32.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 183.

⁷⁴ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*. Pretoria: Daan Retief, 1960, p. 1.

⁷⁵ R. Olivier, *Jochem van Bruggen*. Pretoria: Cum Boeke, 1981, pp. 3-6.

⁷⁶ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 1-2.

⁷⁷ Kleinjan, "Jochem van Bruggen", *Die Huisgenoot*, 18(610), 1 Desember 1933, pp. 43 & 89.

⁷⁸ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 202.

⁷⁹ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 2-3.

characters in his novels, he too longed for the rural areas, away from the city and the British. He moved 60 km away from Johannesburg to the Magaliesburg on a farm called Steenkoppies, close to his school friend G.J. Oosthuizen.⁸⁰ There was a lot of poverty evident in this region. He remained on this farm until his death in 1957.⁸¹

In this rural area, he became a teacher for a short while. The parents of the children he taught were tobacco farmers and there were times when they paid him with tobacco. He soon left teaching after a disagreement with the School Commission for teaching the children to sing psalms in different notes. With the tobacco he had accumulated, he and his friend, Oosthuizen, became business partners, but within 18 months they were bankrupt.⁸² After this experience, he decided to start farming.⁸³ During this time, Van Bruggen started a local choir, drama and debating society. The society became known as the “Magaliesburg Cultural Society” and flourished. Van Bruggen was the chairman of the society for a number of years.⁸⁴ Meanwhile, the farm was not prospering. Thus, he decided to supplement his income by writing poetry, however, when he was told by a publisher that he would need to pay for the publishing, he abandoned poetry and began to focus on literature.⁸⁵

During his career as a writer, Van Bruggen received numerous awards for his literary texts. His first fictional story made its appearance in 1914, entitled *Die Ou Bandwag* (The old Lookout). In the same year, he came second in a competition for his story *Die Praatmasjien* (The talking Machine). From then on, he was both a writer and farmer. His second story, *Oom Jannie* (Uncle Jannie), won a prize in the South African Academic and Literature competition. It was, however, in 1917 that his first book appeared under the title *Teleurgestel* (Disappointed) and for which he was awarded the Hertzog prize. This was the turning point in his writing career as he then became an established writer and achieved what he set out to do – sell books and receive money for his work. He won the Herzog prize three more times for his works *Ampie Die Natuurkind* (Ampie The Nature-Child) – 1924, *Ampie Die Meisiekind* (Ampie The Girl) – 1928 and *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis* (The Locust Official of Sluis) – 1933. Both *Ampie* and *Die Burgermeester van Slaplaagte* (The Mayor of Slaplaagte) were re-written as plays under the title *In Die Malstroom* (In the

⁸⁰ E. Botha, “Jochem van Bruggen: 1881-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 645.

⁸¹ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*. Pretoria: van Schaik, 1973, p. 17.

⁸² J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 184.

⁸³ E. Botha, “Jochem van Bruggen: 1881-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 645.

⁸⁴ R. Olivier, *Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 19.

⁸⁵ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 4.

whirlpool) and were performed.⁸⁶ He was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Pretoria in 1953. He passed away on 22 May 1957 after a very fulfilling life.⁸⁷

Van Bruggen's work was influenced by the Afrikaans language and culture struggle, the Anglo-Boer War, as well as the poor-white problem – each with their own underlying consequences.⁸⁸ Van Bruggen was an important figure in the development of Afrikaans literature and was described as a Realist who in reality found his own spiritual truth. Reality and truth were very important to him⁸⁹ His stories and novels have a historical element and can be described as historical fiction, although in truth he remains a Realist.⁹⁰ He was one of the first authors to begin writing novels in Afrikaans and his work in the Afrikaans Realism genre became the most well-known and stood out as the best example.⁹¹ Van Bruggen was regarded as the best writer on the poor whites and their lives, making the reader aware of the problem and also providing insight into their lives.⁹² His literature climaxed in the 1930s, especially his novels on *Ampie*, which were written and published during the height of the poor-white question. His novels would in turn inspire other novelists.⁹³ For the purpose of this study, *Ampie* (the trilogy)⁹⁴ and *Bywoners* (By dwellers/sharecroppers/tenants)⁹⁵ were selected for analysis because they have a specific focus on the poor whites and were written at the height of the poor-white question. However, where necessary, reference will be made to some of his other novels to make a specific point. This is an exception in this study, as his works are the most dominant in South African poor white fictional literature. *Bywoners* received a special mention in the popular Afrikaans magazine *Die Huisgenoot's* (The Home Companion) column entitled *Boeke Ontvang* (Books received) and was recommended by the magazine to its readers.⁹⁶ *Ampie Die Natuurkind* received a review in this magazine and thus, it is evident that his works reached a wide range of people.⁹⁷ Some of his works were also prescribed text of schools.

⁸⁶ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 17-18.

⁸⁷ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 20.

⁸⁸ C.J.M. Nienaber, "Jochem van Bruggen 1881-1957" in P.J. Nienaber (red.), *Perspektief en Profile*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Persboekhandel, 1951, p. 285.

⁸⁹ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 140.

⁹⁰ C.J.M. Nienaber, "Jochem van Bruggen 1881-1957" in P.J. Nienaber (red.), *Perspektief en Profile*, p. 286.

⁹¹ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 184.

⁹² R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 46.

⁹³ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 184.

⁹⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1965.

⁹⁵ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1973.

⁹⁶ Anonymous, "Boeke Ontvang: Op Veld en Rande", *Die Huisgenoot*, 5 (56), Desember 1920, p. 344.

⁹⁷ F. Malherbe, "Oor Boeke: Ampie die Natuurkind", *Die Huisgenoot*, 9(153), 13 Februarie 1925, pp. 21-23.

Van Bruggen's work can be best described as humour-realism. This is Realism with a humoristic element that is meant to detract from the harshness and bluntness of the truth.⁹⁸ The humour in his work softened the reality and at times did not allow the seriousness of the situation to have a full impact on the reader. At times, this resulted in the loss of the importance of what he was trying to express, which in turn made the novels seem "shallow". One of the main reasons Van Bruggen did this was to lessen the severity and bleakness of the situation and to ensure that the reader could enjoy the novel.⁹⁹ A number of the readers of the time Van Bruggen wrote in were living in similar circumstances and situations. Therefore, the novels were not only a reflection of the time and their lives, but also something they could relate to – but with a lighter, funnier and happier storyline.¹⁰⁰ Van Bruggen loved people thus, he always tried to "save" his characters rather than allowing them to take full responsibility for their actions and situation.¹⁰¹ He tried to create some form of hope.¹⁰²

Van Bruggen had experienced and witnessed the suffering the War had caused – the burnt down farms and slaughtered livestock, the thousands of women and children who died in the concentration camps and the misery that dominated the former Boer Republic after the War ended. He witnessed how many tried to no avail to build their lives after the War, but failed and were forced to go to the urban areas to seek out a meagre existence in the form of employment or charity assistance, while those who had owned land and decided to remain in the rural areas became *bywoners*.¹⁰³ In addition, on his own farm lived and worked a number of *bywoners* and he witnessed their poverty and destitution first-hand.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, he too experienced the hardships of farm life or life in the rural areas due to perpetual drought and disease,¹⁰⁵ which is one of the reasons why he was able to accurately depict the white hierarchy, as well as its relations to other races.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁸ E. Botha, "Jochem van Bruggen: 1881-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 647.

⁹⁹ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 14-15.; R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 129.

¹⁰⁰ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 14-16.; R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 129.

¹⁰¹ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰² R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, pp. 69 & 105.

¹⁰³ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁰⁴ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ J. Lötter, *Tienertake: Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 17.

¹⁰⁶ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 185.

His work is described as “potent and realistic”, as he drew inspiration from events of the time, people he met and his own experiences. One such example is a *bywoner* he met who became his inspiration for the character *Ampie*. Ampie became the first “living person” in Afrikaans literature and was perceived as the most real character written about because Van Bruggen made his readers aware of Ampie’s thoughts and emotions.¹⁰⁷ Although Ampie is a personal individual, he became a symbol of poor whiteness.¹⁰⁸ The lives and personalities of Van Bruggen’s characters are simple and uncomplicated. His love of the farm and rural, country life is evident in his work, while the cities, towns and urban areas are regarded as “evil”. There are parts of his novels that play out in the urban area, this is usually where everything goes wrong or all the bad happens, however, it is the rural areas that are the main scenes, reflecting the hardship and poverty endured there. Many of his characters return to the rural areas, which is what most of his readers idealised and longed for.¹⁰⁹ Although a polarisation exists in his work, the rural area is not always depicted as idyllic and the urban area is not always an evil place.¹¹⁰ The majority of his novels focus on the poor whites or less fortunate and the life in a small farming community or town. Due to his different stylistic approach, he had an enormous influence on Afrikaner literature. His work would act as a forerunner for later novelists.¹¹¹

Novelist and poet Christiaan Maurits van den Heever was born on 22 February 1902¹¹² in a concentration camp near Norvalspont¹¹³ on the border of the Free State and Northern Cape, near the Gariiep dam, during the Anglo-Boer War. He grew up in the aftermath of the War with increasing poverty in both the rural and urban areas. He witnessed the once proud Afrikaners become impoverished due to the destruction caused by the War, especially the devastation of many farms as a result of the British scorched earth policy.¹¹⁴ He lived on a farm in the OFS and was very fond of nature, which would have a great influence on his later novels.

¹⁰⁷ R. Coetzee, “Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 46.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁸ R. Coetzee, “Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 81.

¹⁰⁹ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 8-9.

¹¹⁰ E. Botha, “Jochem van Bruggen: 1881-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 646.

¹¹¹ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 194.

¹¹² Other sources say he was born on the 27 February 1902.

¹¹³ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 190.

¹¹⁴ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 110.; P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 292.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 296.

Van den Heever was educated in the Trompsburg and Brebner districts and later at Grey University College in Bloemfontein, where he had a keen interest in history and literature.¹¹⁵ After he completed his schooling, he remained in Bloemfontein and worked as a teacher and civil servant. In 1922, he decided to continue his studies and obtained the Thomas Robertson bursary. In 1924, he obtained his BA degree from Grey University College with distinctions in Dutch and History.¹¹⁶ After his studies, he became a journalist for *Die Landbouweekblad* and *Die Volksblad*. However, he returned to his studies in Dutch and Afrikaans in Bloemfontein at the University of the Orange Free State and in 1926, he obtained a Masters with distinction. He studied under Professor A. Francken and Dr D.F. Malherbe, both of whom had a major influence on him and his work.¹¹⁷

Van den Heever then continued his studies at the University of Utrecht in 1929, where he passed his doctoral exam in Dutch literature. When he returned to South Africa, he took up a post as a lecturer at the University of the Orange Free State and completed a thesis on the poet Toitus,¹¹⁸ at the University of South Africa in 1932.¹¹⁹ Van den Heever was appointed as Professor in Afrikaans and Dutch Literature at Grey University College in 1931 and then in the same position at the University of the Witwatersrand in 1933, where he was the first lecturer in this new field. He held this position until his death.¹²⁰ In 1934, he and T.J. Haarhof initiated the *Afrikaanse Skrywerskring* (Afrikaans Writer's Circle) to encourage Afrikaans writers and the publication, as well as distribution of Afrikaans novels and books. It offered information regarding Afrikaner literature and was published in the format of a yearbook. In 1951, the *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (Journal for Literature) was launched and Van den Heever became the first editor.¹²¹ Van den Heever passed away on 8 July 1957.¹²²

¹¹⁵ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 110.

¹¹⁶ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers* p. 110.

¹¹⁷ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 299.; G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 191.

¹¹⁸ His thesis was entitled: *Die Digter Toitus, Sy Betekenis vir die Afrikaanse Letterkunde* (The poet Toitus, his meaning/contribution to the Afrikaans literature/prose)

¹¹⁹ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 299.; G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 191.

¹²⁰ Anonymous, 'Christiaan Maurits van den Heever', <http://www.springbokboeke.co.za/html/c_m_van_den_heever.html>, n.d. Accessed: 31 October 2022. H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1999, p. 653.; P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 111.

¹²¹ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 654.

¹²² H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 653.

As mentioned, Van den Heever was both a renowned poet and novelist and was very productive in his literary work. His work spans different movements of Afrikaans literary history. However, his novel *Droogte* (Drought) falls within the period of the *plaasroman* in the Second Language Movement.¹²³

As an adult, he moved to the urban area, but often remarked that he “lived in the city”, but was “not of the city”.¹²⁴ This was reflected in his work, which mostly concerned the rural areas. He experienced the contrast between the urban and rural areas and this also became a major theme in his novels.¹²⁵ It was only with his later novels that the urban areas and the problems of the uprooted rural people in the city played an important role in contrast to the prescribed roles of farm life, poverty and sacrifice.¹²⁶ Van den Heever wrote many poems and novels during his career, as well as a historic biography on J.B.M. Hertzog. He often assisted other writers with their work and involved himself in the cultural struggle and movements of the Afrikaans language and literature.¹²⁷ During his time in Johannesburg, he played a key role in the development of the Afrikaans cultural life in the city. He was an avid supporter of the cultural bonds between the Afrikaans, Dutch and Flemish worlds and strongly supported the policies of Hertzog.¹²⁸

Although his development as a poet was not typical of a *Dertiger* (Afrikaans poet of the 1930s), he is considered first and foremost as the first *Dertiger*. With regards to his cultural views, he was the forerunner of N.P. van Wyk Louw,¹²⁹ especially regarding the role of Afrikaans intellectuals and the importance of critical thinking in spite of his pleas for a liberal Afrikaans nationalism.¹³⁰ Van den Heever’s work (novels and poetry) that appeared between 1923 and 1954 are categorised as in either the Romanticism or Realist genre, but he was generally referred to as the best example of rural farm novels (*plaasroman*). He won the Hertzog prize for literature twice: in

¹²³ H. du Plooy, “C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 654.

¹²⁴ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 296.; Anonymous, 'Christiaan Maurits van den Heever',

<http://www.springbokboeke.co.za/html/c_m_van_den_heever.html>, n.d. Accessed: 31 October 2022.

¹²⁵ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 296.; Anonymous, 'Christiaan Maurits van den Heever',

<http://www.springbokboeke.co.za/html/c_m_van_den_heever.html>, n.d. Accessed: 31 October 2022.

¹²⁶ H. du Plooy, “C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 661.

¹²⁷ H. du Plooy, “C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957” in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, pp. 653-654.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 296.

¹²⁸ Anonymous, 'Christiaan Maurits van den Heever',

<http://www.springbokboeke.co.za/html/c_m_van_den_heever.html>, n.d. Accessed: 31 October 2022.

¹²⁹ A very well-regarded Afrikaans author and poet.

¹³⁰ Anonymous, 'Christiaan Maurits van den Heever',

<http://www.springbokboeke.co.za/html/c_m_van_den_heever.html>, n.d. Accessed: 31 October 2022.

1928, he won it for poetry and in 1942, he won it for literature.¹³¹ Sadly his later works were regarded as repetitive in theme and technique.¹³² However, he was both a dreamer and realist. He believed that the poet could be meaningful and an idealist, but a novelist had to be a hard worker striving for the truth and reality. Thus, he was able to bring together thoughts and deeds.¹³³

Many studies have been done on Van den Heever's work. Through his novels, Van den Heever aimed to depict a new type of Afrikaner, how they ought to differ from their forefathers and how they should create a new Afrikaner nation. Van den Heever was active when the Afrikaner nation was redefining itself and change was taking place in South Africa.¹³⁴ Later writers of the poor-white theme, such as Van den Heever, had an impact, however, it was hard to demonstrate.¹³⁵ Van den Heever's novels reveal that they were influenced in part by the work of Van Bruggen and thus, he is regarded as a refiner of the Romantic and Realism genres in Afrikaans prose.¹³⁶ The themes of his novels are described as "Pessimistic and dark"¹³⁷ and his spirit and attention to detail is evident in his realist description of the people, animals and land, as well as the literal and figurative details.¹³⁸ His work developed from his own experiences and artistic flair and was governed by historical circumstances, events, as well as religious and political views of the time. This is evident in his novel *Droogte* (Drought).¹³⁹ It is one of his best descriptions of the destruction caused by nature and is a typical *plaasroman*.¹⁴⁰ It was first mentioned in *Die Huisgenoot* under the column *Boeke Ontvang*¹⁴¹ and was later positively reviewed.¹⁴² He is very descriptive in his work, bringing the world of the novel to life and making the reader starkly aware of the conditions and what he wants the reader to feel.¹⁴³ Although Van den Heever grew up in a time of political upheaval, he did not involve himself with the masses, but concentrated on the individual. Through

¹³¹ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 654.; P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 292.

¹³² H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 654.

¹³³ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 111.

¹³⁴ C. Coetzee, "The Afrikaans Farm Novel and Idealised Sons: C.M. van den Heever's Farm Novels as Narratives of the Nation", *Alternation: International Journal for the study of southern African Literature and Languages*, 4(2), 2011, pp. 114-122.

¹³⁵ R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 145.

¹³⁶ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, pp. 298 & 310.

¹³⁷ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 655.

¹³⁸ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, p. 659.

¹³⁹ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1930.

¹⁴⁰ G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, pp. 292-293.; P. de V. Pienaar, "Oor Boeke: Droogte", *Die Huisgenoot*, 16(491), 21 Augustus 1931, p. 19.

¹⁴¹ Anonymous, "Boeke Ontvang", *Die Huisgenoot*, 15(450), 14 November 1930, p. 59.

¹⁴² P. de V. Pienaar, "Oor Boeke: Droogte", *Die Huisgenoot*, 16 (491), 21 Augustus 1931, p. 19.

¹⁴³ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, pp. 300-301.

his novels, he was able to create the Afrikaner as they were and historically portray their poverty. Their battles against the elements, their search for identity, their exodus and migration to the urban areas and the impoverishment of not only their materialistic, but also their religious lives. His views on Calvinism are infused in his novels. However, there are also elements of Pantheism,¹⁴⁴ especially in his novels regarding the farm, land or rural areas.¹⁴⁵

As mentioned, the theme of most of Van den Heever's novels is the rural area or farm and the people who lived there. He grew up in this environment and thus, much of what he wrote about was what he either experienced or witnessed. His characters are neither shallow nor superficial and the reader is offered a look into a real and intense person and situation. His novels reflect on the different times in which he lived. Van den Heever wrote in such a manner that people of later times and generations would be able to understand and even relate to the Afrikaans people and history in the period he wrote.¹⁴⁶

Abraham Hendrik Jonker, who also sometimes wrote under the aliases Maurice Becker, R. Bezema and Marcellus Prins, was born on the farm Kalkfontein in the Boshof region on 22 April 1905.¹⁴⁷ In 1910, the family moved to Christiana in the Transvaal,¹⁴⁸ where he went to school. After school, he attended Stellenbosch University where he studied Literature, Classical Languages, Law and Theology.¹⁴⁹ In 1925, he obtained his BA degree with distinction and in 1926, he attended the Theological Seminary while pursuing a Masters in Greek at the same time which he also obtained with distinction in 1927.¹⁵⁰ He passed the Theology candidates exam, but decided to pursue an LLB in law.¹⁵¹ Between 1930 and 1932, he was the travelling organiser for the NP in the Cape.¹⁵² Once his studies were completed, he became a journalist for publications such as the newspaper *Die Burger* in 1932, where he was part of the editorial team¹⁵³ and became assistant editor and later the editor of *Die Huisgenoot* in the same year. In 1936, Jonker became a member of the editorial for the United Party's mouth piece in Cape Town the *Die Suiderstem*

¹⁴⁴ The belief that the universe, nature and everything is identical with divinity.

¹⁴⁵ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, pp. 654-655.

¹⁴⁶ H. du Plooy, "C.M. van den Heever: 1902-1957" in H.P. van Coller (red.), *Perspektief en Profiel: 'n Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis II*, pp. 662-663.

¹⁴⁷ Other sources say he was born on 23 April 1905.

¹⁴⁸ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 160.

¹⁴⁹ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 336

¹⁵⁰ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 160.

¹⁵¹ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 160.

¹⁵² P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 356.

¹⁵³ .P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 356.

(The Southern Voice) and from 1937-1945, he was the editor. He furthered his education in 1942 and obtained the only D. Litt degree with distinction also at Stellenbosch University with a thesis entitled: *Die roman: Sy Aard, Onstaan en Soort* (The novel: It's nature, origin and type).¹⁵⁴ In 1945, he started his own publication entitled *Monitor*, which was bilingual. He was co-establisher and co-editor of *Ons Eie Boeke* (Our Own Books), as well as one of the co-establishers of the *Vereniging vir die Vrye Boek* (Association for the Free Book).¹⁵⁵ After many years in journalism, he changed his career and went into politics and served the United Party, the Conservative Party and the National Party consecutively.¹⁵⁶ He was a prominent author and father of the renowned poet and author Ingrid Jonker. He passed away in Cape Town on 10 January 1966.¹⁵⁷

Jonker wrote numerous novels and poems that were at first published in the publications he worked for. However, the novels that he produced in the 1930s were his most important.¹⁵⁸ These included novels such as *Die Plaasverdeling* (The farm division)¹⁵⁹ and *Die Trekboer* (The moving/roaming farmer).¹⁶⁰ Both of these novels also featured in *Die Huisgenoot* and appeared in a serialised form over a number of weeks.¹⁶¹ A year after appearing in the magazine *Die Plaasverdeling* was reviewed, very positively¹⁶²

Jonker is well-known for his tragic novels of the poor whites and associated with the same type of Realism as Van Bruggen. However, Jonker's work is blunt, truthful and shocking – raw Realism and does not have a humoristic element. Furthermore, he does not save his characters, but does create sympathy for them. Without subtly playing with the readers' emotions, he makes the reader face the hard truth and hard reality.¹⁶³ His work is described as pessimistic and sombre. Jonker's interest was more defined in the characters than the plot. His main character, Antonie Reys, becomes a symbol of the majority of poor whites in South Africa.¹⁶⁴ His novels focus on the causes and effects of the poverty and the tragic results, as well as the influence of the changing modern

¹⁵⁴ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 356.; J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 336.

¹⁵⁵ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁶ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 336.; B.M. Schoeman, *Parlementêre Verkiegings in Suid-Afrika 1910-1976*. Pretoria: Aktuele Publikasies, 1977, pp. 282, 343 & 350.

¹⁵⁷ P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 160.

¹⁵⁸ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, pp. 336-337.

¹⁵⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1932.

¹⁶⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1934.

¹⁶¹ A.H. Jonker, "Die Plaasverdeling", *Die Huisgenoot*, 16(502), 13 November 1931 en 16(508), 25 Desember 1931.; A.H. Jonker, "Die Trekboer", *Die Huisgenoot*, 18(627), 20 April 1934, 18(630), 11 Mei 1934 en 18(631), 29 Junie 1934.

¹⁶² L. van Schaik, "Oor Boeke: Die Plaasverdeling", *Die Huisgenoot*, 17(556), 18 November 1932, p. 31.

¹⁶³ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 337-338.

¹⁶⁴ R. Coetzee, "Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde", M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, pp. 174 & 189.

world on the small details, as well as on the bigger picture.¹⁶⁵ In these two novels *Die Plaasverdeling* and *Die Trekboer*, the whole tragedy of the poor white is depicted in this family history. Drought, shop debt, impoverishment on the move/road, fleeing to the diggings and eventually a dilapidated house in a back street all in one story.¹⁶⁶ It is one of the first times the reader follows the story of the poor white from inception to end.¹⁶⁷

The Southern Renaissance Movement

The literature of the post-bellum period focused mainly on the “Lost Cause.”¹⁶⁸ This was an interpretation of the American Civil War (1861-1865) which attempted to present the War from the Confederates perspective in the most favourable possible light. It was developed in the Post-war climate of racial, social and economic uncertainty by white Southerners, many of whom were former Confederate generals. The “Lost Cause” romanticised the “Old South”, as well as the Confederate war effort and often distorted history in the process. Therefore, many historian interpret the “Lost Cause” as a legend or myth. It romanticised views of the antebellum South portraying idyllic Southern culture before the Civil War (1861-1865) while ignoring the evils of slavery and the inequality of the plantation system.¹⁶⁹ Travellers’ accounts, fiction and histories all agreed about the poor whites. Their contemptuous and derogatory terms were found throughout these pieces of literature. The unabashed class hatred towards the poor whites was expressed by exaggerating all their vices (laziness, ignorance, illiteracy).¹⁷⁰ For the literary South, the social order was not threatened by rebellious African American enslaved people, but rather by degenerate poor whites. It was important to characterise the poor whites in the novels in order to defend and glorify the plantation system and slavery. It was also the plantation that was the main setting for social activity and central location in the novels.¹⁷¹ It was in these novels where

¹⁶⁵ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 339.; G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis*, p. 275.

¹⁶⁶ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 361.

¹⁶⁷ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 337.

¹⁶⁸ The Lost Cause is an important example of social memory – a nostalgia and longing for the past, as well as a collective “forgetting” of the horrors of slavery. It provides a sense of relief to white Southerners who feared being dishonoured by defeat. The Lost Cause was mainly accepted in the years following the War by white Americans who found it useful in reconciling the North and South. The Lost Cause has lost much of its academic support, however it continues to be an important part of how the War is commemorated in the South, as well as remembered in American popular culture.

¹⁶⁹ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁷⁰ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 177 & 179.

¹⁷¹ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 179.

the main role of the poor white was played as the “bad guy” upsetting the “harmonious” setting of the plantation or the “side-kick” of the “noble” or “hero” land-owner.¹⁷²

The start of the twentieth century, however, saw the emergence of a number of well-educated, well-read and well-travelled novelists who broke away from the glorified nostalgia for the Old South. Ellen Glasgow led the way in her call for “blood and irony”, which was a call for a new form of literature that moved away from falsehood and towards the principles of critical realism that focused on more contemporary social problems of the region. Hers was the first voice of the Southern Renaissance.¹⁷³ The call made by Glasgow was heard by novelists who sought to bring their readers a realistic picture of the hardships endured by their fellow Americans.¹⁷⁴ It was important for the novelists that realism supplant sensationalism.¹⁷⁵ The Southern Renaissance novelists often shared common themes, such as that of the poor whites. Each of their novels addressed the history of the South in some way with a sense of honesty and realism, unlike their predecessors.¹⁷⁶ Social issues of tradition, prejudice, farm and urban problems peculiar to the South formed the major themes. Therefore, sociological explorations and re-evaluations dominated the Southern Renaissance literature.¹⁷⁷ Serious historical realism and regional realism were largely Southern Renaissance developments.¹⁷⁸ The realism these novelists used attempted to portray life as it was with its problems, cruelties, sorrows, harsh conditions, but also its joys and successes. It was a rebellion against the idealised Romanticism.¹⁷⁹ These novelists apparently considered themselves “expert witnesses”, they lived and witnessed what they wrote about as part of a shared experience and knowledge.¹⁸⁰ The popularity of the Realism genre lured a number of novelists, historians, journalists, poets and writers.¹⁸¹

¹⁷² S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 185-196.

¹⁷³ A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*, pp. 656-666.; D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 243.; S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’,
<<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁷⁵ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁶ A.L. Vander Zee/sanderscl, ‘The “Great” American Novel 1900-1965: Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance’, <<http://blogs.cofc.edu/american-novel/2018/02/21/faulkner-and-the-southern-renaissance/>>, 21 February 2018. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁷⁷ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 75.

¹⁷⁸ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 19.

¹⁷⁹ Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’,
<<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁸⁰ S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, p. 256.

¹⁸¹ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 19.

In 1917, H.L. Mencken, a cultural critic, compared Southern culture to the Sahara Desert in his famous essay entitled “The Sahara and the Bozart”, which featured in the New York *Evening Mail*.¹⁸² According to him, the South was “almost as sterile artistically, intellectually, culturally, as the Sahara Desert.”¹⁸³ As mentioned in chapter four, the South was regarded as “backwards” and by the start of the twentieth century, it had not “caught up” to the North. The South still had some way to go to be fully incorporated into the proposed Union. This rapid transformation contributed to the betrayal and hope that informed the emergence of the South’s new literature.¹⁸⁴

Novelists reacted to Mencken’s “Sahara” statement by creating literature that could be considered noteworthy and confronted this view of a non-cultured South inept of producing great works of literature.¹⁸⁵ By 1925, Mencken stated: “Just what has happened down there I don’t know, but there has been an immense change of late... the new Southern writers are re-examining the civilisation they live under, and striking out boldly.”¹⁸⁶ The South was apparently no longer the artistic desert Mencken had first claimed and many novelists and poets were moving and forming themselves into groups, societies and clubs, setting up magazines, pamphlets and journals.¹⁸⁷ However, these novelists had to wait for metropolitan recognition of the works before they could be accepted. Most of the promising work came from younger novelists who offered a new freshness of point of view and charm of style.¹⁸⁸ The early writers had no formal training and were not concerned with winning a popular audience. Many of these novelists started their writing careers as poets. Fiction and drama were rejuvenated from the outset of the Southern Literary Renaissance. It is, however, the novelists who comprise the core of the Southern Renaissance who were highly conscious literary artists.¹⁸⁹ So successful was the Movement that many of these novelists won awards for their works.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸² A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*, p. 666.

¹⁸³ C. vann Woodward, “Why the Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51(2), 1975, p. 223.; L.M. Killian, *White Southerners*, p. 94

¹⁸⁴ S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, p. 252.

¹⁸⁵ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁸⁶ A. Tate, *Essays of Four Decades*. Chicago: Swallow Press, 1968, p. 520.

¹⁸⁷ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, pp. 9-12.

¹⁸⁸ H.M. Jones, “Is there a Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 6(2), 1930, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸⁹ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, pp. 13-15.

¹⁹⁰ A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*, p. 666.; J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, pp. 3-4.

The Southern Renaissance was thus an important literary movement within Southern American Literature that emerged during the early twentieth century in the American South.¹⁹¹ This was a phenomenon that was unparalleled in American history.¹⁹² It was a burst of fresh literary art appearing in the South during the period following the end of the First World War.¹⁹³ The term is often questioned, as it was not a “rebirth” or return to an earlier form, but was a unique and entirely new form of literature. However, the name stuck. This movement was considered a “rebirth” of Southern literature that occurred from approximately the 1920s to the 1960s. It challenged common topics and themes and was a reaction to previous literature that had characterised the American South. The movement reflected change in the South, but also through the rest of the USA.¹⁹⁴ Unlike the European Renaissance, the Southern Renaissance focused mainly on the literary arts – fiction, poetry and drama.¹⁹⁵ The challenge and change would be a literary one.¹⁹⁶ The writers adopted a new critical spirit and thus reviewed the past and present.¹⁹⁷ The Southern Renaissance was to be more than just a literary movement, it also represented history, political analysis, autobiography, sociology and journalism.¹⁹⁸ According to W.J. Cash, the Southern Renaissance can be described as:

... the outburst proceeded fundamentally from and represented basically the patriotic response of men of talent to, the absorbing need of the South to defend itself, to shore up its pride at home, or some variation on it, and to justify itself before the world.¹⁹⁹

Previous novelists had glorified the antebellum South, but the novelists from the Southern Renaissance Movement dealt with the region’s history and the reality thereof. The South had been a stronghold of slavery and racism, it had been defeated in the Civil War, it underwent Reconstruction and in the twentieth century had participated in the First World War (1914-1918), as well as becoming gradually more urbanised. Most of the South’s people faced poverty and

¹⁹¹ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁹² J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 7.

¹⁹³ J.T. Matthews, “The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South” in S. Monteith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, p. 116.

¹⁹⁴ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; A.L. Vander Zee/sanderscl, ‘The “Great” American Novel 1900-1965: Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance’, <<http://blogs.cofc.edu/american-novel/2018/02/21/faulkner-and-the-southern-renaissance/>>, 21 February 2018. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

¹⁹⁵ C. vann Woodward, “Why the Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51(2), 1975, p. 222.

¹⁹⁶ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 198.

¹⁹⁷ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 7.

¹⁹⁸ R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ C. vann Woodward, “Why the Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51(2), 1975, p. 229.

racial segregation which remained a feature of daily life. Thus, it is not surprising that the effects of the past, poverty and divisions in class and race became key themes in the novels written at the time. The South possessed a mainly conservative culture with the emphasis on family, religion and community and therefore, the novelists examined how individuals defined themselves within this culture. The legacy of slavery and racism also found a place within these novels, as did the cultural influence of the African American population.²⁰⁰ However, by the 1920s, people started reassessing their lives and situations. In less than a century, the South had experienced great upheaval and change on a number of different fronts. Many of the people returning from the First World War had also been exposed to new associations and environments and they did not plan on settling back into old habits. The excitement and stimulation was all around the novelists. The pressure of social change caused many novelists to turn to artistic forms of expression.²⁰¹ Thus, the South was literally the literary land of promise.²⁰²

In the 1920s, soon after the origins of the Southern Renaissance Movement, a sub-genre emerged: the Southern gothic novel. In this genre, the macabre and fantastic were central. It did not so much focus on the supernatural, rather under the “pretty” surface of the Southern social order it considered, dark, disturbing truths and realities, just behind the veil of respectability and gentility. Most contained some aspect of the grotesque. This sub-theme, “Southern grotesque”, features factors such as incest, mental disability, deviance, bestiality, violence, suffering, physical decay, illness, physical disfigurement and death. The Southern grotesque features prominently in the Southern Renaissance.²⁰³ The 1930s saw a greater interest in the poor white in literary circles. The period began with a confluence of events and attitudes that made it possible for literature to be more sympathetic and receptive to the poor whites’ predicament.²⁰⁴

It has been argued that the Southern Renaissance could mostly be attributed to a depression phenomenon.²⁰⁵ The economic struggles of the Great Depression of the 1930s prompted a number of novelists to write an assortment of socially conscious novels that were referred to as working class or proletarian literature. Erskine Caldwell and John Steinbeck, two of the authors

²⁰⁰ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²⁰¹ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, pp. 8 & 197.

²⁰² H.M. Jones, “Is there a Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 6(2), 1930, p. 185.

²⁰³ A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*, p. 666.

²⁰⁴ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 37.

²⁰⁵ C. vann Woodward, “Why the Southern Renaissance?”, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, 51(2), 1975, p. 228.

selected for this study, wrote “proletariat literature”.²⁰⁶ These novelists viewed capitalism as the main cause of the Great Depression, which resulted in many leaning towards the “left”.²⁰⁷ Communism and Fascism were rising abroad and the effects were felt in the South, where the suffering and horrors surfaced in the literature.²⁰⁸ The novelists selected for this study focused on presenting the poor whites as proletarian heroes and not the rural peasant that had been their only label. However, not all were radical.²⁰⁹ In the South, the “Depression Thirties” saw a rise in radical and militantly liberal fiction. The poor whites were one of the central themes. An extensive number of Southerners sympathised with the uprooted, exploited and deprived.²¹⁰ Due to these social changes, it was during the 1930s that the Southern poor whites held the most interest. This time enabled a new ideological approach to the literature and the historical moment most sympathetic and receptive to the poor-white’s predicament.²¹¹ The Southern Renaissance was the most striking literary development of the 1930s and arose from an improbable confluence of events such as the Crash of Wall Street. It brought the USA closer to the experiences of the South and thus, made the Southern experience more pertinent. The South was already familiar with history’s negative lessons of poverty, defeat, failure and guilt.²¹²

The novels that formed part of the Southern Renaissance have shifted and changed over time, expanding the canon. It has become more inclusive not only in terms of the novelists (black, female, poor), but also in terms of the novels themselves and their themes. Novelists writing about the poor were regarded as writing about what was considered political or national thus, political writing was not regionalist. These novelists were regarded at first as social agitators who were manipulating art for the sake of dogma. However, through the remapping of the Southern Literary Movement, poor whites were no longer the villains of the plantation novel or “Dixies Forgotten

²⁰⁶ Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’, <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²⁰⁷ Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’, <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; “Left”, in the 1930s referred to those became disgusted with capitalism and supported Marxist theories of class struggle. Although Communism never took off in the USA, it did appeal to novelist who rejected the materialism and greed associated with capitalism.

²⁰⁸ S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 13. However, the novelists were neither communist nor fascist.

²⁰⁹ S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 1 & 20.

²¹⁰ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 18.

²¹¹ S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 13 & 23.

²¹² S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, pp. 252-253.

People” and neither were the novelists writing about them.²¹³ The differences with regards to the ideologies of the novelists and novels had one fundamental element that was the same, they explored the dimensions of a Southern culture while demystifying Southern traditionalism, writing at a time of great intellectual energy derived from the perceived clash of traditional and modern cultures.²¹⁴ Different groups, such as the Nashville group and the Vanderbilt group, emerged with different views of what constituted as the Southern Literary Renaissance.²¹⁵ It is important to note that the Southern Renaissance included mostly authors who were from the South – born and bred, but exceptions have been made and boundaries have been pushed or pulled. Bradbury discusses this in his work entitled *Renaissance in the South: A critical history of the literature, 1920-1960*, and believes that the “canon” has limited the number of authors that have contributed to the South’s modern literature.²¹⁶

The American novelists selected for this study form part of the Southern Renaissance’s First Wave (1920s-1940s). The First Wave was largely a reaction to the abovementioned criticisms of the South’s culture. Novelists dealt with the troubled past and tried to define the South as a unique cultural place, with distinctive features, separate and different from the rest of the USA.²¹⁷ They used their novels to explain the cultural nuances and provided an identity and gave voice to Southern characters.²¹⁸ A. Tate considered these novelists “traditionalists”, not because they celebrated the South’s traditions, but since they understood that the region possessed distinctive features and these became associated with the purported virtues of Southern life.²¹⁹

The narrative techniques used incorporated traditions and techniques from oral storytelling, oral history and oral traditions in Southern culture. These included conversing, preaching and memorialising. These novelists also tried to capture the distinct features of the Southern language and its dialects that were starting to disappear, as well as quaint customs and unfamiliar

²¹³ R.H. Brinkmeyer, “The Southern Literary Renaissance” in R. Gray & O. Robinson, *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, pp. 149-156

²¹⁴ R.H. Brinkmeyer, “The Southern Literary Renaissance” in R. Gray & O. Robinson, *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, p. 156.

²¹⁵ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, 1920-1960, pp. 16-17.

²¹⁶ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 4.

²¹⁷ Study Smarter, ‘Southern Renaissance’, <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; M. Kreyling, “Essay-Review: The Renaissance of the Southern Renaissance”, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 34(1), 1980-81, p. 61.

²¹⁸ A.L. Vander Zee/sanderscl, ‘The “Great” American Novel 1900-1965: Faulkner and the Southern Renaissance’, <<http://blogs.cofc.edu/american-novel/2018/02/21/faulkner-and-the-southern-renaissance/>>, 21 February 2018. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²¹⁹ J.T. Matthews, “The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South” in S. Monteith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*, p. 117.; R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*, p. 86.

scenery.²²⁰ The novelist's material was said to be broadened to include a number of aspects that had remained untouched.²²¹

The Second Wave of the Southern Renaissance (approximately 1940s-1960s) emerged under the influence of the Agrarians.²²² These novelists attempted to build on the message of value in the South's traditions. They wrote during the changes that came to the South in the form of urbanisation, industrialisation, economic development and post-World War changes.²²³

Southern writers were extremely productive during the first half of the twentieth century and it is estimated that the Southern Renaissance writers produced approximately 5 000 titles. The most widely read American novelist of this time period was Erskine Caldwell, with William Faulkner not far behind.²²⁴ By the 1930s, the South had become the most productive literary region in the USA.²²⁵ Some of these works can be attributed to the Federal Writers Project (FWP). This project started in 1935, and formed part of a branch of the New Deal programme – the Works Progress Administration (WPA).²²⁶ The Great Depression resulted in many people becoming unemployed and this included artists as well. Thus, the WPA established the Federal Project Number One to provide artists with employment.²²⁷ For example, John Steinbeck and James Agee were two writers who benefited from this project.²²⁸ The FWP focused on writers, journalists and novelists. It included a number of different written works that acted as a time capsule to the reality and events taking place in the USA.²²⁹ The 1930s brought to culmination the most extensive literary

²²⁰ A. Berke, R.R. Bleil, J. Cofer & D. Davis, *Writing the Nation: A Concise Introduction to American Literature 1865 to Present*, p. 666.; J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 20.

²²¹ S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 11.

²²² A group of writers teaching at Vanderbilt University who celebrated the agrarian tradition of the South and contrasted it to the urbanised North.

²²³ Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²²⁴ Both of these novelists will be discussed in greater detail.; Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²²⁵ W. Marshall, *The Literature of the United States of America*, p. 150.

²²⁶ Encyclopedia.com 'Literature 1929-1941', <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²²⁷ Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, 'The Federal Writer's Project', <<https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2020/07/14/the-federal-writers-project/>>, 14 July 2020. Accessed: 21 November 2022.

²²⁸ Encyclopedia.com 'Literature 1929-1941', <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

²²⁹ Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library and Museum, 'The Federal Writer's Project', <<https://fdr.blogs.archives.gov/2020/07/14/the-federal-writers-project/>>, 14 July 2020. Accessed: 21 November 2022.

and artistic effort launched in the USA with the aim of recording, searching out, examining and altering the life and values of its people.²³⁰

It was, however, only in 1945 that this phenomenon was first formally termed and called a “Southern Literary Renaissance”²³¹ by Tate who believed the movement existed between 1929 and 1945.²³² Unlike the 1920s the South was no longer looking backwards, but forward and was emerging as part of the modern world.²³³

The First Wave Novelists of the Southern Renaissance Movement

This section will consider the following novelists that represent the first wave novelists: W. Faulkner, J. Steinbeck²³⁴ and E. Caldwell. They are discussed in chronological order and in addition to select biographical details, their literary works are briefly considered.

William Cuthbert Faulkner²³⁵ was born in New Albany Mississippi on 25 September 1897.²³⁶ His father owned a livery stable,²³⁷ and he was the oldest of five sons. He was close to his mother and his African American nanny, a former enslaved person, who remained with him until her death in 1940. Her influence in his life is apparent in a number of his novels.²³⁸ Both his parents came from wealthy families, but were reduced to genteel poverty by the Civil War.²³⁹ Faulkner’s family moved to Oxford, Mississippi, in 1902, where he spent most of his life. This area forms the basis for the town of Jefferson in his invented Yoknapatawpha series, an area based on Lafayette Country.²⁴⁰ As a child, he said he wanted to be a writer like his grandfather.²⁴¹

²³⁰ S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, p. 250.

²³¹ It was Tate’s spelling of renaissance.

²³² J.T. Matthews, “The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South” in S. Monteith (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*, p. 116.; L Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, p. 750.

²³³ R.H. Brinkmeyer, “The Southern Literary Renaissance” in R. Gray & O. Robinson, *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004, p. 150.

²³⁴ John Steinbeck was not from the traditional “South”, however, he was not from the North. He came from California which is in the south-west of the USA.

²³⁵ Originally spelled Falkner, a published accidentally added the “u” and he decided to keep it.

²³⁶ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.

²³⁷ M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*. New York: The Overlook press, 2006, p. 11.

²³⁸ J.D. Anderson, *Student Companion to William Faulkner*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007, p. 2.

²³⁹ Your Dictionary, ‘Biography: William Faulkner’,

<<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/william-faulkner>>, n.d. Accessed 13 January 2022.

²⁴⁰ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 81.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303. M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 27.

²⁴¹ M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 11.

Faulkner was a poor student and left high school after the tenth grade. However, he taught himself French in order to be able to read the Symbolist poets and read widely in modern English literature. During the First World War, he was enrolled in the Royal Flying Corps in Toronto, which did not see any action. After the War, Faulkner studied for a year at the University of Mississippi (1919-1920) and was employed in a number of vocations, such as bookkeeper, shop assistant, postmaster and journalist.²⁴² In 1924, he published his first volume of poems entitled *The Marble Faun*.²⁴³ He considered poetry the most difficult genre and himself a “failed poet” thus, devoting most of his energy to writing novels, but still continued writing poetry.²⁴⁴

In 1925, he travelled to New Orleans and contributed to the New Orleans’ *Time-Picayune* and *The Double Dealer*, in order to earn a passage for a six month visit to Europe.²⁴⁵ However, while in New Orleans, he met Sherwood Anderson, who praised and encouraged his work.²⁴⁶ On his return, he published his first novel in 1926, *Soldiers’ Pay*.²⁴⁷ From 1927, he became a full-time writer and later during the 1930s and 1940s also a screenwriter for Metro-Goldwyn Mayer, 20th Century Fox and Warner Brothers.²⁴⁸ He did not enjoy writing for Hollywood, but did so when the popularity of his novels waned slightly in the 1930s.²⁴⁹ The Yoknapatawpha cycle began appearing after 1929 with *The Sound of Fury* and *As I Lay Dying* (1930).²⁵⁰ Yoknapatawpha County was modelled on the region where he lived in the red clay hills of northeast Mississippi and used his native region as inspiration and source material.²⁵¹ Sherwood Anderson cautioned him that the best writing came from what you knew best.²⁵² Later, Faulkner remarked, “I discovered that my own little postal stamp of native social was worth writing about and that I would never live long enough to exhaust it.”²⁵³ It was apparently in these novels that his true genius found its fullest expression.²⁵⁴

²⁴² D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁴³ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.; J.D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*, p. 131.

²⁴⁴ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, pp. 210-211.

²⁴⁵ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.; J.D. Anderson, *Student Companion to William Faulkner*, p. 3.

²⁴⁶ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 79.; M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 20.

²⁴⁷ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁴⁸ J.D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*, p. 132.; D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.

²⁴⁹ C. Waid, “Faulkner and the Southern Novel” in L. Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 754.; R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 205.; J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 83.

²⁵⁰ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁵¹ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 20.

²⁵² J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 79.

²⁵³ M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 26.; W. Marshall, *The Literature of the United States of America*, p. 151.

²⁵⁴ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, pp. 210-211.

Faulkner received critical attention from early in his career and this turned into notoriety due to his novels sensational subject matter. This was evident with his publication of *Sanctuary* (1931). In 1932, he published *Light in August* and in 1936, *Absalom Absalom* and these novels appear to have established him as a novelist.²⁵⁵ In 1939, he became a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters.²⁵⁶ Faulkner received the Henry award in 1939 and again in 1949 for his literature.²⁵⁷ However, the start of the 1940s saw him fall from fame in the USA and he turned to script writing in Hollywood in order to make a living. Faulkner's second enduring rise to fame came in the mid-1940s. In 1946, he published *The portable Faulkner*, which was edited by M. Cowley.²⁵⁸ In 1948, he became a member of the American Academy.²⁵⁹ Later that decade, he published *Intruder in the Dust* (1948), but it was his *Collected Stories* in 1950 that won him a National Book Award. Later that same year, he was awarded the American Academy Howells Medal, as well as the Nobel Prize for Literature and travelled to Stockholm to give his acceptance speech, which in itself has become famous. In 1955, he was awarded another National Book Award.²⁶⁰ Faulkner donated his Nobel Prize winnings to establish a fund that would encourage and support new fiction writers, which resulted in the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction.²⁶¹

He was now an established novelist. In the 1950s and early 1960s, Faulkner travelled abroad for the State Department to various destinations such as South America, the Far East and Europe. Faulkner was a writer in residence at the University of Virginia between 1957 and 1958. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize twice, first in 1957, for *The town* and then again in 1962, for *The Reivers*.²⁶²

A few of his other works include: *The Unvanquished* (1938), *Go Down Moses* (1942), the *Snopes Trilogy* (1940-1959),²⁶³ *Requiem for a Nun* (1951) and *A Fable* (1954).²⁶⁴ His *Snopes Trilogy*, which features poor whites, reflected the social changes that occurred in the South over half a

²⁵⁵ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁵⁶ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, pp. 208-209.

²⁵⁷ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.

²⁵⁸ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁵⁹ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.

²⁶⁰ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 208.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁶¹ Biblio, 'William Faulkner (1897-1962)', <<https://www.biblio.com/william-faulkner/author/225>>, 2022. Accessed: 25 November 2022.

²⁶² H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁶³ J.D. Hart, *The Concise Oxford Companion to American Literature*, pp. 163 & 406.; This included *The Hamlet* (1940), *The Town* (1957) and *The Mansion* (1959).

²⁶⁴ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.; D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 20.

century while remaining faithful to patterns in other times and societies.²⁶⁵ He wrote a number of novels, short stories, screenplays, articles and poetry over the course of his life.²⁶⁶

It has been claimed that throughout his career Faulkner was a heavy drinker which posed a serious risk to his health. He was essentially a shy man and did so mostly to ease the pressures of social situations and a difficult marriage. His wife Oldham was also an alcoholic. He often joked that he thought up a lot of his material whilst drunk.²⁶⁷ Faulkner was described as a dapper, quiet, courteous man, sharp-eyed and moustachioed. He refused the role of celebrity, did not allow prying into his private life and very rarely granted interviews.²⁶⁸ Faulkner passed away on 6 July 1962 of a heart attack in Oxford, Mississippi.²⁶⁹

Faulkner has been called the greatest of modern American novelists, a claim that rests on his prodigious creativity and productivity, his extraordinary mastery of literary techniques and a breadth of characterisation and insight into the human condition.²⁷⁰ It has been claimed that Faulkner performed a labour of imagination that has not been equalled, making his Yoknapatawpha County stand as a parable of all the Deep South.²⁷¹ What truly made Faulkner one of the best American novelists of all time was his use of ground breaking literary devices such as symbolism, time-shifts within the narrative, a stream of consciousness and multiple narrations within a novel.²⁷² He had the ability to present a range of human possibilities within society by presenting his reader with the characters' inner most thoughts and psychologies; feelings and desires. This granted readers a better understanding and insight into the daily lives of his characters.²⁷³ Faulkner accepted and utilised Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest, and this is especially evident in his depiction of the survival abilities of the Snopes clan.²⁷⁴ Faulkner's novels reveal a constant effort to create a vision of man that is personal, social and mythic at the same

²⁶⁵ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 211.

²⁶⁶ M. Cunliffe (ed.), *American Literature Since 1900*, p. 197.

²⁶⁷ J.D. Anderson, *Student Companion to William Faulkner*, p. 4.; M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 54.

²⁶⁸ Your Dictionary, 'Biography: William Faulkner',

<<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/william-faulkner>>, n.d. Accessed 13 January 2022.

²⁶⁹ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 1303.

²⁷⁰ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature* p. 211.; K.J. Hayes, *A Journey Through American Literature*, p. 150.

²⁷¹ J.D. Anderson, *Student Companion to William Faulkner*, p. 1.

²⁷² M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 30.; S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 39.; Biblio, 'William Faulkner (1897-1962)', <<https://www.biblio.com/william-faulkner/author/225>>, 2022. Accessed: 25 November 2022.; R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*, p. 94.

²⁷³ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, pp. 210-211.; A.S. McIlwaine, "The Southern Poor White: A Literary History", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1939, p. 196.

²⁷⁴ A.H.P. Werlock, "Poor Whites: Joads and Snopeses", *San José Studies*, 18(1), 1992, p. 64.

time, in which a scheme of social history and economic victimisation of the poor white plays a significant role.²⁷⁵

He was a realist writer and used vivid factual narration and a scrupulous use of dialects to make his novels come alive, relatable and real.²⁷⁶ Like Van Bruggen's Ampie, his portrayal of the Snopes clan has become part of popular consciousness with "Snopeiasm referring specifically to a certain type of poor white or person."²⁷⁷ Faulkner stated: "I listen to the voices and when I put down what the voices say, it's right."²⁷⁸ He was a listener of people and their stories.²⁷⁹ Faulkner was one of the novelists who repeatedly affirmed the dangers of subverting the crafty dishonesty of fiction.²⁸⁰ He uses tradition, culture, folklore and superstition to make his novels realistic, relatable and believable.²⁸¹ Faulkner's observations have a truth and can be compared to social history.²⁸² He incorporated events from his own life into his work.²⁸³ Faulkner is viewed as an "agrarian realist" who reveals the truth in an agricultural society as a whole. Thus, he examines land, its ownership and its importance in all aspects of the South.²⁸⁴

Faulkner is considered one of the Southern agrarians that formed part of the Southern Renaissance. He examined inequality (in terms of race and class) that characterised the South and criticised the urban lifestyle of the North while celebrating the traditional rural life of the South.²⁸⁵ Most people in the South were still agrarian in outlook, felt the rhythm of the seasons and maintained a fierce sense of independence.²⁸⁶ Faulkner, being a Southerner, possessed a deep feeling for the soil and a recognition of the land's importance and the effect it can have on those who respect it. This also made him a regionalist.²⁸⁷ His novels represent the agrarian

²⁷⁵ S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 29.

²⁷⁶ D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 210.

²⁷⁷ A.H.P. Werlock, "Poor Whites: Joads and Snopeses", *San José Studies*, 18(1), 1992, p. 66.

²⁷⁸ R. Gray, "William Faulkner" in L.T. Hönnighausen (ed.), *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*. Tübingen: Francke, 1993, p. 307.

²⁷⁹ R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 199.

²⁸⁰ S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 28.

²⁸¹ S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 35.

²⁸² S. Callen, "Planter and Poor White in 'Absalom Absalom!'. "Wash" and "The Mind of the South", *The South Central Bulletin*, 23(4), 1963, pp. 24-36.

²⁸³ R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 309.

²⁸⁴ D.G. Breaden, "William Faulkner and the Land", *American Quarterly*, 10(3), 1958, pp. 344-345.

²⁸⁵ Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; C. Waid, "Faulkner and the Southern Novel" in L. Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, p. 759.

²⁸⁶ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 2.

²⁸⁷ D.G. Breaden, "William Faulkner and the Land", *American Quarterly*, 10(3), 1958, p. 334.

aristocratic Old South and the ruthless mercantile New South and its effects on poor whites.²⁸⁸ It has been claimed that Faulkner was also a naturalist.²⁸⁹ In an interview, speaking about his home county, he stated: "It's the only really authentic region in the United States, because a deep indestructible bond still exists between man and his environment."²⁹⁰

The gothic genre was also prominent in his work regarding poor whites.²⁹¹ Faulkner turned Southern sociology and misshapen personalities into effective gothic pronouncements concerning the quality of modern life. His novels were rarely based on the narration of one character which allowed the reader a better understanding of the story on a different level and when necessary an omniscient narration was employed. The poor whites featured in a number of his novels, however, to some readers these characters were strange and often violent. Faulkner was able to use his technical complexity to tell their story.²⁹²

Faulkner liked his characters and therefore he brought them back in other novels and short stories.²⁹³ A number of his novels feature poor whites because they played a dominant role in the history of the South and the time period in which Faulkner lived. Furthermore, there were a number of poor whites in Mississippi and in the area Faulkner grew up in and it was from his surroundings and personal life that he drew his ideas for his novels.²⁹⁴ He portrayed his poor whites in a number of different ways (good and evil) and permitted them to be heroic and humanly fallible, however, this deflected attention from their exploitations as a clearly defined social class.²⁹⁵ His focus was not only on poor whites, but also on the society and the social order that created and formed them. His works are based on Southern tradition, culture and historical consciousness.²⁹⁶ Poor whites occupied Faulkner throughout his career. Their characters and

²⁸⁸ Your Dictionary, 'Biography: William Faulkner', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/william-faulkner>>, n.d. Accessed 13 January 2022.

²⁸⁹ A.S. McIlwaine, "The Southern Poor White: A Literary History", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1939, p. 188.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 82.

²⁹⁰ H.D. Piper, L. Bouvard & W. Faulkner, "Conversation with William Faulkner", *Modern Fiction Studies*, 5(4), 1959/60, p. 364.

²⁹¹ A.S. McIlwaine, "The Southern Poor White: A Literary History", D. Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1939, p. 190.

²⁹² D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, pp. 129 & 210-211.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, pp. 42-43 & 48.

²⁹³ M.T. Inge, *William Faulkner*, p. 27.; M. Cunliffe (ed.), *American Literature Since 1900*, p. 185.

²⁹⁴ Your Dictionary, 'Biography: William Faulkner', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/william-faulkner>>, n.d. Accessed 13 January 2022.; J.D. Anderson, *Student Companion to William Faulkner*, pp. 1-4.

²⁹⁵ S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 51 & 53.

²⁹⁶ R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, pp. 120, 130 & 140.

roles changed as his own ideologies and understanding shifted, however, his novels always remained insightful to the period.²⁹⁷ Although his novels include the extreme consequences of the material poverty of poor whites, he was not political nor did he lean towards the literary left, but his treatment of the poor whites in his work reveals him as class conscious.²⁹⁸

Although not technically a Southerner or from what is deemed the South, John Ernst Steinbeck will be considered in this study for the impact his novel *The Grapes of Wrath*, which deals with poor whites, had.²⁹⁹ Steinbeck was born on 27 February 1902 in Salinas, California.³⁰⁰ He was one of four children and the only son. Although he did not know his grandparents, all of whom had immigrant backgrounds, their life stories sparked his imagination and featured as themes in his novels.³⁰¹ His father suffered a number of losses that would also impact Steinbeck's work. His father lost his job then invested his life savings in a feed and grain store, but this went bankrupt due to the move in industrialisation from animal transportation to automobiles. He served most of his life as treasurer for Monterey County, but was happiest outdoors. He passed this love of nature onto Steinbeck. His mother was an accomplished teacher and community leader. It was from her that Steinbeck was introduced to literature and encouraged to read. At age 14, he announced he wanted to be a writer.³⁰² As a young man, he was described as a loner and a dreamer which would continue into adulthood.³⁰³

He was regarded as a mediocre student³⁰⁴ and after school he enrolled at Stanford University (1919-1925) to please his parents.³⁰⁵ However, he never completed a degree, only taking courses he found interesting and courses to help with his writing.³⁰⁶ While at university, he took a short story writing class from Edith Mirrielees and was published in Stanford's undergraduate

²⁹⁷ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, p. 118.

²⁹⁸ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 39.

²⁹⁹ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 16.

³⁰⁰ R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁰¹ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*. New York: Facts on File, 2005, p. 3.

³⁰² J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 4.; S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³⁰³ G. Bergquist, "Biography of John Steinbeck" in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*. Pasadena: Salem Press, 2011, p. 7.

³⁰⁴ G. Bergquist, "Biography of John Steinbeck" in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 7.

³⁰⁵ S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*, p. 3795.

³⁰⁶ G. Bergquist, "Biography of John Steinbeck" in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 7.

magazine.³⁰⁷ In 1926, he tried to publish a series of short stories, but was unsuccessful.³⁰⁸ He held a number of temporary jobs such as watchman, reporter, labourer and handyman and this gave him a deep appreciation and sympathy for the common labourer, which would contribute to his novels written in the 1930s.³⁰⁹ His first paid story was published pseudonymously in 1927, entitled “The Gifts of Iban”.³¹⁰ In 1929, he published his first novel entitled *Cup of Gold*, but the novel scarcely sold and the publisher went bankrupt.³¹¹ However, he had realised his vocation and never again held a traditional nine-to-five job. In 1930, Steinbeck married Carol Henning and with her support and the support of his parents, writing became his occupation.³¹² Henning would help shape his writing style and his social consciousness of the 1930s.³¹³ His next two novels: *Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*, which received greater critical attention also went largely unnoticed and did little for his finances or fame.³¹⁴ He wrote a number of short stories during the midst of the Depression that had minor successes. It was only in 1935 with his novel *Tortilla Flat*, which became a best seller, that he received his first significant recognition as a novelist – the California Commonwealth Club Gold Medal for Best Novel by a Californian.³¹⁵ After 1935, his work began to deal more with contemporary issues, especially the plight of the socially and economically dispossessed.³¹⁶ With his 1937 novel and play *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck was praised for his accomplishments as a writer and the play won the New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award.³¹⁷ He now had the means to travel and he and Henning travelled through the USA, Mexico, Europe and the Soviet Union. These travels would continue throughout his life and also inspired and contributed to his work.³¹⁸

³⁰⁷ R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁰⁸ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 5-6.

³⁰⁹ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 8.; J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 5.; S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer writer’, <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³¹⁰ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 8.

³¹¹ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 6.; R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³¹² R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³¹³ S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer’, <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³¹⁴ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 8.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*, p. 3795.

³¹⁵ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 6.

³¹⁶ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 8.

³¹⁷ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*, p. 3795.

³¹⁸ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 6-16.

In 1939, Steinbeck published his novel *The Grapes of Wrath* and it was this novel that made him famous.³¹⁹ George West, editor of the *San Francisco News*, commissioned Steinbeck to do a series on the Dust Bowl³²⁰ migration into rural California and thus he covered the plight of migrant workers. Several experiences and shorter works, such as *The Harvest Gypsies*³²¹ and two documentary films by Pare Lorentz,³²² contributed to his final work.³²³ His direct involvement created an obsessive urge to tell the story of these migrants honestly, but also movingly. Steinbeck spent a lot of time visiting migrant camps, he got to know the people through social and cultural observations. He travelled with these people, ate with them and sat and talked in ditches with them. He worked in the relief camps after the heavy rain and flooding in 1938 stranded 5000 migrant families in hopeless destitution. He witnessed the dire situation, the desperateness, starvation, illness and became angry at how the situation had been allowed to develop. He remained in contact with Tom Collins, who headed the migrant camps in Marysville and Arvin, California, as he wrote his novel. It had been Collins who introduced him to a number of people on whom he based his characters. This contact offered insight into conversations and daily events that took place in these camps.³²⁴

The Grapes of Wrath was extremely topical and the themes of disposed sharecroppers, the working class, the preying of men upon one another and the sentimental attachment to land were to remain prominent in Steinbeck's future work.³²⁵ It was published at the apex of the Depression and recorded the lives of dispossessed farmers captured in the decade's angst and the USA's legacy of visionary prosperity, individualism and westwards movement. However, there were those who considered it "Marxist propaganda", "a lie" and "scourge" on California's generosity

³¹⁹ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.

³²⁰ The Dust Bowl was a period of severe dust storms that greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture of the American prairies during the 1930s. The phenomenon was caused by a combination of both natural factors and manmade factors.

³²¹ This included the series of works he wrote for the *San Francisco News* accompanied with photographs by Dorothea Lange of the Farm Security Administration.

³²² These films were made of President Roosevelt's New Deal inspired Resettlement Administration and dealt with human displacement and the natural erosion caused by the Dust bowl and Mississippi Valley floods.

³²³ J. Whitt, "To Do Some Good and No Harm: The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck", *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 57-58.

³²⁴ R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.; J. Whitt, "To Do Some Good and No Harm: The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck", *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 58-60.

³²⁵ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.

and it was banned until 1945.³²⁶ This was not his intention, as is evident in a letter he wrote about *The Grapes of Wrath*, where his intention was “to do some good and no harm”.³²⁷

As mentioned, this novel was his most successful and sold out an advance edition of 19 804 by mid-April 1939 and 10 000 copies per week by early May 1939.³²⁸ *The Grapes of Wrath* became a best seller and the most widely read book of 1939.³²⁹ It was also translated into nearly thirty languages. *The Grapes of Wrath* has been praised as a triumph of proletarian writing by the left and nominated by critics and reviewers as “The Great American Novel”. In 1940, *The Grapes of Wrath* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and was made into an acclaimed motion picture³³⁰ and later a play whose Broadway production won a Tony Award. It has been claimed that *The Grapes of Wrath* would become one of the most enduring novels by an American author.³³¹

Steinbeck wrote novels, short stories, pamphlets plays, films, and some of his later works included: *Cannery Row* (1944), *The Pearl* (1947), *The Wayward Bus* (1947), *East of Eden* (1952), *Sweet Thursday* (1954), *The Short Reign of Pippin IV* (1957) and *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961).³³² He participated in a number of non-fiction genres, such as travel writing, personal essays, as well as social and political commentary. Although he had an interest in journalism, it would always come second to his fictional writing, which was his “real” work, passion and true calling.³³³

Steinbeck was multi-talented. He had conferred with the President, F.S. Roosevelt about the need to counter proliferating Nazi propaganda. This resulted in Roosevelt and his top intelligence aids wanting to enlist him in the Foreign Information Service, a news agency to respond to Axis

³²⁶ R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.; S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer’, <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³²⁷ J. Whitt, “‘To Do Some Good and No Harm.’ The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck”, *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, pp. 57-58.

³²⁸ S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer’, <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³²⁹ L Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, pp. 675-676.

³³⁰ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.; L Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, p. 676.

³³¹ R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³³² H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.; J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 3-16.; G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, pp. 9-10.

³³³ J. Whitt, “‘To Do Some Good and No Harm.’ The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck”, *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, p. 41.

propaganda with pro-Allied and pro-American information during the 1940s. At the time, the agency recruited a number of novelists, filmmakers, screenplay writers and playwrights and Steinbeck agreed to partake in writing and some of his works contributed to the morality of soldiers in the Second World War as well as recruitment. He also decided to join the military, but was refused due to some of his literature.³³⁴ Regardless of his patriotic involvement, Steinbeck was requested to make changes to a number of his works, as it appeared he had a socialist stance, however, his work was proletarian. This suspicion of him and his loyalty continued.³³⁵ In 1943, he became a War correspondent for the *Herald Tribune* and in some instances participated in armed combat. These experiences would affect his work and marriage.³³⁶ In the 1950s, Steinbeck became more involved in politics and served as a speech writer for Adlai Stevenson and President L.B. Johnson, but he still continued with his writing.³³⁷

In 1962, he published *Travels with Charley*. It is a journalistic account of his journey across the USA with his dog. In the same year Steinbeck was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature.³³⁸ This apparently became a soured affair. Shortly after the announcement criticism erupted across the USA about the Nobel Committee's choice. Steinbeck never got over the rejection of his worthiness by the literary elite and never wrote fiction again.³³⁹

In 1964, President Johnson awarded Steinbeck with the Medal of Freedom, which was the highest civilian award bestowed by the USA. He was loyal to the USA and committed to the efforts to combat communism, but he did not agree with the USA's involvement in the Vietnam War. However, he became a war correspondent after both his sons enlisted.³⁴⁰

³³⁴ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 9 & 15-16. S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³³⁵ Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 9.

³³⁶ G. Bergquist, "Biography of John Steinbeck" in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 9. J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 10.

³³⁷ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 14-15.

³³⁸ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.

³³⁹ S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.; J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, p. 15.

³⁴⁰ S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

Steinbeck passed away after a number of health complications on 20 December 1968. He had been married three times and was able to support himself and his families exclusively on his writing income.³⁴¹

Many of Steinbeck's novels, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, *Tortilla Flat* and *Of Mice and Men*, became standard readings in high schools and colleges. Furthermore, his works have been used, scrutinised and studied by historians, sociologists, journalists, folklorists and scholars of religious study.³⁴²

Steinbeck was said to have disliked professional intellectuals and viewed them as self-promoters who were only interested in their own advancement. He resented the effects and attention of the fame and fortune and resisted the appeals for interviews. Regardless of his preference for privacy and solitary strangers and forgotten acquaintances began an onslaught of emotional pleas and this only got worse after *The Grapes of Wrath*.³⁴³ He valued his solitude and avoided disruptions to his concentration by sequestering himself in a small room to work.³⁴⁴ Steinbeck was disenchanted with American waste, immorality, racism and greed and this came across in a number of his novels.³⁴⁵

Although he had been regarded a socialist, he never became an activist or radical. His writings stemmed from his own feelings and humane sensibility rather than the persuasiveness of the left's ideas, but by writing about something he felt passionately about was as close to being an agitator as he would be.³⁴⁶ *The Grapes of Wrath* would become one of the best examples of proletarian literature, but post Second World War, it would be treated as New Deal liberalism.³⁴⁷

Regardless, Steinbeck made his mark on American consciousness. He was enamoured by life and recreated it vividly and with accuracy in his literature. He researched most of his work and

³⁴¹ R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 3795.

³⁴² J. Whitt, "To Do Some Good and No Harm: The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck", *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, p. 44.; R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁴³ J. Schultz & L. Li, *Critical Companion to John Steinbeck: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, pp. 6-7.

³⁴⁴ R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁴⁵ S. Shillinglaw, 'Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer', <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³⁴⁶ R. DeMott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁴⁷ L Cassuto (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the American Novel*, pp. 673 & 680.

got to know a number of people who ultimately contributed to it.³⁴⁸ Both his fiction and non-fiction had the same purpose – to increase people’s awareness and lead them to action on behalf of others while causing as little damage as possible.³⁴⁹ Most of his fiction was based on actual events and people. Steinbeck’s best works are in a sense journalism, as they were based on real events thus, his fiction was drawn from the same place as traditional journalism.³⁵⁰ While Steinbeck was writing *The Grapes of Wrath* he said, “I’m trying to write history while it is happening and I don’t want to be wrong.”³⁵¹

Steinbeck had the ability to create authentic portraits rarely seen in fiction before his day, of a class of people: migrant workers, dirt farmers, manual labourers and the dispossessed. He wanted to provide his readers with an authentic and real view of a different class of Americans. His descriptions of strikes, stoop labourers and the Depression are all realistic portrayals. *The Grapes of Wrath* was a realistic and authentic portrayal of many of the social, economic and political wrongs of the 1930s and to many it embodied what the Depression had been like in the western USA.³⁵² His aim was to make his readers feel the reality. Steinbeck stated “... I tried to write the book the way lives are being lived not the way books are written...” In 1940, Mrs Roosevelt inspected the California migrant camps and stated, “I have never thought *The Grapes of Wrath* was exaggerated.”³⁵³

Steinbeck’s novels were claimed to belong with the works of Dorothea Lange, Paul Taylor James Agee and Walker Evans, even though they were fiction. It is said that the fiction only made the story more artful and did not distract from the raw truth.³⁵⁴ Through his honest writing, he tried and wanted his readers to understand their fellow man.³⁵⁵ Unlike Faulkner he rejected Darwin’s pessimistic theory of survival of the fittest and searched for alternatives, which led him to writers such as South African politician Jan Smuts who advocated for a return to a matriarchal society.³⁵⁶

³⁴⁸ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 11.

³⁴⁹ J. Whitt, “‘To Do Some Good and No Harm:’ The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck”, *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, p. 43.

³⁵⁰ J. Whitt, “‘To Do Some Good and No Harm:’ The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck”, *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, p. 41.

³⁵¹ R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁵² G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, pp. 11 & 12.

³⁵³ R. DeMott, “Introduction” in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. eBook: Penguin Books, 1992.

³⁵⁴ J. Whitt, “‘To Do Some Good and No Harm:’ The Literary Journalism of John Steinbeck”, *The Steinbeck Review*, 3(2), 2006, p. 59.

³⁵⁵ S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer’,

<<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³⁵⁶ A.H.P. Werlock, “Poor Whites: Joads and Snopeses”, *San José Studies*, 18(1), 1992, p. 64

His determination for realism and accuracy is evident in the dialogues of his novels. He would read into a tape recorder and play it back to ensure the dialect was right. This attention to authentic speech made many of his novels, such as *The Grapes of Wrath*, great candidates for screen and stage.³⁵⁷ His characters and events were also genuine and realistic and dealt with American contemporary events.³⁵⁸ Steinbeck always wrote with perspicuity, empathy and clarity.³⁵⁹

Erskine Preston Caldwell was born on 17 December 1903 in Moreland Georgia.³⁶⁰ His father was a Presbyterian minister and from 1911, the family moved frequently throughout the South as his father was its designated trouble-shooter, filling vacant pulpits and arbitrating congregational disputes.³⁶¹ The family was poor, but not impoverished.³⁶² His schooling was fragmented and he attended school sporadically due to the moving.³⁶³ His mother was a teacher and home-schooled him at times.³⁶⁴ In 1919, the family finally settled in Wrens, Georgia, but never truly fitted into its clannish society. His father preached his own type of social gospel and refused to compromise in his drive for justice. He denounced the complement of those who cared little for the suffering of others. Caldwell senior administered to the spiritual and physical needs of beleaguered labourers and sharecroppers regardless of their religious affiliation, but it was the race issue that made him a “pariah”. He helped victims of poverty, white and black.³⁶⁵ Whilst in high school, he wrote for Georgia newspapers.³⁶⁶ Caldwell was a curious child and asked questions about the cruelty, suffering poverty he witnessed.³⁶⁷ He turned into a curious teenager and travelled throughout the county, learning about the South, her people, the economy and land. He spoke with people and listened to their stories.³⁶⁸ After school, he first attended Erskine College, took a college course

³⁵⁷ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, pp. 11-12.

³⁵⁸ G. Bergquist, “Biography of John Steinbeck” in D. Noble, *Insights: John Steinbeck*, p. 12.

³⁵⁹ S. Shillinglaw, ‘Biography in Depth: John Steinbeck, American Writer’, <<https://www.sjsu.edu/steinbeck/resources/biography/steinbeck-american-writer.php>>, 7 March 2022. Accessed: 22 November 2022.

³⁶⁰ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.

³⁶¹ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 377.; Your Dictionary, ‘Biography Erskine Caldwell’, <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁶² H.L. Klevar, *Erskine Caldwell: A Biography*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993, p. 21.

³⁶³ Your Dictionary, ‘Biography Erskine Caldwell’, <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁶⁴ C.J. Stevens, *Storyteller: A Life of Erskine Caldwell*. Maine: John Wade publishers, 2000, p. 17.

³⁶⁵ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 377-378.

³⁶⁶ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.

³⁶⁷ H.L. Klevar, *Erskine Caldwell: A Biography*, p. 19.; J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, p. 53.

³⁶⁸ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 378-379.

at the University of Pennsylvania and then enrolled at the University of Virginia.³⁶⁹ However, he did not perform well, but began to write. Although editors offered encouraging words, his work was for the most part rejected.³⁷⁰

Caldwell worked as a cotton picker, labourer, waiter, cook, cab driver, bodyguard, gunrunner, stagehand, book reviewer and professional football player. In 1925, he left the University of Virginia to become a reporter for the *Atlanta Journal*. Caldwell found that work as a reporter left him no time for his creative writing. He decided to go to Maine where he settled down to start his first novel *The Bastard* (1929).³⁷¹ He had opened a bookstore, but his income was not enough to care for his family. He returned with them to his parents in Wren and then holed himself in a fishing cabin and began to write seriously, while the people around him suffered.³⁷²

The Great Depression hit the rural South hard. Caldwell witnessed as families struggled to pay their mortgages, forced sales of land doubled, and tenants and sharecropper, at the bottom of the social hierarchy, had their credit cut. People shared houses, wore rags, did not have enough to eat and contracted pellagra. Thus, Caldwell saw the faces of poverty and according to him, the collapse of the cotton economy left behind “unknown people” and “deformed, starved, and diseased children”.³⁷³ However, it was not only the hardships of the Old South (agriculture) he witnessed, but also the New South (industrialised, mill towns). It was during this difficult time that Caldwell witnessed and lived through that which would act as inspiration for his two most successful novels.³⁷⁴

It was his novel entitled *Tobacco Road* that Caldwell achieved fame. The novel focused on poor whites in the South. In 1933, *Tobacco Road* was dramatised and the stage adaptation ran for seven years on Broadway until 1941.³⁷⁵ However, the staged version focused mainly on the erotic

³⁶⁹ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.; Your Dictionary, ‘Biography Erskine Caldwell’, <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁷⁰ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 379.

³⁷¹ Your Dictionary, ‘Biography Erskine Caldwell’, <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.; H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622

³⁷² B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 379.

³⁷³ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 378-379.

³⁷⁴ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 378-379.; M. Cunliffe (ed.), *American Literature Since 1900*, p. 179.

³⁷⁵ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622

and sordid side of Caldwell's South becoming the second most popular Broadway drama of all time.³⁷⁶ The novel was also later made into a film. It was his next novel that is considered his best work.³⁷⁷

After *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell sought funding for his next novel. He applied for a grant from the Guggenheim Foundation and in his proposal he explained that he wanted to move away from Dixie's impoverished rural area and focus his new novel on the industrial, urban area. He argued, that as a Southerner he was uniquely qualified to "write a full-length novel of proletarian life in the South." During his time writing *God's Little Acre* he was influenced by Mike Gold, editor of the radical journal called *New Masses*. Gold wrote proletarian realism, and under Gold's tutelage and mentorship Caldwell drifted towards the fringes of the Communist Party, but he never became politically active and remained foremost a novelist.³⁷⁸

In 1933, *God's Little Acre* was published³⁷⁹ without the help of the Guggenheim Foundation. Although not a pro-communist proletarian novel, it was considered by Caldwell as "a sort of union or agrarian and industrial society". He based it on an area, people and history he knew well.³⁸⁰ Once again, this novel was dramatised for the stage and it was also charged with a similar affront. *God's Little Acre* became one of the all-time best sellers in the history of book publishing.³⁸¹ These two novels expanded Caldwell's popularity in the post-War paperback boom and sold so many copies that he was for a time the bestselling American novelist.³⁸² Millions of Americans were said to have sympathised with his characters who were described as starved, stunted and degenerate, while there were those who were repelled by the coarse nature of his fiction and doubted the conditions.³⁸³

³⁷⁶ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 382

³⁷⁷ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell',

<<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁷⁸ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 382

³⁷⁹ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.

³⁸⁰ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 383.

³⁸¹ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell',

<<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁸² H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.

³⁸³ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 251.

Both his famous novels encountered censorship and controversy. Newspapers and Southern politicians accused Caldwell of misrepresenting conditions in the South.³⁸⁴ In 1933, J.S. Summer, secretary and attorney for the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice filed an obscenity suit against Viking Press for publishing *God's Little Acre*. However, City Magistrate Benjamin Greenspan cleared the charges. He states, "I believe the author has chosen to write about what he believes to be the truth about a certain group in American life. Truth should always be accepted as justification for literature." However, his struggle for honesty in writing had still not been won. In 1934, Columbia University removed these two novels from the library and Caldwell condemned the university's suppression of his novels as the worst kind of moral and intellectual dishonesty, as well as comparing their action to educational censorship in the South. He felt this deed encouraged prejudice and disregarded the social responsibility towards the poor "by the simple method of refusing their existence".³⁸⁵ The dramatisations of his novels also faced rejections, especially in Chicago, where the Mayor, E.H. Kelly revoked Selwyn Theatre's licence to stop the production of *Tobacco Road*. Congressman B.D. Deen also regarded it as "untruthful" after the play opened in Washington DC. He did not want people getting the impression that these people were living in inferior environments like savages 200 years ago. Caldwell responded that it was not pleasing in his opinion to watch people die of poverty and that he had lived, worked and spent time with these poor whites. He emphasised that it was love that compelled him to expose "the shame of its civilisation" and the rot that allowed this to continue. Caldwell was pleased that his novels forced attention on these social problems and demanded reform.³⁸⁶

However, Caldwell was determined to support his claims and did so through a series of articles and photographs published in the *New York Post*, and a non-fiction book entitled *Some American People* (1935). He conducted a journey through the South with photographer M. Bourke-White, which resulted in a photojournalistic study entitled *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937).³⁸⁷ He wanted to prove that these people and conditions were not figments of his imagination.³⁸⁸ Exposing the underside of Southern life through fiction and photo-documentaries placed Caldwell

³⁸⁴ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*, p. 622.; R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 251-252.

³⁸⁵ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 252.

³⁸⁶ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 253-256.

³⁸⁷ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature, Vol. 1-7*, p. 622.; R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 256-257.

³⁸⁸ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 144.; R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 258.

among the most influential and caustic critics of American society and the capitalist system.³⁸⁹ He continued to condemn Southern shortcomings such as disease, racial prejudice, religious bigotry, illiteracy, a worn-out agricultural system, and cultural sterility and blamed the repressive and exploitive hierarchy and called for the Federal Government to intervene and assist.³⁹⁰

Many organisations appealed to him for help during the Depression. His publishers encouraged him to be more publically visible to increase sales, which he did through personal appearances, speeches and permitting the use of his name for fundraisers.³⁹¹ However, in later life, he sought privacy and rejected public appearances and interviews.³⁹² This could be due to the attacks he faced regarding his work, which deeply hurt him.³⁹³

Caldwell spent a few years as a Hollywood script writer during the mid-1930s, but continued to write his novels. In 1938 and 1939 he was a newspaper correspondent in Mexico, Spain and Czechoslovakia.³⁹⁴ Caldwell travelled to many communist countries as his novels were very popular there. Unable to receive the royalties he was able to spend his earnings, living lavishly, especially in Soviet countries such as Russia and Poland.³⁹⁵ In 1941, Caldwell found himself unable to leave Russia and so he produced several books and radio broadcasts and reams of correspondence for *Life* and *PM*. He returned to the USA in 1942.³⁹⁶

Caldwell was considered a threat by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and later the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). In 1941 the FBI began to compile a file on him and for a number of years he was followed, tracked and information on him was gathered from a number of sources including opening his post. The FBI's Director, J. Edgar Hoover, was convinced Caldwell was a communist and a threat. He placed Caldwell in the Group A category reserved for the most

³⁸⁹ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 249.

³⁹⁰ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 257.

³⁹¹ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 250-251.; His name was associated with the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored people, the Southern Tenant Farmers union, the Highlander Folk School and various guilds for artists, philosophers, committees, federations, leagues and labour strikes.

³⁹² Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁹³ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 256.

³⁹⁴ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁹⁵ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 272-273.

³⁹⁶ H. Bloom, (ed.), *Twentieth Century American Literature*, Vol. 1-7, p. 622.

dangerous individuals in the USA. Caldwell was later interviewed by the FBI and denied the allegations which were never proven.³⁹⁷

During the 1940s, Caldwell published two more of his best-selling novels. *Trouble in July* (1940) and *Georgia Boy* (1943), a sensitive portrait of a Southern childhood. Between 1941 and 1954, Caldwell edited the *American Folkways Series*. Some of his post-War literature includes: *The Sure Hand of God* (1947), *Episode in Palmetto* (1950), and *A Lamp for Nightfall* (1952).³⁹⁸

After the Second World War, Caldwell moved around, finally settling in Scottsdale Arizona in 1977. He had continued writing, although his work remained popular abroad, in the USA his plain style had fallen out of fashion. His later books failed to create the excitement of his 1930s works, but he had earned his niche as a regionalist writer.³⁹⁹

In 1982, to mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Tobacco Road*, the New American Library released it and *God's Little Acre* in new paperback editions. Caldwell was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1982 and in 1985 and the Georgia Endowment for Humanities invited him for a series of events and lectures in his honour. He commented on how many social and economic changes had taken place in the once destitute rural South.⁴⁰⁰ In 1987, Caldwell published his autobiography entitled *With all My Might*. In the same year, on 11 April, Caldwell passed away from lung cancer.⁴⁰¹ He was a powerful communicator of what Southern culture was and in his lifetime published fifty-five books that were translated into forty-three languages.⁴⁰²

Caldwell was described as a traveller and listener who wrote about the despised and oppressed people of the South.⁴⁰³ His novels are simple with little hidden meaning⁴⁰⁴ and he had a cavalier

³⁹⁷ R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, pp. 262-281. Of interest John Steinbeck and William Faulkner both also had files compiled by the FBI.

³⁹⁸ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

³⁹⁹ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

⁴⁰⁰ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

⁴⁰¹ Your Dictionary, 'Biography Erskine Caldwell', <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

⁴⁰² R.E. Snyder, "Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell", *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 281.

⁴⁰³ S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, p. 258.

⁴⁰⁴ H.L. Klevar, *Erskine Caldwell: A Biography*, p. xvi.

disregard for style when it came to his writing.⁴⁰⁵ B. Simon states that “although fiction is not true, however, it is not a forgery of the truth, but rather an embellishment of reality and aims to teach” and thus, the type of fiction Caldwell used can be considered a type of social history. Therefore, to see him as a social historian, one needs to examine his details and comments on society through his novels, dialogue and characters. His character was formed from the people he grew up with, spoke to, listened to and watched.⁴⁰⁶ When asked about his realistic treatment of the South, he simply answered that he based his writing on the life that was going on around him.⁴⁰⁷

According to William Faulkner, who is regarded as one of the best Southern writers of the first half of the twentieth century, Caldwell, in his opinion, ranked as one of the top five most promising novelists.⁴⁰⁸ Regardless, he often had to declare himself a Southerner of the South to critics. He was heralded as one of the first Southern literary realists and included the techniques of naturalism, surrealism and black humour in his work.⁴⁰⁹ Caldwell’s work is regarded as pessimistic realism and that he himself was a naturalist and presented poor-white life that existed in fact and literature for two hundred years. He forms part of the gothic school within in the Southern Renaissance.⁴¹⁰ As such, Caldwell’s interest lay in his grotesque comedy,⁴¹¹ as his vision of the poor whites was a mixture of macabre, humour and social realism.⁴¹² Caldwell used humour as a weapon.⁴¹³

Caldwell’s novels are regarded as brutal realist descriptions of the rural South.⁴¹⁴ His novels, like social history, focus on the everyday lives of the poor whites and present ordinary people pressed

⁴⁰⁵ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, 1997, p. 34.

⁴⁰⁶ B. Simon, “The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell’s “God’s Little Acre” and Class Relations in the New South”, *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 376-377 & 390.

⁴⁰⁷ R.W. Hoag & E.P. Broadwell, “Erskine Caldwell on Southern Realism”, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 36(4), 1983, p. 580.

⁴⁰⁸ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, p. 90.; C.J. Stevens, *Storyteller: A Life of Erskine Caldwell*. Maine: John Wade publishers, 2000.

⁴⁰⁹ R.W. Hoag & E.P. Broadwell, “Erskine Caldwell on Southern Realism”, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 36(4), 1983, p. 579.

⁴¹⁰ A.S. McIlwaine, “The Southern Poor White: A Literary History”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1939, pp. 188-190.; R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*, p. 40.; D.L. Kirkpatrick (ed.), *Reference Guide to American Literature*, p. 129.

⁴¹¹ S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 22.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, pp. 81-82.

⁴¹² S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, p. 44.

⁴¹³ R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*, p. 87.

⁴¹⁴ Your Dictionary, ‘Biography Erskine Caldwell’, <<https://biography.yourdictionary.com/erskine-caldwell>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 January 2022.

by extraordinary circumstances.⁴¹⁵ One critic explained that the first time he read *Tobacco Road*, it held his interest, as he thought the poor whites were very much like his country neighbours.⁴¹⁶ While another commented that his work was deemed so realistic, it appeared to be researched, adding that scholars should take his observations seriously.⁴¹⁷ His work was also described as being marked by a journalistic eye for a good story, he was an artist among writers, writing life as he saw it.⁴¹⁸ Another commented that his work was stripped of all nostalgic yearning that proliferated in the Lost Cause literature and focused more deeply on the uncertain future after the end of the Civil War.⁴¹⁹

Caldwell wanted to arouse his readers' social awareness and used his work to justify reform.⁴²⁰ The general public was apparently wilfully ignorant regarding the nation's poverty and Caldwell wanted to change this and make his reader sympathise with the characters.⁴²¹

Movements and Novelists: A Reflection

There are a number of similarities and differences regarding South Africa and the American South with regards to their novelists and novels and the topic of poor whites. In South Africa, the Second Language Movement developed out of a need to distinguish the Afrikaners as a different culture and language, as well as a reaction against Anglicisation. This resulted in the development of Afrikaans as a new unique language both in a spoken and written form. The written aspect was done through literature and novels in particular. The Southern Renaissance Movement in the USA developed as a reaction and call for the South to create and exhibit their own unique literature, which did not solely focus on the "Lost Cause". A new outlook was presented and a new way of writing novels came to the forefront with a new, more realist way of examining the world in which the authors lived.

The novelists selected for this study from both countries also have a number of similarities and differences. Firstly all became novelists over time, with some also writing poetry and plays. The

⁴¹⁵ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 377.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 83.

⁴¹⁶ H.L. Klevar, *Erskine Caldwell: A Biography*, p. xiii.

⁴¹⁷ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 390.

⁴¹⁸ J.A. Bryant, *Twentieth-Century Southern Literature*, p. 34.

⁴¹⁹ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, p. 54.

⁴²⁰ S. Kidd, "The Farm Security Administration Photographic Project's Reinvention of the Southern Poor Whites in the 1930s" in L.T. Hönnighausen (ed.), *Rewriting the South: History and Fiction*. Tübingen: Francke, 1993, p. 220.

⁴²¹ J. Mellette, *Peculiar Whiteness: Racial Anxiety and Poor Whites in Southern Literature, 1900-1965*, pp. 55-57.

work of some of the authors from both countries was so popular and or significant that they were made compulsory prescribed work for schools, colleges and universities, whilst some of the work was remade into plays and films. Most of the novelists won some form of prize or award for their work. They were generally written during the 1930s, some a little before and others a little after. All the novelists had been a journalist or written in a journalistic capacity at some time in their career. They all experienced and witnessed the reality of poor whites around them and drew from this source to write about these people in some form of expression. The poor whites became a topic they all wrote about, although with different end goals. The Afrikaans, South African authors, gained some fame during their lifetime, but few people remember them and their work in the twenty-first century. The Southern novelists reached great fame with their work and their work is often still discussed and examined. The South African novelists were all well-educated and all had university degrees. All the Southern novelists selected for this study had some form of schooling, went to university and took some courses, but none of them graduated with a degree.

The topic – poor whites – which all the novelists wrote about and the reasons they wrote about it also has similarities and differences. The South African novelists wrote about what was happening at the time the Language Movement was developing. They sought identifiable and serious topics that touched the nationalistic heart of their fellow Afrikaners. The poor-white problem had developed into a serious national issue and thus, appeared in all forms of writing and literature. Although there were some people who were embarrassed by the poor whites and the novels written about them, the majority of Afrikaners realised their importance in the larger sphere and history of the country. They realised these people were also their *volk* (people/nation) and needed assistance to be brought back into the fold of a decent and respectable white Afrikaner. Most people realised that there were a few “bad apples” whose poverty stemmed as a result of their own fault and shortcoming, but the rest had fallen due to no fault of their own and that environmental reasons were the cause. Therefore, these poor whites could and should be “saved”. The novels mainly resulted in sympathy and a desire to help. The Afrikaner government also realised this and promoted the novelist work.

Things were very different in the USA. Poor whites had formed the topic or theme for novels for a long time. Mostly these poor whites were portrayed as the worst types in society, the proverbial “bad guys” with little or no empathy.⁴²² Many of the narratives were rarely told from the point of

⁴²² S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 185-196.

view of the disenfranchised people but rather their stories were narrated by people with positions in society.⁴²³ There were many matters that kept the poor white in the public eye. Reasons and causes for their poverty and existence were sought and explained. It was the Social Sciences and their study of the poor whites that made the topic of poor whites “vogue” and led to the production of a number of poor white novels. This progress may be viewed in three types of interpretation: “local colour”, criticism and propaganda, as well as sensibility and realism.⁴²⁴ However, the reason the poor whites became a popular topic during the 1930s had to do with the Great Depression, the injustices of Reconstruction and the failures of the New Deal. Southern poverty entered the nation’s consciousness with unprecedented force as the plight of the nation’s poor was captured in the literature and other forms of media. The Depression captured the nation’s imagination. Southern poverty loomed large in key publications and this was merged with visual accounts that brought forth the truth.⁴²⁵ The novelists’ work was seen as proletariat literature leaning towards the left. The government and the different government departments were not happy with their work, to the extent that they were regarded as a threat.⁴²⁶

Regardless of the reason or motivation for the respective movements (See Table Two), these novelists (See Table Three) were all intrigued to write about the poor whites and the social conditions around them. As such, they unwittingly contributed on a large scale to the social history and a greater understanding of the daily lives of poor whites.

⁴²³ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 15.

⁴²⁴ S. Mcilwaine, *The Southern Poor White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road*, pp. 169-174.


























































⁴²⁵ S. Robertson, “Poverty and Progress” in S. Monteith, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, pp. 104-105.

⁴²⁶ R.E. Snyder, “Spying on Southerners: The FBI and Erskine Caldwell”, *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 72(2), 1988, p. 278.























Table Two: The Movements Compared

	The Second Afrikaans Language Movement	The Southern Renaissance Movement
Period	1902	1918
Reaction to	Anglicisation by the British	Northern Criticism of Southern literature, language and culture
Catalyst	The First Language Movement	The Lost Cause
Preceding Genres	Romanticism	Romanticism/Sensationalism
The spread of the Movement	Whole of South Africa	Whole of the American South and into the North
“Tradition”	Afrikaner Nationalism	Southern Nationalism
Origins	A language and cultural movement	A “rebirth” or new form of literature
Aim	Establish the Afrikaans language and unify the Afrikaner people	Improve the South’s literature output through reviewing past and present and proving the South was not backward/undeveloped in terms of literature
Goal	Develop a spoken and written language	Southern literature to compete with the North
Novelists	Mostly white Afrikaans men	Inclusive – whites, blacks and women
Element	Poor whites, offer help and assistance and unify Afrikaners (creating the <i>volk</i>)	Explore dimensions of Southern culture while demystifying Southern traditionalism
Situating of Novelists	Across South Africa	In the southern regions, The South
Genre	Realism	Realism
Sub-genre	<i>Plaasroman</i>	Gothic novel/southern grotesque
Changes dealt with	Urbanisation, industrialisation, loss after the Anglo Boer War	Urbanisation, industrialisation, reconstruction, loss after the Civil War
Most Popular Period	1930s	1930s
Renowned authors	Mostly in South Africa, some in Holland	In the USA, Europe and former Soviet countries

Table Three: The Authors Compared⁴²⁷

	Van Bruggen	Van den Heever	Jonker	Faulkner	Steinbeck	Caldwell
1930s Novels						
Realism Genre						
Poor Whites as a Theme/Topic						
Poetry						
Journalists						
Educator						
Writing to educate and entertain						
Reaction – Help						
Reaction – Disbelief						
Prescribed Text						
Tertiary Studies						
University Degrees						
Honorary Doctoral Degrees						

⁴²⁷ These two flags are being used in their historic context. Currently in both the Republic of South Africa and the United States they are classified as “derogatory” and “banned.”

Awards/Prizes						
Negative Government Stance						
Positive Government Stance						
Books made into Plays/Movies						
Script/Screen Writer						
Work Banned						

CHAPTER SEVEN

Poor Whites and White Poor

Poverty, like beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder. Poverty is a value judgement: it is not something one can verify or demonstrate, except by inference and suggestion, even with a measure of error. To say who is poor, is to use all sorts of value judgements. The concept has to be limited by the purpose which is served by the definition.¹

The poor whites of South Africa and the poor whites of the American South have both been classified as a peculiar and distinctive class.² However, a number of sources have stated that within the group or class of “poor whites”, there are different types and different categories of poor whites. The idea that comes to mind when the term “poor white” is invoked differs from each individual and does not always include the other groups that are also represented by the term.³ Thus, it is important to discuss what is implied as “poor white” as a whole. This chapter examines the different definitions of the term “poor white” and also considers some of the other terms they are known by. In turn, the different categories that emerge will be used to link or classify the different characters and types of poor whites from both the selected South African and American novels. Furthermore, the results may provide insight as to how some of the novelists perceived the poor whites through their work, but also augment the historical record of these individuals on the fringes of society.

Academic literature focuses on the poor whites from a number of different angles and views, from the causes of poor whitism, solutions to the “problem”, their place in society to their culture. Many academics attempt to define what a poor white is and most agree that it is an extremely difficult term to explain and that it encapsulates various aspects and may have different meanings subject to opinion, views and places.⁴

Defining Poor Whites: South Africa and the American South

Defining the term poor white was a simpler affair in South Africa than in the American South. Race plays a large role in defining the poor whites.⁵ The fact that the term includes race/colour

¹ O.P.J. Stander, “Die Voorkoms van Wit Armoede in Oudshoorn Tussen 1914 en 1937”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch University, 2017, p. 4.

² Unlike the poor whites in South Africa who were united by language, culture, history and belonging to the *volk*, the poor whites in America could not in the technical sense be defined as a class as they were mostly an agricultural people with no sense of common condition or unity. There was no group consciousness and no name for themselves.

³ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 12.

⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 17.

⁵ See chapter three and four.

instead of just condition is evidence of this. According to the South African Carnegie Commission, the term could only originate in a country where whites and blacks live in close proximity to each other – such as in South Africa and the American South. It further adds that poverty among whites was felt to be something exceptional.⁶ As mentioned, the term has been used in the USA since the inception of slavery. Giliomee believes it is probable that South Africa borrowed the term from them.⁷ In the chapter entitled “The poor whites of Middelburg, Transvaal, 1900-1930: Resistance, accommodation and class struggle”,⁸ R. Morrell expands on the idea of the term poor white used in the context of a mixed society. He states:

“Poor white” is an elusive term. Usually, used in colonial contexts where blacks were in the vast majority, its most general applicability was to all whites who were poor.⁹

In the report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission it is also made clear how difficult it is to define the term indigent and thus “poor”.¹⁰ “White” was based on appearance and implied a people which the social order included or excluded. “Poor” has tended to be a category imposed from outside, through the dominant class. According to J. Hyslop, the term was imposed from above on poor, white, working-class, lumpenproletarian people by elites seeking to name them as a problem that needed to be solved. Furthermore, “the term “poor white” seeks to displace a class identity with a racial one by constituting poverty as an anomaly in racial status rather than a product of capitalist social relations.”¹¹

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the Transvaal Indigency Commission was already aware of the race aspect when it came to the poor whites. This is evident in its definition of poor whites:

The term is sometimes loosely used in South Africa to describe any European who is more or less constantly in a state of destitution. The poor whites, however, are distinguished from the poorer classes in other countries, not by the character of their poverty, but by the fact that it is due to the presence of a coloured labouring population.¹²

⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 17. This very much reveals the American idea of race and poverty at the time.

⁷ Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 315.

⁸ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 1-28.

⁹ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 1.

¹⁰ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, p. 3.

¹¹ J. Hyslop, “Workers Called White and Classes Called Poor: The “White Working Class” and “Poor Whites” in Southern Africa, 1910-1994”, in D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 27.

¹² Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, p. 116.

Giliomee and Mbenga explain that it was only the colour of the poor-white skins that differentiated them from other poor people of colour. It was their poverty which made them visible. According to them, the term does not refer to a measurable poverty level, but rather to a condition, which in a state of minority rule was unacceptable.¹³ Giliomee adds that the term “poor white” also represents people whose conditions were so horrendous that their living standards were not what a white’s living standard was perceived to be, according to contemporary cultural and social constructs.¹⁴ This is evident in part of J. van Wyk’s definition of a poor white:

...The poor white is then a person whose income doesn’t enable him/her to maintain a standard of living in accordance with general norms or respectability. They have sunk to such a degree that it was difficult to differentiate between their standard of living and that of the black people of the time.¹⁵

In the first volume of the Carnegie Commission entitled *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, Grosskopf states that by the 1930s, approximately one-fifth of the Afrikaner population could be classified as “poor whites.” For the Afrikaner cultural entrepreneurs who were concerned with classifying the boundaries of an ethnic community, poor whites were a source of concern. These entrepreneurs formed part of a middle-class intelligentsia which had an overriding interest in the creation of Afrikaners who could fill Afrikaner churches, attend Afrikaner schools and also purchase Afrikaner books. The middle-class was alarmed by the spectre of potential members of the “*volk*” being lost due to cultural and moral degeneration.¹⁶ Moreover, in South Africa, where the whites were the minority, the poor-white vote became important. Politicians such as D.F. Malan stated that it was necessary for them to remain white and to live like whites, culturally, socially, morally, spiritually and politically. They were seen and treated as part of the *volk*.¹⁷

Teppo adds to these definitions the class aspect of the term.¹⁸ Like Giliomee, she also believes the term originated in the USA during the 1870s and was adapted to South African circumstances, like the American term “white trash.” Teppo maintains that the notion of “poor white” is problematic, as well as “socially constructed.” It is not considered a neutral term, but rather one filled with a number of connotations. It comes as a result of certain historically

¹³ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 255.

¹⁴ H. Giliomee, *Die Afrikaners van 1910 tot 2010: Die Opkoms van 'n Moderne Gemeenskap*, p. 7.

¹⁵ J. van Wyk, *Nationalist Ideology and Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period, 1930-1940*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990, pp. 5-6.

¹⁶ L. Vincent, “The Power Behind the Scenes: The Afrikaner Nationalist Women's Parties 1915 to 1931”, *South African Historical Journal*, 40, 1999, p. 70.

¹⁷ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 282.

¹⁸ See chapter three and four.

defined racial and social hierarchies, which the term serves to reinforce. It has a stigma attached to it and creates boundaries and categories of class and race.¹⁹ Thus, in Teppo's doctoral study, she defines the poor whites as:

...a person who has been labelled or classified as a poor white, not just any paled skinned person who exists under conditions of poverty.²⁰

According to her, the poor white has persisted as a social category throughout the twentieth century.²¹

As mentioned in chapters three and five, there is a distinction between poor whites and white poor. The deserving and undeserving poor, respectively. As Stals states there have always been white poor since the arrival of the first whites in South Africa.²² This view stems from how the poor were perceived in Victorian England. The poor were divided into: the "deserving" who had become poor due to the hardships of life and deserved to be helped to better themselves to become "decent" citizens again and the "undeserving" who were beggars, criminals and prostitutes and were poor by nature.²³

The Carnegie Commission classified these two groups into categories in which the chief cause of the poverty or retrogression was a personal one and the other which was based on external influences.²⁴ Further distinctions were made based on the response of the poor whites to their situation. Those who tried to support themselves and their families vs those who are notorious and who one tends to think of when the term "poor white" is used – the dependent, "good for nothing", lazy poor white. A further distinction was also made between those poor whites who had known better days, but were slowly sinking within the social and economic milieu; those who had always been poor, even in previous generations and would remain so in future generations; and lastly those who had risen out of poverty to a higher social and economic level.²⁵ One of the Carnegie Commissions' main recommendations and conclusions was that the poor whites would have to learn to maintain themselves and rise above their poverty in

¹⁹ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, pp. 22-23.

²⁰ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, p. 23.

²¹ A.B. Teppo, "The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town", D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, p. 23.

²² E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad II, 1924-1961*, p. 14.

²³ C. Bundy, "Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen: White Poverty in the Cape Before Poor Whiteism" in W. Berinart, P. Delius & S. Trapido, *Putting a Plough to the Ground: Accumulation and Dispossession in Rural South Africa 1850-1930*, p. 13.; E.J. Bottomley, *Poor White*, pp. 43-45.

²⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 152.

²⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 3.

order to eradicate the problem. Thus, the Carnegie Commission emphasised that it was important to prevent poor whites from becoming dependant on help and assistance.²⁶

Similarly, historian Charles van Onselen categorises these two types of poor whites according to causes of their poverty in what he refers to as the “Hand of God” and the “Hand of Man.” The “Hand of God” are those who have become poor due to no fault of their own and in which they had no control over, in other words natural disasters. The “Hand of Man” refers to those who became poor as a result of their own behaviour and actions. However, there is a second connotation to the “Hand of Man” and that is those who have become poor due to “Man’s actions” or the “Hand of Man” such as depressions and wars. These are events and actions over which they had no control, which was not necessarily their fault, but caused them to become victims of circumstance.²⁷

According to Morrell, there should be an even narrower meaning in regard to defining poor whites and makes the point that there is a distinction between rural and urban poor whites.²⁸ This distinction is evident in the following comment made by the Carnegie Commission:

Most probably it was in English that the word was first used in South Africa, particularly by English-speaking town-dwellers who viewed the influx of impoverished and untaught persons from the farms sometimes with scorn and often with annoyance. To-day urban workers and small tradesmen are still inclined to look upon them as unwelcomed intruders and competitors. But unfortunately a certain portion of the better educated and more favourably situated Dutch-speaking population are also beginning to feel ashamed of this group of their people and to treat them with some contempt and little sympathy.²⁹

Different types of poor whites were pointed out in the report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission. According to the Commission, there were two types of white indigents: The first were those in actual want. This “class” was further divided into those through some physical defects were unable to work, those who were able to work, but due to fluctuations in trade were unable to find employment and had exhausted all their savings; those able-bodied, but unwilling to work; and those who were able to work, but not competent due to a lack of skills and are in competition with cheap black labour. The second “class” were those who had barely

²⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 226.

²⁷ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 321.

²⁸ R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 1-2.

²⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 17.

enough to live on, but were lazy and ignorant that they would eventually find themselves in actual want.³⁰

In his 1930 monograph, W.M. Macmillan refers to comments made by the 1913 Select Committee with regards to defining the poor whites in South Africa, indicating that there were different types of poor whites. However, many dismiss the whole phenomenon as one of mere laziness and if a man is poor, it is his own fault, very much based on the Victorian views.³¹ Macmillan felt there was more to this latter view and tended to agree with the 1913 Select Committee. The Committee only focused on two groups of the poor. Those who were vicious, indigent, degraded, living on charity or on a life of crime and secondly those who were willing to work, but lacked training, education and all decent opportunities. He felt that the sick, aged and mentally deficient also required a group of their own.³²

Van Wyk's description of a poor white acknowledges that there are different types, including the rural and urban poor whites. This is similar to the description given by the Carnegie Commission:

... whites who made a living from farming; economically they form a class of mainly poor "bywoners", hired farm labourers, owners of small pieces of land, settlers and unskilled labourers. They consist further of roaming trek farmers, tenants, hunters, woodcutters, the poor of the town, diggers, manual labourers on the railways and relief workers.³³

The Carnegie Commission regarded a poor white as someone of European descent. Thus, a person with an admixture of coloured or black blood would not be regarded. However, it implies that only those where the admixture was recognisable or evident by means of observation were not regarded as white.³⁴ Similarly, the South African Population Registration Act of 1950 defined a white person through appearance, as well as through markers pertaining to lifestyle and social acceptance.³⁵ However, the Carnegie Commission was adamant that there would not include personal characteristics as part of their definition or categorise this group.³⁶

³⁰ Indigency Commission, *Report of the Transvaal Indigency Commission, 1906-1908: Presented to Both Houses of Parliament by Command of his Excellency the Governor*, pp. 3-4.

³¹ W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, p. 48.

³² W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, pp. 47-48.

³³ J. van Wyk, *Nationalist Ideology and Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama in the Period, 1930-1940*, University of the Witwatersrand History Workshop, Johannesburg, 1990, pp. 5-6.

³⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 2-3.

³⁵ D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 3.

³⁶ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 38.

Unlike South Africa, whereby the idea and term “poor white” only truly came into being during the second half of the nineteenth century,³⁷ in the South, it was a fairly established term by 1870.³⁸ Defining the term “poor white” has proven to be more difficult in the American context. The term has changed and evolved to suit the context, situation and times.³⁹ Beneath the general usage of the term lies a long history of shifting representations and meanings.⁴⁰ It has also gone beyond the mere economic state to encompass culture, class, mentality and health. According to the Carnegie Commission, it was extremely difficult defining what and who a poor white was. Thus, finding a suitable definition for economic purposes increased when moral distinctions were introduced. An objective standard becomes impossible.⁴¹ According to Forret, the antebellum Southerners’ inability to provide a single, unified definition of the term “poor white” has made the task more ominous for historians.⁴² He adds that definitions varied from person to person and inconsistencies plagued individual judgments.⁴³ The major difference in the locale and occupation of the poor white became blurred. Thus, the declining importance of cultural differences among the various groups of poor whites in the face of overwhelming poverty ensured that they were all lumped together.⁴⁴ Poor white became the expression for all whites who were poor.⁴⁵ It became a category of people set apart from everyone else by a plethora of undesirable qualities that added up to degeneracy and depravity.⁴⁶ According to B. Mitchell. Editor of *The State*, although the term is not easy to define, every Southerner knows what it implies.⁴⁷ Thus, it will be these scant definitions and descriptions that will be used to provide insight into what the term represented to whom and when. These “poor whites” were stigmatised because they reacted and behaved differently to what was deemed the norm.⁴⁸ Thus, the “noble” white poor became “white trash” because they refused to emulate the middle class.⁴⁹

³⁷ Although prior to the middle of the nineteenth century there were whites who were poor, they were not yet considered poor whites. These people usually lived in an isolated, rural setting and their “poverty” was considered a way of life, subject to the environment.

³⁸ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 32.

³⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 3.

⁴⁰ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 1.

⁴¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 18.

⁴² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 10.

⁴³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 9.

⁴⁴ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. x.

⁴⁵ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. xii.

⁴⁶ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 10

⁴⁷ A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 410.

⁴⁸ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 13.

⁴⁹ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 25.

The most popular view of the term “poor white” refers to a person with little or no property who also has a low social standing because of certain negative attributes: laziness, shiftlessness and irresponsibility.⁵⁰ The Southern poor white is one of America’s most enduring and oldest folk figures. His image is an elusive one compounded with popular prejudice, a rich literary tradition and myriad sociological investigations. Mostly the understanding derives from the combination of extreme material deprivation with slyness, sloth, absurd folly and random violence.⁵¹

As mentioned, the term “poor white” has evolved and changed thus this study will examine it in the context before slavery, the antebellum period, the post-Civil War period, the start of the twentieth century and the eugenics movement, as well as the period before the Second World War when health also became a factor in defining the poor whites. Ideas and views from the past still reflect views of poor whites in the twenty-first century.⁵²

Early colonial descriptions referred to bizarre, depraved white people inhabiting the backwoods of the South living in their own backwardness, shiftlessness and immorality.⁵³ As mentioned in chapter four, a number of descriptions of poor whites and their way of life were given by travellers and visitors to the South. W. Byrd and C. Woodman both presented scathing portrayals which focused primarily on their laziness, idleness and inability, presenting them as morally, culturally and socially inferior. Byrd and Woodman helped to form the stereotype of the poor white as immoral, idiotic and inert. By the 1730s, Byrd had already established the precedents for opposing ethical positions on the issue of poor whites that would dominate the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: environment vs genetics.⁵⁴ However, he too realised that even the poorest whites were not necessarily “poor whites” and some had aspirations that were evident.⁵⁵

The term did not include all whites who were poor. Poor whites were those who were both poor and lacking in social virtues.⁵⁶ Making distinctions between different types of poor whites was not uncommon. All whites who were poor were not necessarily poor whites.⁵⁷ During the antebellum period and after, Southerners differentiated between white poor, poor whites and

⁵⁰ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 4.

⁵¹ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. ix.

⁵² M. Wray & A. Newitz (eds.), *White Trash: Race and Class in America*, p. 2.

⁵³ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 10.

⁵⁴ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 4.

⁵⁵ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 414.

⁵⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 9. This has been discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

poor white trash.⁵⁸ White poor suffered from depressed economic circumstances and were regarded as poor but respectable. While poor whites were usually quantitatively poor, possessed deficiencies in moral character such as laziness and drunkenness and were thus underserving.⁵⁹

An economic explanation for antebellum white poverty dominated scholarly debate during the early twentieth century.⁶⁰ In Forret's opinion, it is the work by C.C. Bolton, which provides the best definition in purely economic terms.⁶¹ Bolton defines these people as: "southerners who owned neither land nor slaves."⁶² However, Forret expands on this definition:

...owned neither land nor slaves, and survived... Not, in contrast with Bolton, they may also have possessed a few paltry acres or another form of wealth, such as a grog shop...southerners would have defined culturally as degraded "poor whites"...

Forret is adamant in his explanation that there are a number of factors and views that can change the definition and thus it remains elusive.⁶³ Flynt agrees and recognises that defining poor whites in economic terms alone is inadequate because contemporaries conventionalised poor whites in cultural and moral terms as much as in material ones.⁶⁴ The difficulty in defining poor whites derives from the diverse ways the term had been used – it was applied socially, economically, culturally and ethically.⁶⁵ Ownership constituted as one of the factors which determined the definition of poor whites.⁶⁶ Most labourers, many landless farmers and those who owned little real estate could be considered poor whites.⁶⁷ There were poor whites who owned land who were poor and whites whose character determined that they were poor whites.⁶⁸ Cecil-Fronsman agrees and states that a lack of land did not guarantee poor-white status and that a few acres did not automatically elevate them to yeoman status.⁶⁹

⁵⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 9.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. xii.

⁶⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 9.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 3.

⁶¹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 10.

⁶² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 10.

⁶³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, pp. 10-11.

⁶⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, pp. 1-11.

⁶⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 1.

⁶⁶ D. Brown, "A Vagabond's Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South", *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 11.

⁶⁷ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 16.

⁶⁸ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, pp. 9-10.

⁶⁹ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 15.

Furthermore, there were whites who owned neither land nor enslaved people, but possessed substantial wealth in the form of livestock.⁷⁰ The term is further complicated, as a person could be employed and own property and still be regarded as a poor white. It depended on who was doing the defining, it was not employment or ownership, but rather character traits and dependency that mattered.⁷¹ The Southern poor white became a sociocultural term depicting a broader frame of character rather than an economic term which depicted a lack of material well-being.⁷²

Den Hollander expressed his frustration in defining the term poor white. The term represented every white person who was poor and without social standing:⁷³

It is clearly impossible to define with any certainty what does and what does not constitute a “poor white”. In general, it encompasses not only those who possess nothing or little, but also those whose characteristics and mental attitude predispose them to a proletarian life. They are irresponsible and without ambition, barely scraping by yet seeing nothing wrong with their way of life and accepting it as their fate. It is a social figure that is by no means exclusive to the South: however, historical social and economic factors peculiar to the region have given them certain unique traits.⁷⁴

Abolitionists and those who were pro-slavery had differing views regarding poor whites. Helper was of the view that slavery as an economic system condemned poor whites to more than financial baseness committing them to marginalisation.⁷⁵ They were described as dirty, ignorant and miserably poor and in many instances deserving as much sympathy as enslaved people⁷⁶ and were regarded as victims of the system of slavery and could be redeemed through proper education and industrial capital labour.⁷⁷

Pro-slavery secessionists saw no fault in the divided system, as they believed it reflected the natural order and insisted that poor whites only had themselves to blame for their condition.⁷⁸ Hundley, a slave holder, described poor whites during the 1860s as lazy, superstitious, illiterate and perpetually drunk. These were the most degraded people who chose to live by

⁷⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 2

⁷¹ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 33.

⁷² J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 9.

⁷³ A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 408.

⁷⁴ A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 411.

⁷⁵ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ S.V. Ash, “Poor Whites in the Occupied South, 1861-1865”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 57(1), 1991, p. 39

⁷⁷ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 48.

⁷⁸ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 48.

themselves in isolated settlements because they did not want to work and due to their habits being at odds with “respectable” Southern society.⁷⁹

Lazy, illiterate and ignorant were common descriptions of poor whites and continued to define poor whites after the Civil War.⁸⁰ The nineteenth century’s position as regards to poor whites was two extremes: they suffered from poverty and malnutrition because they were lazy or despite their industriousness, they had been pushed off the best land by the plantation owners’ greed.⁸¹ Many of the references and connotations spilled over after the Civil War and in many cases, the meaning stayed the same. G. Edwards defined the poor whites as landless inhabitants during the antebellum era whose numbers only increased during the postbellum economic collapse.⁸² As was the case with South Africa, classifying poor whites had a fine line between the good and bad poor white, thus the worthy or deserving and unworthy or undeserving. Likewise, in South Africa, this idea came from the Victorian age in Britain. The division between the two revolved around the relationship to labour. The worthy or deserving poor white were regarded as those who had fallen upon bad times because of natural disasters, the economy or forces beyond their control. The unworthy or undeserving poor white were faulted for their immoral lifestyles, laziness, and personal irresponsibility. They had no aspirations towards the middle-class and had an anti-work ethic. Thus, ultimately, the reason for their poverty was their own fault.⁸³

Poor whites postbellum⁸⁴ were also different from poor whites in the antebellum⁸⁵ in that the poor whites now had closer personal relations with blacks⁸⁶ and interacted with them more freely. There were more numbers of poor whites appearing in the urban areas doing factory work and that after the Civil War they were given more opportunities and became more noticeable.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, pp. 263 & 277.

⁸⁰ P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 43.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 47.

⁸¹ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 178.

⁸² G. Edwards, “Poor White Political Identity During Reconstruction (and Beyond)”, *Civil War Book Review*, 19(1), 2017, p. 2.

⁸³ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, pp. 18-19 & 25.

⁸⁴ After the Civil War (1861-1865).

⁸⁵ Before the Civil War (1861-1865).

⁸⁶ A.B. Hart, *The Southern South*, pp. 38-39.

⁸⁷ A.B. Hart, *The Southern South*, pp. 40 & 46-47.; A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 46.

The idea of poor whites as being “degenerate” was a popular notion that had arisen during the antebellum period.⁸⁸ People such as Hundley believed the root of poor white degeneracy was in “tainted blood” or “unadulterated pauper blood”.⁸⁹ Many middle-class Americans maintained that the poor whites were impoverished because they were a “breed apart”.⁹⁰ The following characteristics were later incorporated by the eugenics movement to define the “poor white”: unrefined habits, disconnection, inadequate diets and a dearth of medical knowledge and care, which resulted in the stereotypical characteristics used to define poor whites such as rotten teeth, malnutrition, physical deformity, jaundiced skin and poor posture.⁹¹ Poor whites were constantly compared to people of colour (enslaved people, free blacks, Mexican immigrants and Native Americans). Their genetic inferiority, environmental factors and interbreeding with non-whites asserted that they were not “truly” white, but a separate race.

Differences based on the physical, biological and cultural evolution were used to separate poor whites from the rest of white society. Opinions differed as to whether degeneration was preventable, curable, inherited and irreversible.⁹² The post-Reconstruction South (1877) saw an era of rapid social change and the rise of a group of professional scientists adamant in analysing the social and biological effects of environment and heredity among poor whites.⁹³ Degeneracy became the main term to define poor whites. These people were now regarded as unfit, inbred, and feeble minded. The eugenics movement focused on intelligence and cognitive skills of the poor whites. They had bad genes and carried unwanted social traits. Categorisation was framed in biological and medical terms.⁹⁴

In the midst of the eugenics movement, a different approach was undertaken. Health, which was very closely related to the eugenics movement, but where the eugenics movement believed the poor whites were irredeemable and incapable of change, the health campaign believed poor whites were not racially degenerate or dysgenically mixed. Studies were focused on poor whites and the chronic disease they suffered from, which was considered a source and reason for their poverty.⁹⁵ They were described as cadaverous looking and deathly

⁸⁸ M.W. Brewer, “Poor Whites and Negroes in the South Since the Civil War”, *The Journal of Negro History*, 15(1), 1930, p. 27.

⁸⁹ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 274.

⁹⁰ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 14.

⁹¹ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 14.

⁹² A.B. Teppo, “The Making of a Good White: A Historical Ethnography of the Rehabilitation of Poor Whites in a Suburb of Cape Town”, D. Phil. dissertation, Helsinki University, 2004, pp. 29-31.

⁹³ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 19.

⁹⁴ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 65-85.

⁹⁵ Some included: epilepsy, criminality, laziness, alcoholism, premature death, poverty, tuberculosis and pellagra.

pale because of their health and stood in stark contrast to “lifelike” white Americans.⁹⁶ Biology remained a crucial determining factor. Many scientists found that a number of poor whites were capable of becoming civilised and attaining cultural achievement, but that it was diseases, germs and infections which caused their downfall.⁹⁷ However, poor whites could be treated, rehabilitated and cured. Environment played an important role, but disease, germs and dirt became distinctive qualities now identified with poor whites.⁹⁸

It is interesting to note that novels were also used to create the stereotype of the poor whites. Although unintentionally in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *A key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the poor whites were described as the “most heathenish degraded and miserable class of white people”.⁹⁹ This view and opinion of poor whites stuck and has never recovered.

There is no clear-cut definition of the term “poor white” and over time it has become a diverse, layered and complex definition.

A Derogatory Term

In both South Africa and the USA, the term “poor white” is a derogatory term. In the American South, it means contempt and certain associations such as “peckerwood” produce the same feelings as the unacceptable word “nigger”.¹⁰⁰ In South Africa, the term “*armblanke*” or “poor white” was enough to convey the class and status of the person. In both countries, the term is associated with a number of negative connotations. In the USA especially, there are numerous terms that also refer to poor whites. Some started off neutral and did not imply disdain, however, this depended on place and time, but ultimately, they all eventually referred to poor whites in the most despicable way possible.¹⁰¹

The contempt that was often felt towards these people was not only reflected in their definitions and descriptions, but was also evident in some of the opinions and views in the novels.

⁹⁶ J. Winders, “White in All the Wrong Places: White Rural Poverty in Postbellum US South”, *Cultural Geographies*, 10, 2003, p. 51.

⁹⁷ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 20.

⁹⁸ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 96-103.; A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 14.; W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 25.

⁹⁹ H.B. Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Boston: Jewett, Proctor & Worthington, 1853, pp. 184-185.

¹⁰⁰ S. McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road*, p. xiii.

¹⁰¹ S. McIlwaine, *The Southern Poor White: From Lubberland to Tobacco Road*, p. xiv.

“... Party dae dink ek amper dat hierdie klas mense dit darem maar lekker het in sommige opsigte: leef van niks nie en op 'n ander se grond...”... “...wat is hulle? Niks nie, armbblankes!” “Presies, en ons is iets sogenaamd: blanker...”¹⁰²

(“...Some days I almost think that this class of people have it easy in some respects: living on nothing and on someone else’s land...”... “... what are they? Nothing, poor whites!” “Exactly, and we are something so-called: whiter...”)

In South Africa, the use of the word *armblankeplaag* (poor white “plague”) to describe the poor whites reflects on the perception that the poor white was an indignation on the *volk* (nation/people).¹⁰³

Over the years, a number of euphemisms have emerged to add to the onerous term “poor white” in the American context. The term “poor white” itself is often used in a derogatory and misapplied sense.¹⁰⁴ Although the most neutral term, it focuses attention exclusively on the economic aspect of identity, as well as victimisation and degradation.¹⁰⁵ Often, the derogatory terms used were related to articles of clothing, habits, diets, physical appearance, poverty, cultural traits or geography.¹⁰⁶ There are a number of these terms or slurs used to refer to poor whites.¹⁰⁷ Bolton states that these are unflattering labels used to describe them, evoking the strongest possible negative image and that these characterisations and generalisations have done little to reveal the social complexity of the lives of poor whites.¹⁰⁸ The terms¹⁰⁹ “poor white”, “white trash”, “redneck” and “cracker”... have all been used interchangeably to describe certain white Southerners, but exact categories and meanings are difficult to define, although many historians believe there are distinct differences.¹¹⁰ Hundley, believed their characteristics, vernacular, boorishness and habits were all the same regardless of locality or time.¹¹¹ Bledsoe argues that it is “outsiders” and those who consider themselves superior that use pejorative labels to identify those “others”.¹¹² Poor whites have been perpetually stereotyped by the dominant culture, discriminated against and misunderstood. In their

¹⁰² A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 171.

¹⁰³ J. van Wyk, “Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama: 1930-1940”, *Alternation*, 2(1), 1995, pp. 55-56.

A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 422.

¹⁰⁵ I.A. Newby, *Plain Folk in the New South: Social Change and Cultural Persistence 1880-1915*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁶ P. Huber, “A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity”, *Southern Cultures*, 1(2), 1995, p. 145.; J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 9.; A. Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 422.

¹⁰⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. ix.

¹⁰⁹ There are a number more such as, clay/dirt eater, sand-hiller, hillbillies, tar heels, mean whites, no count, corn-cracker, cornpone, hooiser, low-downer, peckerwood, poor buckra, ridge-runner, pinelander, tacky, woolhat, some also describe those in the urban areas or cotton mills – cottonhead, cotton mill trash, cottontail, factory hill trash, factory rat, and linthead. As the South expanded latter editions included Hooisers and Oakies.

¹¹⁰ E. Bledsoe, “The Rise of Southern Redneck and White Trash Writers”, *Southern Cultures*, 6(1), 2000, p. 69.

¹¹¹ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 257

¹¹² E. Bledsoe, “The Rise of Southern Redneck and White Trash Writers”, *Southern Cultures*, 6(1), 2000, p. 72.

isolation, they have developed a unique sub-culture that they have defended with pride and tenacity.¹¹³ The slipperiness of these terms applied either to socioeconomic status or a particular set of ethical values, thus making the categorisation difficult. This combined with the derogatory intent provoked anxiety in those people whose cases were borderline.¹¹⁴ There were very few that attempted to move beyond stereotypes, which could be attributed to an absence of a strong poor white literary voice to counteract the negative labels.¹¹⁵

“Poor white trash” is one of the most derogatory terms used to define and describe poor whites. “Trash” is defined as worthless and disreputable, the British usage denotes poverty and worthlessness and adding the “white” racializes the term.¹¹⁶ There is a school of thought that argues that the term was derived by enslaved people during the antebellum period. The enslaved people’s use of “po white trash” or “po buckra”, later shortened to white trash, also reveals how they viewed the poor whites in relation to themselves. They compared themselves to these lower-class whites to elevate themselves.¹¹⁷ They viewed poor whites as the “laziest and most dissolute people on earth”.¹¹⁸ Enslaved people had the highest contempt for poor whites and white servants.¹¹⁹ Planters found the term useful and worth repeating¹²⁰ and thus encouraged such views to avoid these two classes creating an alliance thus, impoverished whites were regarded as “poor white trash” by enslaved people and planters.¹²¹ They ranked at the very bottom of antebellum society.¹²² However, blacks continued to use these terms and other derogatory terms postbellum and into the twentieth century to poke fun at those poor whites they regarded as socially and morally inferior to themselves.¹²³ The term has been used by all Americans to humiliate, insult, shame, demean, dishonour and stigmatise.¹²⁴ It was the middle-class that gave the term power of social stigma and prejudice and enforced its discriminatory effects with regards to labour.¹²⁵

¹¹³ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. xvii.

¹¹⁴ E. Bledsoe, “The Rise of Southern Redneck and White Trash Writers”, *Southern Cultures*, 6(1), 2000, p. 73.

¹¹⁵ S. Robertson, “Poverty and Progress” in S. Monteith, *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the American South*, p. 106.

¹¹⁶ J. Leyda, *American Mobilities: Geographies of Class, Race and Gender in US Culture*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016, p. 33.; K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 27.

¹¹⁷ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 17.; A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*, p. 417.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 41.

¹¹⁸ A. Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, p. 17.

¹¹⁹ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 12. A. Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, p. 17.

¹²⁰ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 43.

¹²¹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 31.; J. Leyda, *American Mobilities: Geographies of Class, Race and Gender in US Culture*, p. 33.

¹²² P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 42.

¹²³ P. Huber, “A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity”, *Southern Cultures*, 1(2), 1995, pp. 146-147.

¹²⁴ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 1.

¹²⁵ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 43.

The first known recorded use of the term in the USA was in 1833.¹²⁶ However, the term stuck and it continued to be applied to certain poor whites in the twentieth century through an array of novelists, polemicists, playwrights, travel writers and film directors reaffirming the basic traits of laziness, illiteracy and debauchery.¹²⁷ Wray argues that M.B. Stowe¹²⁸ did more to internalise, nationalise and popularise the phrase “poor white trash” than anyone in antebellum history.¹²⁹ It is the most enduring stereotype in the history of the South. It rested on the assumptions of economics, morality, and racial hierarchies, but was also expressed through attitudes regarding taste, culture capital, material goods and “proper” or moral behaviour.¹³⁰ Again, there was a differentiation made between being a “poor white” and being “poor white trash”. A poor white was moral, hardworking, with middle-class aspirations and the poor white trash were lazy, immoral, without self-respect.¹³¹

Many of these slurs, and depictions enabled other classes, especially planters, overseers and factory owners to take advantage of these people. They rationalised the hiring of blacks instead. Society believed, maintained and reproduced these stereotypes proving words were a powerful force in fashioning a class and identity.¹³²

The Carnegie Commission’s Definition

As mentioned in chapter one, the Carnegie Commission’s definition is the definition used in this study due to its links to both South Africa and the USA. Before the Commissioners set off to perform their investigations and field work, they decided to try and define the term “poor white” and found it difficult to find a suitable definition for their specific economic purpose, which would encompass the entire phenomenon. They were adamant in only studying those whose impoverishment was visible. Furthermore, they decided not to start the investigation by presupposing the intellectual and moral weakness among the poor whites. Those involved in the study examined a variety of definitions, including the one published by the Commission for Poor Relief of the Dutch Reformed Church, a few years before the Carnegie Commission, and came up with the following:

¹²⁶ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 41.; J. Leyda, *American Mobilities: Geographies of Class, Race and Gender in US Culture*, p. 33.

¹²⁷ D. Brown, “A Vagabond’s Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 800.

¹²⁸ The author of *Uncle Tom’s cabin*.

¹²⁹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 57.

¹³⁰ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. vi.

¹³¹ K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. vii.

¹³² P. Huber, “A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity”, *Southern Cultures*, 1(2), 1995, pp. 151-152, 155 & 161.

A “poor white” is a person who has become dependent to such an extent whether from mental, moral, economic or physical causes that he is unfit, without help from others, to find proper means of livelihood for himself or to procure it directly or indirectly for his children. Yet not every poor person is necessarily a poor white. A man may be poor and yet have kept his independence and his ability to improve his position.¹³³

However, the Commissioners found that a definition is always subjective to some extent, and therefore stated that for the purpose of their investigation and research, it would be extended as follows:

...as regards their origin, they are persons of European descent who gained (or are still gaining) their livelihood chiefly from farming. As regards their economic condition, they constitute a class consisting principally of poor “bywoners”, hired men on farms, owners of dwarf holdings or small undivided shares of land, poor settlers and the growing groups of unskilled or poorly trained labourers and workers outside farming.¹³⁴

The Carnegie Commission made it clear that their definition would suffice in explaining what the term for a typical poor white was, but added that it was not intended as a description of all the finer distinctions they made. The Commissioners further stated that although a poor white was someone of European descent, anyone that had a mixture of coloured or black blood did not comply with their specifications. The American influence could be seen in this decision with regards to the “tainted blood theory” and the eugenics movement. However, they added that those who were excluded were only done so where the “admixture” was evident and recognisable by ordinary observation. Poor whites were regarded as an element of rural origin and were descendants of impoverished families. It was stated that through a means of adaptation, many later generations who were poor could rise above that class, which is one of the reasons why many real poor families migrated to the urban areas. Although they were all seen as people who were poor, the Commissioners considered it an extremely difficult task to determine the level of poverty because many received some of their payment in kind and their income was also subjected to fluctuations.¹³⁵ Therefore, the Commissioners decided to further define the poor whites by ordering them into one of five categories according to their particular situation: the Natural Group; the Rural Group; the Industrial Group; the Pathological Group; and the Accidental Group.¹³⁶

¹³³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 18.

¹³⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. v.

¹³⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 2-4.

¹³⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

The “Natural Group” included poor whites that evolved through social inheritance. They people may have been of normal intelligence, but for generations, they had belonged to the inferior classes of society until they came to be identified with a definite social pattern of inefficiency. The Commissioners reflected that in some cases, with the proper treatment and guidance, they may have been educated to become useful and respectable members of society. Furthermore, under that Natural Group falls those who flocked together as mentally deficient and incapacitated – which included the chronically sick, deaf, dumb, blind and all others who through some defect or other were unable to care or support themselves.¹³⁷

The rural group was the largest of the groups, and most poor whites fell into this group. It incorporated those who lived in the rural areas and had a rural existence, such as the nomadic *trekboer* (travelling farmers), the *bywoners* (sharecroppers or tenant farmers), the woodcutters, and the Transvaal bushveld type (nomadic hunters living from the environment and those living in isolation (isolated by history or geography)).¹³⁸

On the other hand, the Industrial Group comprised of the poor whites living in urban areas. These were the village (small town or *dorp*) type who had usually been farm labourers or *bywoners* who had been pushed off the rural land¹³⁹ by modern changes and technologies. Many were unskilled in any trade or semi-skilled and used their rural skills where possible in the urban areas to make a living. The “unskilled type” mostly consisted of rural labourers, unskilled in any trade, who came to the urban areas seeking any type of relief and aid, but were unable to adapt to city life and sank further into poverty. The “industrial” or “digger type” were made up of poor fortune hunters without knowledge or experience of digging on the mines.¹⁴⁰

The Pathological Group encompassed the poor whites who through some aberration such as drinking, indolence, improvidence, dependency or crime, had sunk to a low economic and social standard. The abuse of strong alcohol was one of the main causes of the poor-white problem and why so many whites¹⁴¹ did not sympathise with them.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-6.

¹³⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 7-15.

¹³⁹ Not only modern technologies, but also the purchasing of land by big commercialised farmers or and a cheaper wage black population.

¹⁴⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 7-15.

¹⁴¹ Middle class and upper class.

¹⁴² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 15-17.; This is evident in the America depiction and description of poor whites.

Lastly, the Accidental Group covered the poor whites who used to be respectable, self-supporting members of society, but were the victims of some calamity. This included natural disasters and causes that were out of their control. These poor whites, if aided, were often able to escape poverty and become self-supporting once again.¹⁴³

The Carnegie Commission also added a group of whites that were not poor yet, but would become so if circumstances did not change.¹⁴⁴ Throughout the investigation, certain attributes were identified that could lead to their eventual poverty. Among others, a lack of secondary education was the most important and could mean a large difference in the lives of the children of poor-white families. Many of the parents in this group were aware of this fact. Other attributes included having smaller families as well as finding work and working hard. In many of these cases, the whites were not poor yet or had struggled and pulled themselves out of poverty. These were the poor whites who proved not all of them were unwilling and lazy, but that there were some who were victim of their own and other circumstances and furthermore there were those willing to “return” to the *volk* or step-up into the next higher class.¹⁴⁵

Defining the Poor Whites in the Novels: South Africa

As mentioned in chapter six, poor whites played a prominent role and received a great deal of attention in the works of the novelists selected from the respective movements and period of this study.

As has been made evident, in the South African context, the poor whites were still part of the *volk* and were regarded as superior to people of colour. They were usually depicted as victims of circumstance with aspirations of improving their positions and wanting more. The majority are described as hard working. There are a few who represented the “fallen” poor white who made no attempt to raise themselves out of their circumstances, but these characters were written about as a warning to the reader and to be pitied and assisted.¹⁴⁶

In the American context, as indicated the poor white is defined in terms of the moral, emotional and intellectual incongruity with which he is perceived. The poor white usually appears at the bottom of society, sometimes lower than blacks and enslaved people.¹⁴⁷ Class attitudes are

¹⁴³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

¹⁴⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 158.

¹⁴⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 158-166.

¹⁴⁶ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015.

¹⁴⁷ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 5.

deeply embedded in the novels.¹⁴⁸ Poor whites were usually depicted as life's losers. In the novels, they are represented as inferiors to the patriarchal planter or wealthier classes of whom they are usually jealous. Their roles are that of a villain or vicious criminal, comedic or joke of the storyline, seducer, side-kick to the planter hero, the fallen yeoman and racist.¹⁴⁹

The fictional poor white and the social reality developed simultaneously, but not always in harmony.¹⁵⁰

In the analysis, the Carnegie Commission's categorisation of the five groups of poor whites will be used to place or group the various characters from the selected novels.

J. van Bruggen's Ampie Nortjé in his trilogy, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, is the most tangible and real poor-white character in Afrikaans literature. Van Bruggen wrote of him in such a manner that the reader is aware of his thoughts and feelings "bringing Ampie to life". As mentioned, Van Bruggen's work falls into the Realism genre and thus, he wrote about what he saw and experienced. Ampie is based on one of the *bywoners* who lived on Van Bruggen's farm.

Ampie reflects what comes to mind when the term "poor white" is invoked. He is introduced to the reader and described as:

*... 'n seun van twintig jaar... agterlik vir die leeftyd, en sy dom gesig kyk oorbluf na mense... 'n Verwaarloosde vuil hand kom nou eers reguit na oom Kasper... Vaal van die stof... die vodde om sy lyf en die groot ou keps wat tot sy ore toemaak... Sy skurwe swart voete met hul groot weglêtone sak onder die kraalmis in... met bang, bruin oë wat hy amper nooit knip nie.*¹⁵¹

(... a boy of twenty years of age... backwards for the time, and his stupid face looks dumbfounded at people... a neglected dirty hand stretches towards uncle Kasper... dull with the dust... the rags on his body and the big cap which even covers his ears... his rough black feet with their big widespread toes sink under the manure... with scared, brown eyes which hardly ever blink.

He is described by other "better" white characters as:

¹⁴⁸ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁹ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 8.; S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 19, 35, 180 & 185-1960.

¹⁵⁰ S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, p. 5.

¹⁵¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, pp. 1-3.

“...baar soos ‘n vaalpenskafter, vuil soos ‘n koeliemeid: maar dis ‘n Afrikanerkind, en sy wil is goed...”¹⁵²

(“Uncivilised like a pale belly [white] kaffer,¹⁵³ dirty like a coolie maid:¹⁵⁴ but is an Afrikaner child, and he is willing...”)

Many people believed that the poor whites were to blame for their condition, which was mostly attributed to laziness and thus in a sense made them worse than blacks.

“‘n Slegte witman is slegter as ‘n slegte kaffer.”¹⁵⁵

(“A useless white man is worse than a useless black.”)

Hygiene was something that Ampie was not taught, which is evident in the following statement when he is living with Booysen as a *bywoner*.

*Was, haresny en nou al agter die tannie aan wat hom flus die nuwe klere gegee en aanhou sê dat hy vir hom tog elke dag so fris moet was, en dit nogal in koue water!*¹⁵⁶

(Wash, haircut and now following the lady who just gave him the new clothes and keeps telling him to bathe and scrub every day, and in cold water nonetheless!)

According to accounts from the Carnegie Commission, it was not uncommon for poor whites to be unkempt and dirty.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, they believed the high rates of mortality in children was attributed to unsanitary habits and surroundings.¹⁵⁸ Infant mortality was particularly high, which is illustrated in the novel. Ampie’s mother gives birth to ten children, of whom only six survive.¹⁵⁹

In the trilogy, his parents for a range of reasons are basically destitute and have no desire to improve their situation. They are depicted and described as follows: his mother is an *idiotemoeder, vuil, onpresies, tam, kinderagtig en ontydig* (idiotic-mother, dirty, careless, weary, childish and untimely) and his father is *verstandelike en geestelik minderwaardig, wreed, oneerlik, leunagtig, lui, gulsig, dierlik, smerig en liefdeloos* (mentally and spiritually deficient,

¹⁵² J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 75.

¹⁵³ “Kaffer” is an extremely derogatory term and is by law defined as hate speech. In this context it was a great insult as a white to be compared to being like a black.

¹⁵⁴ *Koeliemeid* is also a very derogatory term. *Koelie* can refer to coloureds or Indians and *meid* literally means maid, but can also be used as a derogatory term depending on the context. This is also defined by law as hate speech.

¹⁵⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 76.

¹⁵⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 154-155.

¹⁵⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. xiv.

¹⁵⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 48.

cruel, dishonest, lying, lazy, greedy, animalistic, dirty and hard-hearted).¹⁶⁰ His upbringing is described as *van opvoeding geen sprake nie, in die onmaatskaplike bandelosseheid en temidde van ontbering en verliederliking in elke vorm, geen order, geen reëlmaat, geen netheid, geen ambisie nie* (having no education or upbringing to speak of, in unsocial lawlessness and in the midst of hardship and debauchery of every form, and lacking order, routine, neatness and ambition).¹⁶¹ Ampie only had very little education and did not complete school. He did not have the ability to grasp concepts as easily as other children, even those younger than him and thus he becomes a little “wild”.¹⁶² His own father is illiterate and is obviously ashamed of it, which is evident when he needs to pretend his hand hurt and requires Ampie’s help to sign his own name.¹⁶³

Ampie’s family is described as living in an *ou murasie* (old ruin). His father had made no attempt to improve their living conditions. Most of their living space is virtually outside and exposed to the elements. Van Bruggen describes it as having no comforts of the life of white people and that there were many black people having better shelter and dwellings and also living in a better state.¹⁶⁴ However, Ampie becomes more aware of his situation, which is apparent in the following extract.

*“Pa wil my uitroei, want pa is te sleg om te werk! Ek moet almelewe uitspring en Pa vat somaar ou-Jakob... Ek kon al ‘n trop esels gehad het! Vandag het ek nie eers ‘n vulletjie nie.”*¹⁶⁵

(“Father, you want to ruin me because you are too lazy to work! My whole life I have had to learn to survive and you just take Jakob [his donkey]... I could have had a drove of donkeys! But today I do not even have a foal.”)

In his late teens, Ampie decided to leave his parent’s home to work as a farm labourer. This is partly because he wanted his donkey that his father sold, back and because he wanted to earn his own money. Throughout the trilogy, Ampie wants to become independent and improve his circumstances, making him a redeemable character. He goes to work for Kasper Booysen, the farmer who purchased his donkey Jakob. Booysen views Ampie and the other *bywoners* as people who do not think about the future. He feels responsible for him and tries to counsel and guide him, but worries about what will happen to him when he may no longer

¹⁶⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1965.; R. Coetzee, “Die Armbanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 96.

¹⁶¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. Johannesburg: Afrikaanse Pers, 1965.; R. Coetzee, “Die Armbanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 97

¹⁶² J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 8.

¹⁶³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 47.

¹⁶⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 7.

be there.¹⁶⁶ While living on Booyesen's farm, Ampie learns to eat proper food, wash himself, live in a house, sleep on a bed, become decent, and have self-respect, manners and pride in himself. Mrs Booyesen tells him that white people live in a house, not in the veld like some animal.¹⁶⁷ This is also clear on New Year's Day when his mother's actions embarrass him. He becomes self-conscious and begins to see how others may perceive him.

*Al die jongmense het hom daarvandaan vermy... Vir die eerste keer in sy lewe kon sy oë toe opmerk die verwaarlosing en verslegting van sy familie...*¹⁶⁸

(After that all the young people avoided him... For the first time in his life he could see for himself the neglect and deterioration of his family...)

Van Bruggen states that for Ampie, it has become nearly necessary to lie, although he does not always have a reason to do so.¹⁶⁹ This reflects one of the negative attributes that typifies poor whites. Ampie wants to be confirmed by the church so that he may marry his cousin, Annekie.¹⁷⁰ However, before he is confirmed, he steals from Booyesen, but realises his actions were wrong. He asks for forgiveness and amends his ways.

*Hy het van oom Kasper se pampoene, rieme en greedskap gevat, en dit was nie reg nie, 'n mens kan maar sê dis steel... Vir die eiers hey hy meestal "sigrets" gekoop en dis ook maar direkte diefstal. God hey die dinge almal raakgesien... Dis deur sy eie sonde. Hy sal nooit weer steel nie.*¹⁷¹

(He took uncle Kasper's pumpkins, leather thongs, and equipment and that was not right, one could say it was theft... With the eggs he usually purchased cigarettes and that was also theft. God saw all these things... It was his own sins. He will never steal again.)

Ampie leaves Booyesen's farm and together with his family and wife's family, goes to work on the diggings in Kimberley to mine for diamonds. Here, once again, the reader is made aware that Ampie is a hard worker.

*Maar eenkant in die kleimgat werk hy vir twee dwarsdeur die voormiddag sonder verposing, soos 'n kaffer wat die duiwel in is en woës sy krag meet met die werk, sodat vuil kronkel spore op sy verlepte gesig agterlaat.*¹⁷²

¹⁶⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 246.

¹⁶⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 80.

¹⁶⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 130.

¹⁶⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 211.

¹⁷⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 172.

¹⁷¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 201.

¹⁷² J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, pp. 379-380.

(But one side in the diggings he does the work of two people right through the morning without pause, like a furious black who is wildly measuring his strength against a task, leaving dirty, winding tracks on his withered face.

In the trilogy, the reader is introduced to a child who was born a poor white, but strives to rise above it. Through his thoughts, the reader sees a very human side to his character. As the novels progress, Ampie grows into a more “respectable” white. He is described as hard working, but remains ignorant and innocent, which leads to the reader sympathising with him. He is portrayed as a redeemable character. With regards to the Carnegie Commission’s categories, Ampie falls under the Natural Group – being born into poverty and the cause being heredity and is in a sense a victim of his circumstances. He is also categorised in the Rural Group – being a poor white from the rural/farming area and becoming a *bywoner*. This realistic portrayal of a poor white became part of the popular consciousness and created an attitude, such as that of Kasper Booysen that the “Ampies” of the Afrikaner *volk* could and must be saved.¹⁷³ This aligned with the Afrikaner Nationalist Party policy and practice.

In most of the novels, both in the South African context and American context, there is some type of poor white villain. In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Ampie’s cousin and later brother-in-law fills this role. Bart is clever and sneaky and is able to out-wit Ampie. In the final book of the Trilogy, Ampie and his family (parents and in-laws included) leave the rural farming area and move to the diamond diggings to try and make their fortune. Ampie and his father do most of the hard, manual labour, whilst Bart is in charge of selling the diamonds. Ampie’s father suspects Bart of theft and warns Ampie that Bart is cheating them all and that he is a crook.¹⁷⁴ The others also do not trust Bart, including his own mother:

*Sy is op die plek vol agterdog en vertrou vir Bart glad nie.*¹⁷⁵

(She is immediately suspicious and does not trust Bart at all.)

Ampie reminiscence about the instances where Bart had done him in.¹⁷⁶ Their luck turned and they find a big diamond, however, due to Bart’s sly operations they are all forced to return to the rural area and Ampie once again goes to work for Booysen. It was Bart’s actions in this case that was the worst injustice he does towards his family and Ampie. He had a separate fraudulent and illegal book in his own name, in which he made a fortune with the diamonds that they mined, via transactions the others were not aware of. This book is discovered by

¹⁷³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

¹⁷⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 405.

¹⁷⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 210.

¹⁷⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 205.

Ampie and he realises Bart had taken a lot of their money, giving them only the money from the smallest diamonds.¹⁷⁷

Bart falls into the Pathological group due to his crime. As a poor white, he does not receive any sympathy due to his actions. He is unredeemable.

The main character, Lambertus Bredenhand, in Van Bruggen's novel *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, is a poor white who has lost his income mostly due to the "Hand of God", that is actions out of his control. He has to resort to manual labour – small jobs here and there. Although he assumes that he will be able to find work easily to compensate his income, this turns out not to be the case.¹⁷⁸ He has lost his farm, but is not a lazy poor white and provides, although meagrely, for his family. People do not pay him well for his labour and thus he remains reliant on them.¹⁷⁹ The situation makes him very bitter and despondent as he is a hard worker, but is only able to make very little.¹⁸⁰ Bredenhand's brother-in-law recommends him for the position of Locust Official. He is appointed and although the position is not permanent, he takes it very seriously.

*Met militêre houding kom Bredenhand op die vosperd aangetrippe.*¹⁸¹

(With a military-like attitude, Bredenhand comes along on a bay horse.)

*Die sprinkaanveldtog was van korte duur, tot teleurstelling van die beampte wat verwag het om die betrekking sy lewe lank bekleë.*¹⁸²

(The locust campaign was short-lived, to the disappointment of the Officer who expected the position for life.)

After being appointed, Bredenhand runs up a considerable amount of debt that he is unable to pay off once his term ends. Not only is he forced to return to working as a manual labourer, but he has to work off his debt to the shop owner, Fisher.¹⁸³

The novel emphasises throughout the fact that Bredenhand is a hard worker. Most of the surrounding farmers can see how hard he tries to provide for his family and there are a few who try to help him. However, there are those who look down on him, even after he is appointed as the Locust Officer. These farmers feel that the government is providing too many

¹⁷⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 418.

¹⁷⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 12.

¹⁸⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, pp. 6 & 28.

¹⁸¹ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 48.

¹⁸² J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 113.

¹⁸³ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 113.

opportunities and hand-outs for the poor whites, such as jobs being created to provide them with an easy and lazy life. They feel that they are compensating these jobs with the tax which they pay and that it is a waste of money.¹⁸⁴ This is evident in the following statements:

*Vir hom is Bredenhand die sukkelaar-ambagsman wat ook al vir hom 'n paar dingetjies reggeknutsel het...*¹⁸⁵

(To him Bredenhand is the struggling tradesman who has done a few odd jobs for him...)

*“Jy is astrant, nè, jou niksgewènd!”*¹⁸⁶

(“You are impudent, you worthless person!”)

This novel makes the reader aware of the hard working and willing poor whites. Bredenhand falls into the Rural, as well as the Accidental and Recovering categorisation. The loss of his farm and the subsequent poverty occurred through no fault of his own. Prior to this, he was self-supporting. However, at the start of the novel, he leads a rural existence, making a living in the rural area. He has many different rural skills and is able to perform a number of manual labour jobs. He decides to remain in the rural area offering his services to people who may need him and this is a decision he makes again after his position at the Locust Official ends. Through his work and the position he takes, the reader is made aware that he is trying to better himself and improve his situation to escape the poverty he finds himself in.¹⁸⁷

Van Bruggen’s novel *Bywoners* offers an extensive view of the different types of poor whites who existed. The categorisation is evident in most of the character names.¹⁸⁸ The novel offers specific points of view for the different characters.

Cornelis Sitman¹⁸⁹ represents in popular consciousness what it means to be a poor white. He is the character that is most focused on in the novel. Sitman is described as a white man with a springless step and a heavy-hearted face wearing battered clothes. His looks like a dead body sagging in his rag jacket and has dirty long-fingered¹⁹⁰ hands and lazy arms. His

¹⁸⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 61.

¹⁸⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 100.

¹⁸⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

¹⁸⁸ Vyr (Free) is the owner of the farm on which the *bywoners* work. *Niklaas* (No class or not belonging to the class of *bywoners*) went to the First World War to earn a wage. *Willemse – Wil* (Willing) Willing to work and is the most hardworking of the *bywoners*. *Gouws – Gou* (Quickly) His wife runs up a big account and he realises he will not have any money over from the harvest and decides to leave to go to the mine after paying his account. He decides quickly and leaves quickly. *Sitman* (Sit man) The laziest of the *bywoners* who prefers to sit around rather than working.

¹⁸⁹ Adries Vry describes him by his name in the following statement: “He is a man who sits where he sits and I do not wish to be the man who has to chase him out of the wattle-and-daub house.”; J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 42.

¹⁹⁰ In Afrikaans culture someone who is referred to having long fingers could have literally long fingers or when implied was someone who steals.

appearance is a scene of inferiority and most people are repulsed by his neglected appearance and expression.¹⁹¹ Furthermore, every characterisation of Sitman, made by the other *bywoners* and farmers, tends towards the bad and inferior: *meeldiaken* (flour deacon),¹⁹² *die elfde plaag* (the eleventh plague), *die man wat altyd opdraand loop* (the man that always walks uphill), *vyand van alle vaste werk* (enemy of all permanent work).¹⁹³ *‘n Eie boerdery het hy nie meer nie. Daarvoor is hy te sleg...*¹⁹⁴ (He no longer has his own farm. For that he is too useless...).

He is depicted as a poor liar and is lazy and will try to get out of work by using a number of poor excuses. Thus, he is looked down upon, even by the other *bywoners*. Sitman will only work when he knows there is something for him to gain. Descriptions of him include:

*...willoos, vol ingebeelde kwale en ‘n vyand van all vaste werk.*¹⁹⁵

(...without a will of his own, full of imaginary ailments and an opponent to all regular employment.)

*“Luisiekte!... vervlakste luisiekte! Hy is oorlede dood so uitgedruk!”*¹⁹⁶

(“Lazy sickness!...damn lazy sickness! He is already past dead so to speak!”)

*“Jy weet, ek word so stadiggaan moeg vir jou gelêery die heeldag by jou huis!”... “Ek kan tog nie werk as ek siek is nie!” het Neels temerig geantwoord. “Ek glo niks aan al daardie kwale, waarmee jy die mense se oë wil verblind nie. Dis pure slegtigheid en luiheid en niks anders nie.”*¹⁹⁷

(“You know, I am slowly getting fed up with you lying about your house all day!”... “Surely I cannot work while I am ill!” Neels drawled. “I do not believe in all your ailments that you try to blind people with. It is pure uselessness and laziness and nothing else.”)

Not only is Sitman a liar, but he is also a thief, and he teaches these bad qualities to his children. He is caught stealing eggs, but after he is caught he avoids the farmer De Klerk, however, his wife catches one of Sitman’s children stealing eggs a week later.¹⁹⁸

*Sitman het begin om rond te snuffel en die oop hoenderneste op die arglose boerewerwe was vir hom baie verleidelik. Wie sou dit agterkom?*¹⁹⁹

¹⁹¹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 38-39

¹⁹² He is called this because he carries a pillow case with him at all time to beg some flour from his neighbours, he also has a sugar bag.

¹⁹³ A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁴ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁵ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 29.

¹⁹⁶ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁷ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁸ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 66.

¹⁹⁹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 66.

(Sitman began to sniff around, the unguarded chicken coops on the unsuspecting farms was very tempting. Who would notice it?)

Sitman has a number of children and is incapable of looking after or supporting his family. He also does not make much effort to try. Poverty is rife in the Sitman household and the conditions in which they live are described as miserable throughout the novel. The reader experiences the slow deterioration of the Sitman's conditions and matters get worse due to his laziness.²⁰⁰

*Die ander kinders drein om haar heen. Dis nie meer 'n huil oor kos soos vroeë nie, dis nou 'n aaklige grensgehuil, vol langgerekte klaagtone, wat hulle taaie gemoedstemming uit, as hulle magies skreeu van die honger.*²⁰¹

(The other children whine around her. It is no longer a cry for food like before, but it is now a terrible mewling, full of drawn-out groans emanating from their hopeless situation when their stomachs growls as a result of hunger pains.)

Sitman is considered one of the worst types of poor whites. According to the Carnegie Commission, he falls into the Natural Group only because his poverty is most likely hereditary and he does not know better. He also falls in the Rural Group in terms of where he lives, as well as the Pathological Group due to his idleness, laziness, dependency and resorting to crime.²⁰²

The other *bywoners* in the novel do not belong to the same category as Sitman. Willemse is portrayed as the best type of *bywoner* and the hardest working out of the group. Where Sitman has no livestock or crops of his own and lives in a temporary dwelling, Willemse produces a small harvest and has built a solid and permanent brick house with a barn and kraal.²⁰³ He remains a *bywoner* because he knows Andries Vry, the landowner, would struggle on the farm without him.²⁰⁴ The other *bywoners* look up to him and work under his leadership.²⁰⁵

Other *bywoners*, Niklaas and Jaap Gouws, also live and work on Vry's farm to provide for their families. The cost of living is high and when Gouws receives his account from the Jewish shop owner, he realises that he will be unable to pay it and that his entire harvest would have to be

²⁰⁰ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 64.

²⁰¹ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 64.

²⁰² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

²⁰³ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 29.

²⁰⁴ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 29.

²⁰⁵ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 29-34.

used to cover it.²⁰⁶ He decides he can no longer make a living in the rural area and is determined to move to the urban area and work in the mines for a fixed income.²⁰⁷ Many months later, Gouws returns to the farm to visit the other *bywoners*. He joined the army to fight in the First World War. He tells the other *bywoners* about the perks of joining the army, such as grants for each child and a fixed monthly wage.²⁰⁸ The others are apprehensive at first, but the cost of living is twice as expensive as before the War and they are unable to survive on their harvests. Later, all, except Sitman and Willemse, leave in search of employment that is more stable.²⁰⁹ These *bywoners* fall into the Natural, Rural and Accidental and Recovering Groups. They all work to provide for themselves and their families. With regards to Niklaas and Gouws, they both seek new and better opportunities in the urban areas, thus also making them part of the Industrial Group.²¹⁰

In C.M. van den Heever's novel *Droogte*, the reader is introduced to five brothers who are all different. Sagrys is blatantly portrayed as the villain in the novel. Van der Heever emphasises this fact by explaining how Sagrys betrayed his people during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) by supporting and joining the English and as a result, his possessions were not destroyed and he was able to retain his property and belongings.²¹¹ He wants complete ownership of the farm, which has been divided between the five brothers, and is content to watch as his brothers spiral further into poverty.²¹² Sagrys tries to encourage the Jewish shop owner to introduce high interest rates for their debts and call in their debts sooner. This was done to speed up the loss of his brothers' property. He also informs the policeman in the veld that his brothers' flock has scab disease which will lead to them being dipped and if they were too weak to their eventual death.²¹³ He is also very cruel to his disabled brother Datie, who he describes as *onnoesel* (stupid), however, he is not, but is incapable of communicating. In a conversation with the Minister, Sagrys states:

“...ek voel so jammer vir die ou doofstom broer van my... want so 'n mens verstaan mos nie dinge soos ons wat 'n gesonde verstand het nie.”²¹⁴

(“...I feel so sorry for my deaf-dumb brother... because someone like him does not understand things like those of us who are sound of mind.”)

²⁰⁶ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 31.

²⁰⁷ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 31.

²⁰⁸ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 31.

²⁰⁹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 73.

²¹⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

²¹¹ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 59.

²¹² C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 145-146.

²¹³ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 48-49.

²¹⁴ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 51.

Stoffel is the youngest brother and does not look after his land. He is a drunk not married, but is interested in having a relationship with his niece, his bother Soois's daughter.²¹⁵ Stoffel further tempts his brother Luikes with alcohol, which also causes him to become a drunk.²¹⁶ The three brothers (Sagrys, Stoffel and Luikes) are constantly fighting with each other and are transfixed by the drought, which occupies most of their thoughts and is the only topic they seem interested in talking about. The reader has no sympathy with these three brothers, as they have no redeemable qualities.²¹⁷

Datie was born deaf and dumb and has no means of communicating his feelings. He has suffered years of abuse from Sagrys: *...hy het die aand vir Datie so 'n bekruij-skop in sy sy daar in die veld gegee...*²¹⁸ (...the other evening in the veld he gave Datie a stalking-kick in his side...)

Datie is depicted as a sad, pathetic character. Van den Heever gives the reader a greater insight into Datie's life by writing from his point of view. This creates a lot of sympathy for him.²¹⁹ He feels unwanted and not needed and that he is a millstone to the world. He prefers the company of his flock of sheep and sleeps near them when his inferiority, self-pity and sense of weakness regarding his disability overwhelms him.²²⁰ Van den Heever describes him in the following statement:

*Sy ou swak linkerogje en half-oop mond gee hom 'n dom, stomp gelaatsuitdrukking.*²²¹

(His weak left eye and half open mouth gives him a dumb doff facial expression)

*Soos hy daar staan wil die maer gestalte se flou linkerogje net toeval. Die wange is hol ingesink en die bene onderkant die oog steek knopperig uit. Die baard is vuil en slordig, steekhard oor die blou-bruin vel gegroei. Die toue hare lê deurmekaar soos gras wat papnat gereën is. Die krom ruggie, met 'n langerige plooinek soos 'n kaalgeplukte hoender s'n bokant die grys ou baadjie uit, help alles mee om Ou-Datie so 'n vervalle en bejammerenswaardige wese te laat lyk...*²²²

(As he stands there, the thin figure's weak left eye just wants to close. His cheeks are hollow and the bones below the eyes stand out sharply. His beard is dirty and untidy, grown stubbly over the blue-brown skin. The strands of hair lay unkempt/messy/tangled like grass that has rained soaking wet. His curved back, with a long-wrinkled neck like a

²¹⁵ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 56, 71 & 97.

²¹⁶ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 186 & 193.

²¹⁷ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 125 & 186.

²¹⁸ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 48.

²¹⁹ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 47.

²²⁰ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 47 & 160.

²²¹ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 8.

²²² C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 196.

bare-plucked chicken sticking out of the old grey jacket does everything to make Old Datie look dilapidated and pitiful)

Soois is the only redeemable character in the novel. Soois focuses on the future and is willing to try and fight against nature to save his farm and livestock. Soois keeps lifting the cattle back onto their feet when they fall. In contrast, the reader never witnesses any of the brothers doing any real work.²²³ He is also the only brother who has any time for Datie and tries to understand, help and communicate with him.²²⁴ When Soois moves to town, Datie desperately wants to go with him. Soois even cries having to leave Datie behind.²²⁵ Datie views Soois in the following statement:

*Van al sy broers het hy die grootste liefde vir oom Soois... want die het hom altyd beskerm as ander hom uitgekoggel het, toe oom Sagrys hom op lae wyse agter die rug verniel het. En nou gaan sy beskermer weg... dit voel vir hom of die hoop van sy lewe met die bokwa saamgaan.*²²⁶

(Of all his brothers, he has the greatest love for Soois... because he always protected him when others tried to cheat him, until Sagrys destroyed him [Soois] in a low manner, behind his back. In addition, now his protector is leaving... it feels as if all hope is leaving with the cart.)

Datie is sent to an asylum for the rest of his life after murdering Sagrys for all the years of abuse and mistreatment and for forcing Soois to leave the farm.²²⁷ After Sagrys's death, the brothers ultimately lose the farm, as they were unable to pay their debts.²²⁸ The brothers, with the exception of Datie, move to the town where they become wage labourers on the railways.²²⁹ However, Stoffel and Luikes continue to abuse alcohol.²³⁰ It is Soois who tries to uplift himself and recover from his poverty.

Droogte presents a variety of different poor whites. According to the Carnegie Commission's categories, all the brothers fall partly into the Rural Group because each brother's piece of land is so small that they are barely able to survive together like *bywoners*. These brothers also fall into the Accidental Group due to the drought, a condition that is out of their control. Datie also falls into the Natural Group due to his disability. Luikes and Stoffel fall into the

²²³ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 76-77 & 125.

²²⁴ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 73-75 & 143.

²²⁵ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 143.

²²⁶ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 143.

²²⁷ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 197-199.

²²⁸ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 189.

²²⁹ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 202.

²³⁰ C.M. van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 203.

Pathological Group. They do nothing to improve their circumstances and only exacerbate their situation through the abuse of alcohol – wasting money they did not have. Sagryst did try to improve his circumstances, but in a devious and dishonourable way and thus, he too falls into the Pathological Group. Soois is the only redeemable brother and after he starts work in the town, he also falls into the Industrial Group.²³¹

Die Plaasverdeling and its sequel, *Die Trekboer*, are two novels by A.H. Jonker that examine the life of Antonie Reys. Antonie is described as looking like a foreman compared to his brother Jacob, who looks like the boss. Antonie is an *afwagende, half apologetiese figuurtjie* (awaiting and apologetic figure).²³² Throughout the novels, he is described as a tall, thin man, with an ashen face and spiny, small moustache; fair hair; scrawny frame; small, blue, sunken eyes; and thin calloused hands.²³³ Antonie farms with sheep and has no idea regarding business practices or how to work with money. This is aggravated after the death of his father and the farm is divided between him and Jacob.²³⁴ He is naïve and a day dreamer. He lives in a *hartbeeshuisie* (wattle and daub house) in the same manner as a *bywoner*. Antonie suffers from an inferiority complex,²³⁵ like many poor Afrikaners, and is done in time and time again by his cunning brother.²³⁶ However, he is not lazy and is depicted as a hard and willing worker.²³⁷

*Hy moet sy broer en vader baie dikwels help op die saailand – daarvan kan hy nie los kom nie – maar hy voel maar eers gelukkig as hy kan weg kom na die vee toe.*²³⁸

(He often needs to help his brother and father in the arable lands – he cannot get away from that – but he feels happy again when he can get away to the flock.)

He tries hard to make his part of the farm profitable and takes pride in his work. He is a good sheep farmer, but is at a loss when it comes to dealing with people or business.²³⁹ A terrible drought causes Antonie to lose hundreds of sheep at the same time his accounts come in. He finds himself in a hopeless situation, unable to pay all his debts.²⁴⁰

²³¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

²³² A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 53.

²³³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1932.; A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Pers, 1934.

²³⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 250 & 306.

²³⁵ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 280.

²³⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 65 & 306.

²³⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 109.

²³⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 8.

²³⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 254-255 & 321.

²⁴⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 363-366 & 377.

*Slof-slof stap Antonie weg na sy huis toe. Hy het nie meer lus om sy voete op te tel nie. Hy weet nie meer her – of derwaarts nie!*²⁴¹

(Shuffling, Antonie walks towards his house. He does not even have the will to lift his feet. He does not know here or there anymore!)

*...hy lê gewoonlik die helfde van die nag wakker om te prober planne maak...*²⁴²

(...he lies awake half the night trying to make plans...)

*“Hiedie is almal joune... die rekening by Felsen... Die landmeter se rekening... jou rekening by ou Steenman...”*²⁴³

(“This is all yours... the account by Felsen... The surveyor’s account... your account by old Steenman...”)

He decides that there is no other solution than to move with his remaining flock and family to seek better grazing land.²⁴⁴

*“Trek man, trek! Dis al wat ‘n boer kan doen as die droog is.”*²⁴⁵

(“Move man, move! That is all a farmer can do if it is dry.”)

In the *Die Trekboer* Antonie’s story continues as he searches for a place for his family and sheep. The sheep continue to die along the road, which makes his depression and anxiety apparent: *As hy maar net by die groen wêreld kan uitkom!* (If only he could get to the green world).²⁴⁶ After settling on a number of different farms and working as a *bywoner* and farm labourer²⁴⁷ Antonie’s wife, Bekka and son decide they need to move to the diggings on the mines to make a living as they were falling further into poverty.²⁴⁸

*“Ons kan nie langer hier bly sit en vrek nie. Ons moet maak soos Herklaas sê! Ek sê ook so!”*²⁴⁹

(“We cannot sit here any longer and die. We must do as Herklaas says! I say so too!”)

The reader sees all the characters change from the first novel to the next. Antonie is broken and a shell of the man he was. He changes from a strong and independent man and becomes a weak, pathetic and drunk figure, all as a means to cope with his situation and poverty.

²⁴¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 352-353.

²⁴² A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 354.

²⁴³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 363-364.

²⁴⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 361.

²⁴⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 358.

²⁴⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 9.

²⁴⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 73-77.

²⁴⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 96-99.

²⁴⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 99.

At the diggings, Bekka and Herklaas sell sheep and meat to the diggers and Antonie becomes a water driver.²⁵⁰ He, however, feels ashamed of the work he does.

*Antonie Reys was nog nooit 'n man wat bang was vir werk nie... hy sou neergesien het op hierdie soort werk en op die wat dit moet doen.*²⁵¹

(Antonie Reys was never a man that was afraid of work... he would look down on this type of work and the person who has to do it.)

Antonie is tempted into drink, which starts to ruin his family. He is very unhappy and dissatisfied with his lot in life. He is tired of struggling to survive and failing to provide. He wants to desperately better himself and his family, but does not know how.²⁵²

*...dan kan 'n mens sommer ruik dat hulle eers by die kantien was... Antonie sê hy kan dit nie verhelp nie...hulle trakteeer hom... Antonie het vandag hard gewerk en heelwat verdien, maar hy voel nie heeltemal tevrede nie...*²⁵³

(...you can smell he has first been at the canteen/shebeen... Antonie says he cannot help it... they treat him... Antonie worked hard today and earned quite a bit, but he does not feel completely content...)

Eventually, the family decides to buy a claim and they find a diamond. However, Bekka takes control of the family's finances from this point because of Antonie's drinking problem.²⁵⁴ Antonie breaks completely spiritually because of Bekka's actions, he no longer feels like the patriarch and physically due to the hard work and hard life he has had to endure. He realises that he will never be able to return to his farm and most likely will never see it again.²⁵⁵ This causes him a lot of heartache and anger as he had big dreams and now he no longer has a will. His body also starts to deteriorate. His back and kidneys begin to bother him and he is in constant pain so much so that some days it is difficult for him to move or get about.²⁵⁶ He remains a hard and willing worker. Jonker describes his feelings and outlook in the following statement:

Oral het mense hom net skeef aangekyk en hul koppe geskud as hy werk vra...werk is skaars... En slu skelm het Antonie daar maar weggestap...bly half dat hy geen swaar werk gekry het om te doen nie, want Vader weet hy is nie lui om te werk nie, maar hy

²⁵⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 102

²⁵¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 109.

²⁵² A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 119-120.

²⁵³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 119.

²⁵⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 155-156.

²⁵⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 165.

²⁵⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 165-166.

*voel siek en uitgeput, te skaam lusteloos in en oor himself om 'n vinger te wil verroer as dit nit volsterk nodig is nie.*²⁵⁷

(Everywhere he asked about work the people would just look at him strangely and shake their heads... work is scares... And slyly Antonie walked away... half happy that there was no hard labour because the Lord knows he is not lazy to work, but he feels ill and exhausted, too ashamed and lethargic in and about himself to lift a finger is not strictly necessary.)

After finding a diamond, Bekka decides it is time for the family to move from the diggings, as she regards it an evil place.²⁵⁸ Once again, they return to the rural area as *bywoners* on a farm on the outskirts of the town. Here, the family tries to farm again and wash gravel in search of diamonds for the farm owner.²⁵⁹ They do not remain there long. Many whites had sympathy with the poor whites, while there were some that regarded them as a nuisance and problem:

*Arme sukkelaar*²⁶⁰...*Hoe op aarde die arm mense darem so van plek tot plek kan rondswerf: boer met 'n klompie vee, delwer, rondloper, werksoeker, handlanger...sonder om ooit iets bestendigs in die wêreld te wil nastreef! Dis darem hoog tyd dat die Regering iets aan die armblankevraagstuk begin doen veral nou dat die Carnegie kommissie aan die saak roer... die Regering moet regtig iets doen insake die armblankeplaag!*²⁶¹

(Poor man/pauper/struggler... How on earth can poor people wander from place to place like that: farming with a few livestock, digger, wanderer, job seeker, labourer... without ever wanting to pursue anything permanent in the world! It is high time that the government did something regarding the poor-white question especially now that the Carnegie Commission is investigating the issue... the government must truly do something about the poor-white plague!)

The Reys family lives on the road for a time doing odd jobs and then decide to return to the urban area.²⁶² Here, Antonie is involved in an accident and passes away from his injuries, pathetically alone with none of his family around him.²⁶³ Bekka thinks back on their life and realises:

²⁵⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 191.

²⁵⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 156.

²⁵⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 159.

²⁶⁰ *Sukkelaar* is a difficult word to translate. There is no direct translation. It means someone who always struggles. Not necessarily financially, but someone who always seems to be dealing with one or other obstacle.

²⁶¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 160-161.

²⁶² A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 177-180, 185 & 188.

²⁶³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 223-224 & 232

...dat haar Antonie maar net 'n klein sukkelaartjie was...²⁶⁴

(... that her Antonie was always just a little struggler)

According to the Carnegie Commission, Antonie would first fall into the Accidental Group due to circumstances out of his control. He would also fall into the Rural and Industrial Group and lastly, he would fall into the Pathological Group.²⁶⁵ His family remained in the Accidental Group. His son, Herklaas, is a hard worker and throughout the novels, he helps the family by working with his father. He acts as a shepherd for the flock, works on the diggings and on the farm land, he helps his mother with the slaughtering and selling of the sheep and he also helps by performing farm labour.²⁶⁶ After Antonie's death, Herklaas gets a job at a shop and Bekka continues to sell meat and sheep.²⁶⁷ They move into the Recovering Group, as they are not lazy but work hard to drag themselves out of poverty.²⁶⁸

Defining the Poor Whites in the Novels: The American South

Similarly in the American South there were a number of different types of poor whites who could also be classified into the Carnegie Commissions categories.

W. Faulkner examines the life of the Buddrens poor white family in *As I Lay Dying*. Anse Buddren is the father. His appearance is described as:

Pa's feet are badly splayed, his toes cramped and bent and warped, with no toenail at all on his little toes, from working so hard in the wet in homemade shoes when he was a boy. Beside his chair his brogans sit. They look as though they had been hacked with a blunt axe out of pig-iron.²⁶⁹

The shirt across pa's hump is faded lighter than the rest of it. There is no sweat stain on his shirt. I have never seen a sweat stain on his shirt. He was sick once from working in the sun when he was twenty-two years old, and he tells people that if he ever sweats, he will die. I suppose he believes it... Since he lost his teeth his mouth collapses in slow repetition when he dips. The stubble gives his lower face that appearance that old dogs have.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 229.

²⁶⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

²⁶⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 29, 40, 107-108, 112, 114, 162-163, 167, 182, 196-197 & 211.

²⁶⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 234.

²⁶⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

²⁶⁹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*. London: Vintage, 1930, p. Darl 16.

²⁷⁰ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Darl 20.

His overalls are faded; on one knee a serge patch cut out of a pair of Sunday pants, wore iron-slick.²⁷¹

His neighbours and people he knows all refer to him as lazy and believe it was only his wife who kept him at work.

“She kept him at work for thirty-odd years...”²⁷²

“It’s like a man that’s let everything slide all his life to get set on something that will make the most trouble for everybody he knows.”²⁷³

I notice how it takes a lazy man, a man that hates moving, to get set on moving once he does get started off, the same as he was set on staying still, like it aint the moving he hates so much as the starting and the stopping. And like he would be kind of proud of whatever come up to make the moving or the setting still look hard...²⁷⁴

Sometimes I think that if a working man could see work as far ahead as a lazy man can see laziness.²⁷⁵

“Of course he’d have to borrow a spade to bury his wife with. Unless he could borrow a hole in the ground. Too bad you all didn’t put him in it too...”²⁷⁶

Regardless of this, his neighbours and people who know him always try to help and assist him.

... I tell him again I will help him out if he gets into a tight, with her sick and all. Like most folks around here, I done help him so much already I cant quit now.²⁷⁷

“Damn the money... Did you ever hear of me worrying a fellow before he was ready to pay?”²⁷⁸

The Doctor, Peabody, treats Anse’s son, Cash, for a broken leg after he travelled with it for six days on a wagon and after Anse put cement on it to fix it. His irritation and opinion of Anse is expressed in the following statement:

“God Almighty, why didn’t Anse carry you to the nearest sawmill and stick your leg in the saw? That would have cured it. Then you all could have stuck his head into the saw and cured a whole family...”²⁷⁹

²⁷¹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Tull 28.

²⁷² W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Tull 31.

²⁷³ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Tull 70.

²⁷⁴ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Samson 85.

²⁷⁵ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Cash 175.

²⁷⁶ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Peabody 178.

²⁷⁷ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Tull 30-31.

²⁷⁸ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Peabody 38.

²⁷⁹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Peabody 177.

Anse blames everything and everyone for his circumstances, including the road, the rain, his children and even his dead wife.

Durn that road. And it fixing to rain, too. I can stand here and same as see it with second-sight, a-shutting down behind them like a wall, shutting down betwixt them and my given promise. I do the best I can, much as I can get my mind on anything, but durn them boys.²⁸⁰

...falling off of churches and lifting no hand in six months and me and Addie slaving... It aint that I am afraid of work; I always is fed me and mine and kept a roof above us: it's that they would short-hand me just because he tends to his own business, just because he's got his eyes full of the land all the time.²⁸¹

It's a hard country on man... Nowhere in this sinful world can a honest, hardworking man profit. It takes them that runs the stores in the towns, doing no sweating, living off of them that sweats. It aint the hardworking man, the farmer. Sometimes I wonder why we keep at it.²⁸²

"It's because she wouldn't have us beholden."²⁸³

Anse has little respect for his children's possessions. He takes what he wants to suit his needs. This includes eight dollars he took out of Cash's clothes and ten dollars from his daughter, Dewey Dell, who was given the money to end her pregnancy. He also takes and trades Jewel, his son's, horse.

"So that's what you were doing in Cash's clothes last night."²⁸⁴

"You mean, you tried to swap my horse?"²⁸⁵

"It's not my money, it doesn't belong to me... If you take it you are a thief... It's not mine, I tell you. If it was, God knows you could have it."... "It's not like I wouldn't pay it back. But she calls her own father a thief... It's just a loan..."... He took the money and went out.²⁸⁶

Throughout the novel, the only real thing that Anse is concerned with was his lack of teeth or getting new ones made. One of his first thoughts after his wife's death is that he can now get himself new teeth.

²⁸⁰ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 32.

²⁸¹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 33

²⁸² W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 83.

²⁸³ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Vardaman 144.

²⁸⁴ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Amstrid 141.

²⁸⁵ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Amstrid 142.

²⁸⁶ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Dewey Dell 191-192. This is behaviour very similar to Ampie's father selling his donkey.

And now I got to pay for it, me without a tooth in my head, hoping to get ahead enough so I could get my mouth fixed where I could eat God's own victuals...²⁸⁷

"God's will be done... Now I can get them teeth."²⁸⁸

But now I can get them teeth. That will be a comfort. It will.²⁸⁹

"God knows it. He knows in fifteen years I aint et the victuals He aimed for man to eat to keep his strength up, and me saving a nickel here and a nickel there so my family wouldn't suffer it, to buy them teeth so I could eat God's appointed food."²⁹⁰

Anse does get himself new teeth at the end of the novel, using Dewey Dell's ten dollars. He also gets a new wife.²⁹¹

Anse's children are also described in the novel. For the purpose of this chapter only two of them will be discussed as Vardaman is still a boy, and Cash and Jewel²⁹² are hard and willing workers. Darl is Anse's second son. He is described as being different. He fought in the First World War and this could be the cause.²⁹³

...folks say is queer, lazy, pottering about the place no better than Anse...²⁹⁴

Darl sets Gillespie's barn on fire and is taken to Jackson for his crime. When taken by the constables, he appears quite mad laughing and answering "yes" to every question.

They put him on the train, laughing, down the long car laughing, the heads turning like the heads of owls when he passed. "What are you laughing at?" I said. "Yes yes yes yes yes."²⁹⁵

Dewey Dell is Anse's only daughter. She is pregnant in the novel, but has not told her father. Her boyfriend gave her money to get rid of the baby. She is portrayed as pretty, with dark eyes. Most of the time barefoot, hard-working and caring.²⁹⁶ She goes to the drugstore in Jefferson to get something to end her pregnancy. The pharmacist's assistant takes advantage of her. He gives her turpentine to drink and capsules filled with talcum powder. He also states he needs to perform an operation – one she has already had – "a hair of the dog that bit

²⁸⁷ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 33.

²⁸⁸ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Darl 43.

²⁸⁹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 83.

²⁹⁰ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Amstrid 142.

²⁹¹ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Cash 195.

²⁹² Jewel is not Anse's son, but the reader is not made aware if Anse knows this. Jewel is a difficult character and does not get along with most people.

²⁹³ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Darl 189.

²⁹⁴ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Cora 25.

²⁹⁵ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Darl 189.

²⁹⁶ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Moseley 147-148.

you..."²⁹⁷ Thus, the reader knows he takes advantage of her sexually, furthermore, he does not take the money from her.²⁹⁸

This poor white family represents a large number of poor whites in the rural areas. According to the Carnegie Commission categorisation, this family falls into the Rural Group. Anse is lazy and self-centred and also falls into the Natural Group. Darl also falls into the Natural Group, but also into the Pathological Group. Dewey Dell also represents the typical portrait of a young, unmarried, poor white girl who has gotten herself pregnant and is uneducated and ignorant of the ways of life that she gets taken advantage of.²⁹⁹

A number of different types of poor whites appear in *Absalom Absalom* by Faulkner. The most obvious poor white is Wash Jones.³⁰⁰ He is described as

...a gaunt gangling man malaria-ridden with pale eyes and a face that might have been any age between twenty-five and sixty...³⁰¹

He lived on Thomas Sutpen's farm and did odd jobs. Sutpen allowed him to squat:

... in a crazy shack on a slough in the river bottom on the Sutpen place, which Sutpen had built for a fishing lodge in his bachelor days and which had since fallen in dilapidation from disuse, so that now it looked like an aged or sick wild beast crawled terrifically there to drink in the act of dying.³⁰²

However, he realises that Sutpen's enslaved people are better housed and dressed than him and that he is treated similarly where he is not permitted at first to enter the house and has to knock at the back door.³⁰³ He is never treated equally by Sutpen who either lies in the hammock or sits on a chair while Jones is left to squat down or find a box to sit on. Similarly, Sutpen sleeps on the bed and Jones on the floor.³⁰⁴ Jones does not go to fight in the Civil War (1861-1865) and is ridiculed for being a "coward". He claims it is because he is looking after Sutpen's farm as well as his daughter and granddaughter. Most people believed he was too shiftless and lazy. He is also ridiculed by the enslaved who laugh at him and call him "white

²⁹⁷ The operation he refers to as "a hair of the dog that bit you" is having sex with her.

²⁹⁸ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. MacGowan 180-185 & Vardaman 186-187.

²⁹⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

³⁰⁰ Wash Jones appears in *Absalom Absalom* but his story is also told from his own perspective in Faulkner's short stories entitled *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. Both these novels will be used to represent Wash Jones and Thomas Sutpen.

³⁰¹ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*. New York: Random House, 1936, p. 65.

³⁰² W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*. New York: Vintage International, 1995, p. 236.

³⁰³ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, pp. 236-237.

³⁰⁴ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 237.

trash” behind his back. They also laugh at him when he calls them “niggers”.³⁰⁵ Jones’s laziness is apparent with regards to the scythe he borrows from Sutpen three months ago to cut the weeds around his home and which is left in the weeds to rust.³⁰⁶ However, Jones does the heavy garden work and chops wood and provides food for Sutpen’s daughter during the Civil War.³⁰⁷ After the War he works for Sutpen as a clerk in his shop.³⁰⁸

Jones has great respect for Sutpen and in a sense idolises him to the extent that he allows Sutpen to take advantage of his fifteen-year-old granddaughter who Sutpen gets pregnant.³⁰⁹ Sutpen has no respect for Jones or his granddaughter, whom he states: “Well, Milly, too bad you’re not a mare like Penelope. Then I could give you a decent stall in the stable.”³¹⁰ Jones loves his granddaughter very much, which the reader is made aware of by the way he speaks to her and treats her. He is also very excited about being a great-grandfather.³¹¹ He is deeply hurt and angered by this comment, which leads to him killing Sutpen and later, before the authorities try to arrest him, he kills his granddaughter and her child³¹² and then forces the authorities to shoot him.³¹³ Jones is depicted as a typical Southern poor white. According to the Carnegie Commission Categorisation, he would fall into the Natural, Rural and Pathological Group.³¹⁴

Sutpen also has poor white beginnings. His family lived on a mountain in a small cabin. After his mother died, the family moved about and finally settled on a plantation. It was the first time he saw people who had money and enslaved people. His father was an alcoholic and drank heavily. He soon realises that there are different types of whites when he is told to go to the backdoor instead of using the front and also sees that the enslaved are dressed better than his own family.³¹⁵

...where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody...³¹⁶

³⁰⁵ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

³⁰⁶ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 235.

³⁰⁷ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 93 & 117.

³⁰⁸ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 237.

³⁰⁹ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 238.

³¹⁰ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 143.

³¹¹ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 40.

³¹² He knew there would be no one to look after them and he did not want them to suffer.

³¹³ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 242.

³¹⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

³¹⁵ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 171-179.

³¹⁶ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 171

He drove the oxen, since almost as soon as they got the cart his father began the practice of accomplishing that part of the translation devoted to motion flat on his back in the cart... snoring with alcohol.³¹⁷

...learning that there was a difference between white men and white men, not to be measured by lifting anvils or gouging eyes or how much whiskey you could drink then get up and walk out of the room. He had begun to discern... how; whether you were lucky or not lucky...³¹⁸

He runs away and goes to the West Indies where he makes money³¹⁹ and returns to buy land and start his own plantation.³²⁰ Although he is depicted as being a horrible and sly character, he is still a poor white who falls into the Natural and Rural Group first and pulls himself out of his poverty to improve his situation, although at times this would also cause him to fall into the Pathological Group.³²¹

Two characters in Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* who were also poor whites were the two women, Rosa Coldfield and Judith Sutpen. Both become poor when the men in their lives leave and die. They fall into the Accidental Group because their poverty is caused by circumstances out of their control. This is a time when women had very few rights, means to a livelihood and options.³²² Judith's downfall begins during the Civil War when her father Thomas Sutpen leaves to fight. Later, when he dies, she is left with nothing except the house and tries to scrape together a living with her half-sister Clytie, who is coloured.³²³ "Yet Judith still had those abandoned acres to draw from, let alone Clytie to help her..."³²⁴ Rosa also became destitute after her father's death, she also remains in the small house, but unlike Judith, she does not try to provide for herself. Neighbours leave baskets or plates of food for her, but she will not even return the dishes washed.³²⁵ She also steals food through fences in order to try and survive.

Negro servants going to work in white kitchens—would see her before sun-up gathering greens along garden fences, pulling them through the fence since she had no garden of her own, no seed to plant one with, no tools to work it with herself, even if she had known

³¹⁷ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 173.

³¹⁸ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 174

³¹⁹ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 184.

³²⁰ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 5.

³²¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

³²² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

³²³ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 45 & 82.

³²⁴ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 64.

³²⁵ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 163

completely how... would not have worked it if she had known; reaching through the garden fence and gathering vegetables... and would not even use a stick to reach through the fence and draw the vegetables to where she could grasp them, the reach of her unaided arm being the limit of brigandage which she never passed...³²⁶

In *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* by Faulkner, the reader is introduced to the Snopeses, a poor white family. Flem Snopes is one of the main characters, but the reader never gets to see things from his point of view and needs to rely on other characters to get an all-round, holistic impression. The first Snopes the reader is introduced to is Ab Snopes, Flem Snopes' father who comes with his family to Jefferson in order to rent land to farm. He is described as:

...his face—a pair of eyes of a cold opaque gray between shaggy graying irascible brows and a short scrabble of iron-gray beard as tight and knotted as a sheep's coat.³²⁷

Ab Snopes walked with a limp after being shot in his foot during the Civil War. He used to be a horse trader for both sides.³²⁸ After his injury, he started farming as a tenant farmer or share cropper. He claims he had worked for between fifteen and twenty different land lords. Ab states that the house he is renting is not fit for hogs, but that they will fix it up.³²⁹ He comes into the area with all his life's possessions on a cart. He rents land from the Varner's. However, Will Varner's son Jody soon discovers that he was accused of burning the barn on the previous farm they were on.³³⁰ Although he is guilty, he gets away lightly for the crime.³³¹ Flem Snopes is depicted as big and his appearance is described as:

He had a broad flat face. His eyes were the color of stagnant water. He was soft in appearance like Varner himself, though a head shorter, in a soiled white shirt and cheap gray trousers.³³²

Jody Varner wants to ensure peace is kept because he does not want his family's barn burnt down, so he makes a number of concessions to the Snopes, such as extra land and a mule, to help with the ploughing. Flem gets a job in the Varner shop as a clerk and it is from here that he builds his empire and pulls himself and some of his family members out of poverty. Through a number of different jobs and positions all from the Varner enterprises, Flem builds

³²⁶ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 131.

³²⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*. New York: Random House, 1994, p. 27.

³²⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 44-46.

³²⁹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 38.

³³⁰ In Faulkner's collected short stories, *Barn Burning*, the reader is made privy to the back story and finds out that the Snopes did indeed burn down Harris' barn.

³³¹ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p.

³³² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 39.

up a reputation and money.³³³ Some of his deals are less honest and although he is accused, he is never tried for them. With each advance he makes out of his poverty, something tangible changes. Either it is new shirts, then neckties, then a coat and later a hat.³³⁴ Flem marries Will Varner's pregnant daughter, but not out of love but as a business deal with Varner, who needs to find her a husband.³³⁵ Eventually, Flem moves his family to the town and continues to work his way up the ranks until he is eventually the president of the local bank.³³⁶ As Flem moves upwards out of poverty, he incorporates a number of family members into his schemes and places them in positions he formerly held or in places he needed them to occupy. Some of them are able to also rise out of poverty, while others are left behind. Most of them are Flem's cousins. I.O. Snopes is described as:

...a frail man none of whose garments seemed to belong to him, with a talkative weasel's face... that weasel-like quality of existing independent of his clothing so that although you could grasp and hold that you could not restrain the body itself from doing what it was doing until the damage had been done—a furious already dissipating concentration of energy vanishing the instant after the intention took shape.³³⁷

I.O. Snopes always follows Flem's lead. He also lies in court to defend Flem when he is accused of theft.³³⁸ He becomes the school teacher, but runs away when his first wife comes looking for him and finds out he had married again.³³⁹ He does reappear after Flem moves to the town and works in Flem's restaurant for a while.³⁴⁰

Eck Snopes is one of the better Snopes, as is his son named Wall Street Panic. Eck comes to work in the smithy, he later becomes the new apprentice.³⁴¹ He is a hard worker, good father and provider for his family.³⁴² He is honest and does not want to lie for Flem.³⁴³ Later, he goes to work in Varner's saw mill, where he breaks his neck, saving a black child and needs to wear a special brace.³⁴⁴ He goes to work in Flem's restaurant for a time, but is not able to manage with his injury.³⁴⁵ He finally becomes a night-watchman at Renfrow's Oil Tank. However, after

³³³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 40, 72, 83 & 99.

³³⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 66, 71 & 146.

³³⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 146-148.

³³⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 548.

³³⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 76.

³³⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 308.

³³⁹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 81-82 & 252.

³⁴⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 372.

³⁴¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 76-79.

³⁴² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 78 & 291.

³⁴³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 307.

³⁴⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 368.

³⁴⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 368.

helping to search for a missing child, he accidentally gets himself blown up. The company feels bad for his family and gives his widow a thousand dollars.³⁴⁶

His son Wall starts going to school when they move to the town and starts to take his brother too. He works hard at school and gets himself a job, later his brother take his newspaper delivery job as he begins to work in a shop. Soon he employs more boys to do more newspaper delivery routes. After he finishes at school, he becomes partner in the shop and after his father's death uses the money when the shop owner retired to buy the shop. He works hard in the shop and still encourages his brother to continue with school.³⁴⁷ He makes a success of the shop and soon opens a wholesaler.³⁴⁸

Mink Snopes was one of Flem's cousins who moved to the area, but was not assisted. His wife remarks on this:

"He'd let you rot and die right here and glad of it, and you know it! Your own kin you're so proud of because he works in a store and wears a necktie all day! Ask him to give you a sack of flour even and see what you get. Ask him! Maybe he'll give you one of his old neckties someday so you can dress like a Snopes too!"

Mink is described as:

...slightly less than medium height also but thin, with a single line of heavy eyebrow. But it's the same eyes...³⁴⁹

...leaning his cold-raw, cold-reddened wrists which even the frayed slicker sleeves failed to cover...³⁵⁰

His house is described as:

A broken-backed cabin of the same two rooms... It was built on a hill; below it was a foul muck-trodden lot and a barn leaning away downhill as though a human breath might flatten it.³⁵¹

... the paintless two-room cabin with an open hallway between and a lean-to kitchen, which was not his, on which he paid rent but not taxes, paying almost as much in rent in one year as the house had cost to build; not old, yet the roof of which already leaked

³⁴⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 370.

³⁴⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 444-445.

³⁴⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 461.

³⁴⁹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 85.

³⁵⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 650.

³⁵¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 84-85.

and the weather-stripping had already begun to rot away from the wall planks and which was just like the one he had been born in which had not belonged to his father either...³⁵²

There is barely any food in Mink's empty house.³⁵³ A pot of cold peas, the dregs of a stale pot of coffee and then he was down to eating hands-full of raw corn-meal and scraping the sides of the barrel and spitting out the splinters, then he drank warm water with sugar.³⁵⁴

Mink and Houston, another farmer in the area, have some trouble when Mink's cow gets into Houston's pasture.³⁵⁵ After Houston houses and feeds the cow throughout the winter spring and summer, Mink comes to collect him before the autumn. Houston takes Mink to court and it is decided that Mink needs to pay.³⁵⁶ Mink goes to work his payment off as he does not want to sell the cow.³⁵⁷ Mink is angry and feels done in, but does the work for Houston and still ploughs his own land.³⁵⁸ However, when Houston tells him he owes another day Mink ends up shooting him.³⁵⁹

The Snopes cousins are explained in the following statement:

Mink Snopes was mean. He was the only out-and-out mean Snopes we ever experienced. There was mad short-tempered barn-burners like old Ab, and there was the mild innocent ones like Eck that not only wasn't no Snopes, no matter what his maw said, he never had no more business being born into a Snopes nest than a sparrow would have in a hawk's nest; and there was the one pure out-and-out fool like I.O. But we never had run into one before that was just mean without no profit consideration or hope at all.³⁶⁰

The last Snopes that will be discussed is Isaac Snopes. He is mentally retarded. Flem claims to be his guardian but does very little for him.³⁶¹ Isaac lives at the hotel where the lady who owns it, Ms Littlejohn, lets him sleep in her barn; she feeds him and talks to him; and sometimes he does small odd jobs for her.³⁶² She is also the one to teach him to go up and down stairs, as he did not know how.³⁶³ He is described as:

³⁵² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 214.

³⁵³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 217.

³⁵⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 217-220.

³⁵⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 100.

³⁵⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 161 & 649.

³⁵⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 651-660.

³⁵⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 655.

³⁵⁹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 213.

³⁶⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 405-406.

³⁶¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 96.

³⁶² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 92.

³⁶³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 169.

the figure of a grown man but barefoot and in scant faded overalls which would have been about right for a fourteen-year-old boy, passing in the road below the gallery, dragging behind him on a string a wooden block with two snuff tins attached to its upper side, watching over his shoulder with complete absorption the dust it raised... the face too—the pale eyes which seemed to have no vision in them at all, the open drooling mouth encircled by a light fuzz of golden virgin beard.³⁶⁴

At last he took the idiot by the shoulder, shaking him until the sound began to fall, bubbling and gurgling away... The hulking shape—the backlooking face with its hanging mouth and pointed faun's ears, the bursting overalls drawn across the incredible female thighs—blotted the door again and was gone.³⁶⁵

Isaac Snopes falls in love with Houston's cow. He goes to visit her, but Houston chases him away.³⁶⁶ However, when he sees Houston's barn on fire from where he is working in Ms Littlejohn's establishment, he runs to save the cow.³⁶⁷ Houston tries to give him money for saving the cow, but Isaac drops it and does not bother to pick it up, as it has no value to him.³⁶⁸ He is so in love with the cow that he steals her, but Houston gets her back, but then decides it is too much trouble and gives the cow to Isaac.³⁶⁹ The reader later becomes aware that Isaac is performing sexual acts with the cow.³⁷⁰ Some of the cousins deal with the situation and the cow is taken away, however, Eck feels bad that Isaac is sad and buys him a toy cow.³⁷¹

According to the Carnegie Commission Categorisation, the Snopeses fall into a variety of Groups. They all fall into the Natural Group having been born into poverty and the Rural Group coming from and working in the rural area. Ab, Flem and Mink also fall into the Pathological Group due to the various crimes they commit. Flem, I.O., Eck and Wall fall into the Industrial Group and in some sense also fall into the Recovering Group. Isaac remains in the Natural Group due to his disability.³⁷² The *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion* presents the reader with a range of different types of poor whites some who have a number of characteristics that were typical of poor whites. Eck Snopes and his son Wall are the only real redeemable characters.

³⁶⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 92.

³⁶⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 96.

³⁶⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 166-167.

³⁶⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 168-174.

³⁶⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 175-176.

³⁶⁹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 177-191.

³⁷⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 195-196.

³⁷¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 196-198 & 255.

³⁷² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

The novel *Tobacco Road* by Caldwell represents what many Americans considered poor whites to be like. Although Caldwell never intended it, his characters were considered humorous and laughed at. Although in some cases this was the sad reality of many poor whites, they did not get the sympathy they needed or deserved, but were ridiculed.³⁷³ Jeeter Lester is the main character of the novel and is one of the worst types of poor whites. He openly admits he has stolen food:

It did not occur to him that Lov had bought them with money; Jeeter had long before come to the conclusion that the only possible way a quantity of food could be obtained was by theft.³⁷⁴

...but the slowly formed realization that he had stolen his son-in-law's food sickened his body and soul. He had stolen food before, food and everything else he had had opportunity to take, but each time, as now, he regretted what he had done until he could convince himself that he had not done anything so terribly wrong.³⁷⁵

He further admits that when he has the opportunity to buy food, he would rather buy snuff:

Ada says she's just bound to have a little snuff now and then, because it sort of staves off hunger, and it does. Every time I sell a load of wood I get about a dozen jars of snuff, even if I ain't got the money to buy meal and meat, because snuff is something a man is just bound to have. When I has a sharp pain in the belly, I can take a little snuff and not feel hungry the rest of the day. Snuff is a powerful help to keep a man living.³⁷⁶

There was very little to eat in the Lester house. That day before he stole the turnips from Lov, they had salty soup that Ada, his wife, had made boiling several fatback rinds in water and corn bread. They had been living off this type of meal for several days and after the fatback rinds were gone there would be nothing left to eat.³⁷⁷ Jeeter is also very lazy. He always has a number of well-developed plans and intentions, but never gets around to do any of them, procrastinating or finding excuses. These included ploughing the land and getting his daughter's harelip fixed.³⁷⁸ Both his son and wife reproach him for being lazy, although they do not do anything to improve their situation either:

³⁷³ A. Silver, "Laughing Over Lost Causes: Erskine Caldwell's Quarrel with Southern Humour", *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 50(1), 1996/7, pp. 51-68.; S.J. Cook, "The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s", PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 22 & 44.; S.J. Cook, *From Tobacco Road to Route 66: The Southern Poor White in Fiction*, pp. 81-82. R.E. Spiller (ed.), *A Time of Harvest: American Literature 1910-1960*, p. 87.

³⁷⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*. New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1932, Chapter 1.

³⁷⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 5.

³⁷⁶ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 3.

³⁷⁷ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

³⁷⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

“Why don't you go somewheres and steal a sack of turnips?” ... “You ain't fit for nothing else no more. You sit around here and cuss all the time about not having nothing to eat, and no turnips--why don't you go somewheres and steal yourself something? God ain't going to bring you nothing. He ain't going to drop no turnips down out of the sky. He ain't got no time to be wasted on fooling with you, if you wasn't so durn lazy you'd do something instead of cuss about it all the time.”³⁷⁹

“... He tells more lies than any man I ever heard of. I reckon he'd rather lie about it than haul wood to Augusta. He's that lazy he won't get up off the ground sometimes when he stumbles. I've seen him stay there near about an hour before he got up. He's the laziest son of a bitch I ever seen.”³⁸⁰

“You're just lazy, that's what's wrong with you. If you wasn't lazy you could haul a load every day, and I'd have me some snuff when I wanted it most.”³⁸¹

The only possession he has is an old automobile that was turned down by the junk yard when he tried to sell it. The car does not drive as it is badly damaged, it has not been kept in any good condition and has parts missing.³⁸² He also has no money, which he makes clear in the following statement: “... You know I ain't got a penny to my name and no knowing where to get money...”³⁸³ Regardless of his situation, he makes no effort to improve his conditions. He had an attitude of there is always tomorrow... Furthermore, he feels that his situation and circumstances are not his fault or doing. There is always someone or something else to blame.

“My children all blame me because God sees fit to make me poverty-ridden... They and Ma is all the time cussing me because we ain't got nothing to eat. I ain't had nothing to do with it. It ain't my fault that Captain John shut down on giving us rations and snuff. It's his fault...the first thing I knowed, he came down here one morning and says he can't be letting me be getting no more rations and snuff at the store... I can't make no money, because there ain't nobody wanting work done. Nobody is taking on share-croppers, neither. Ain't no kind of work I can find to do for hire. I can't even raise me a crop of my own, because I ain't got no mule in the first place, and besides that, won't nobody let me have seed-cotton and guano on credit. Now I can't get no snuff and rations, excepting once in a while when I haul a load of wood up to Augusta...”³⁸⁴

³⁷⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

³⁸⁰ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

³⁸¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 6.

³⁸² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

³⁸³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

³⁸⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

He will also not move off of the land to seek better prospects and remained in the barren countryside, claiming it was his love of the land:³⁸⁵

There was nothing Jeeter could find to do in the sand hills that would pay him even a few cents a day for his labor. There were no farmers within twenty miles who hired help, because practically all of them were in Jeeter's condition, some of them in an even worse one; nor were there any lumber mills or turpentine stills anywhere near the tobacco road that would employ him.³⁸⁶

He believes his conditions are a man-made calamity and not of his own making. Captain John had sold up and moved to Augusta, but allowed Jeeter and his family to remain on the land and scrape whatever living they could off it. Previously Jeeter had overbought at the stores and when Captain John moved away, the credit had also stopped. The land had originally belonged to Jeeter, but debt caused him to lose it too. He had worked for Captain John as a share-tenant, but the antiquated system caused him to sell up and abandon farming. Therefore, Jeeter is convinced that his means of livelihood were taken away from him.³⁸⁷

The rest of his family are no better. As mentioned, his wife and son complain about their situation, but do not do anything to improve it. Ada is described as thin; with a snuff stick in her mouth; a racist; and she was always cold and had been ill with pellagra for several years. She is fair haired with blue eyes and was not very talkative. Jeeter remarks on Ada not being talkative when they were first married, what he was unable to breakdown in forty years, he states hunger had. It loosened her tongue and she had been complaining ever since.³⁸⁸ When her daughter, Ellie May, distracted Lov in order for Jeeter to steal the turnips, Ada assists by hitting Lov over the head with a branch.³⁸⁹

Jeeter and Ada's son Dude is sixteen years old with wiry black hair and is described as not washing himself very often.³⁹⁰ He has no respect for his parents: "Aw, go to hell, you old dried-up clod... Nobody asked you nothing."³⁹¹ Dude complains about his father's laziness, but he would not even collect or cut wood for the kitchen stove. Dude has no regard or care for damaging property, is not religious at all and is also a racist.³⁹² Dude ends up marrying a woman twenty-five years older than him, Bessie, because she was buying a new car and

³⁸⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³⁸⁶ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

³⁸⁷ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³⁸⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapters 1, 2, 3 & 4.

³⁸⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

³⁹⁰ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

³⁹¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

³⁹² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapters 2, 4, 5 & 6.

promised he could ride it. Bessie was born without a nose bone and her nostrils are described as looking into the barrel of a double shotgun. However, Dude thinks to himself that if she was going to buy a new car³⁹³ he did not care how she looked.³⁹⁴

Elli May is the eighteen-year-old daughter of Ada and Jeeter. She was born with a harelip. She does not speak in the novel. She is also no better than the other Lesters. She seduces her brother-in-law, Lov, in the open, in front of the people passing by and her family and has sex with him in the open for all to see in order to distract him long enough so her father can steal Lov's turnips:

“Ellie May's horsing, ain't she, Pa...”... “I reckon I done the wrong thing by marrying Pearl to Lov...”... “Elile May's acting like your old hound used to do when he got the itch... Look at her scrape her bottom on the sand. That old hound used to make the same kind of sound... It sounds just like a little pig squealing...” “Ellie May's acting like she was Lov's woman... Lov ain't thinking about no turnips... Lov's wanting to hang up with Ellie May. He don't care nothing about the way her face looks now...Lov's going to big her...”³⁹⁵

Ellie May and Lov were in full view...Ellie May and Lov had rolled over... when they finally stopped, Lov was on top...Ellie May lay where she was... on her back... and her pink gingham dress was twisted under her shoulders...Dude went to the pine stump and sat down to watch the red wood-ants crawl over the stomach and breasts of his sister. The muscles of her legs and back twitched nervously for a while...³⁹⁶

Promiscuity is one of the characteristics that is assigned to the American poor whites. Her father is no better and states: “She's got a queer notion that I might take to fooling with the womenfolks. Well, I ain't saying I wouldn't if I had half a chance, neither.”³⁹⁷

The only character the reader feels any sympathy for is the grandmother, Jeeter's mother. She is a small, frail, starved woman who also has pellagra.³⁹⁸ No one takes any notice of her throughout the novel.³⁹⁹ She is shoved out when she tries to come into the kitchen to eat.⁴⁰⁰ She is described as looking like a loosely tied bag of soiled black rags.⁴⁰¹ She is the only one

³⁹³ They do get married and purchase a car, but because the Lesters are unable to look after anything the first signs of damage and deterioration begin on the day the car is purchased.

³⁹⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 9.

³⁹⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 3.

³⁹⁶ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

³⁹⁷ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 6.

³⁹⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

³⁹⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapters 2 & 3.

⁴⁰⁰ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, 1.

⁴⁰¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, 3.

who collects wood for the cook-stove fire in hopes for food. Once she found the snuff jar and Jeeter hit her for taking some and promised to kill her if she did it again.⁴⁰² She is depicted as the hungriest person in the Lester house, she constantly clutches her sides and groans from hunger. After Jeeter returns with what was left of the bag of turnips he:

...tossed three of the smallest ones on the porch in the direction of the door. The grandmother fell on her knees and clutched them hungrily against her stomach, while she munched the vegetable with her toothless gums.⁴⁰³

Although she had pellagra and was constantly starving, she did not die, as she found her own means of sustenance by boiling leaves and roots and eating wild grass and flowers.

Jeeter was angry with her because she persisted in living, and he would not let her have any food when he could keep her from eating.⁴⁰⁴

The grandmother does, however, eventually pass away as a result of Dude accidentally running her over with his car. She is left in the yard to pass away from her injuries as no one checks or cares that she was still alive. It is Lov who finally buries her.⁴⁰⁵

The Lester family is what is personified when the term poor white is invoked. According to the Carnegie Commission categorisation, this poor white family falls into the Natural, Rural and Pathological Group. They are the worst type of poor whites.⁴⁰⁶ The blacks in the novel laugh and make fun of them:

“... All the niggers make fun of me because of the way she treats me.”⁴⁰⁷

They stopped laughing and talking, and slowed down until they were almost standing still.⁴⁰⁸

The negroes were laughing so hard they could not stand up straight. They were not laughing at Lov, it was the action of the Lesters that appeared so funny to them.⁴⁰⁹

In another novel by Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, the reader is introduced to the Walden family. These are a different type of poor white than the Lesters. Ty Ty Walden is one of the main

⁴⁰² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

⁴⁰³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 5.

⁴⁰⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

⁴⁰⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapters 17 & 18.

⁴⁰⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

⁴⁰⁷ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 1.

⁴⁰⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 3.

⁴⁰⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

characters. He owns his own land, a house, mules and an automobile.⁴¹⁰ However, he is classified as a poor white by his character and actions. Although he has arable land to farm, he focuses his attention on digging up his land in search of gold and has been doing so for the last fifteen years.⁴¹¹ He employs two black sharecroppers to grow some cotton to sell in order for him to maintain his family and continue to dig for gold. However, through his obsession he may not have enough money:

The crop had been planted late that year, as they had been so busy digging that there had been no opportunity to plant it until June, and Ty Ty wished to hurry it along as much as possible, if it was within his power to make it grow and mature, in order to get some money by the first of September. He had already bought to the limit of his credit in the stores at Marion, and he had been unable to get a loan at the bank. If the cotton did not thrive, or if the boll weevils ruined it, he did not know what he was going to do the coming fall and winter. There were two mules to feed, in addition to the two colored families, and his own household.⁴¹²

Ty Ty has three sons, two lived on the farm and helped him dig for gold.⁴¹³ His oldest son moved to the town and married a wealthy woman. He also has a job as a cotton broker and does well for himself and wants very little to do with his family.⁴¹⁴ Ty Ty also has two daughters. Darling Jill is the youngest and has a reputation for being promiscuous. She also sleeps with her sister's husband.

"... she's been teasing and fooling with a lot of men."⁴¹⁵

"Take me, Will--I can't wait," she said. "You and me both," said he."⁴¹⁶

Will Thompson is Ty Ty's son-in-law and works in the cotton mill. Ty Ty believes Will is a hard worker, but states that Will does not like that Will does not feel at home there because he is a mill man and does not like it on the farm or in the rural area.⁴¹⁷ The cotton mill where Will works has closed because the workers rose up when their salaries were cut. The people in the mill town were trying to hold out. Many got pellagra and so the Red Cross and government were handing out packages of flour and yeast.⁴¹⁸ This closure caused Will a lot of stress.

⁴¹⁰ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*. New York: Viking Press, 1933, pp. 3 & 6.

⁴¹¹ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, pp. 3 & 7.

⁴¹² E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 54.

⁴¹³ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 3.

⁴¹⁴ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, pp. 40-41.

⁴¹⁵ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 10.

⁴¹⁶ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 31.

⁴¹⁷ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 15.

⁴¹⁸ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 29.

“Isn't he working?”... “No, of course not. The mill is still shut down. I don't know when it will start running again. Some people say it never will. I don't know... He's been drunk all this week... And he won't stay at home with me. He talks about turning the power on at the mill when he's drunk, and when he's sober, he won't say anything. The last time he came home he hit me.”⁴¹⁹

Pluto Swint is a family friend of the Waldens and hopes to marry Darling Jill.⁴²⁰ He is described as a very fat and lazy man.⁴²¹ He hopes to win the election sheriff so he can draw a salary with fees. He peddled goods, but was not a very good salesman and preferred sitting in the pool room talking politics. Pluto believes that if he became sheriff, he would have deputies to do the work for him. He owns a car and sixty acres of land that a black sharecropper works for him. However, it did not produce enough cotton to provide a living for himself.⁴²² Although not technically a poor white yet, due to his laziness and lack of willingness, he would soon fall into the poor white category. This was the Group the Carnegie Commission stated would become poor if their circumstance did not change.⁴²³ The Waldens to some extent also fell into this Group, as did Will Thompson. Although the mill shut down causing him to fall from the Industrial Group into the Accidental Group, Will could have either returned to work for less money or found another job. The Waldens, although not as poor as some poor whites, have similar characteristics. They also fall into the Rural Group, they are not lazy, but direct their efforts towards activities that have offered no rewards. They have the opportunity to work their land and reap the benefits, however, they choose to waste their time digging for gold and producing barely enough to sustain themselves.⁴²⁴

In J. Steinbeck's novel *The Grapes of Wrath* the reader is introduced to the Joad family, they are, however, not your typical poor white family. Although poor, they are just about able to sustain themselves on the piece of land they live on.⁴²⁵ Due to reasons and causes that will be discussed in chapter eight, they needed to seek a new place to move to and find work. They end up selling what they can and packing the rest of their belongings into an old truck and moving from Oklahoma to California where there is supposedly work picking fruit. However, their journey does not go as planned, causing them to fall further into poverty and destitution.

⁴¹⁹ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 25.

⁴²⁰ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 9.

⁴²¹ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, pp. 4 & 10.

⁴²² E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 46.

⁴²³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 158.

⁴²⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

⁴²⁵ A.H.P. Werlock, “Poor Whites: Joads and Snopeses”, *San José Studies*, 18(1), 1992, p. 64.

...maybe you can pick cotton in the fall. Maybe you can go on relief. Why don't you go on west to California? There's work there, and it never gets cold. Why, you can reach out anywhere and pick an orange. Why, there's always some kind of crop to work in. Why don't you go there?⁴²⁶

Tom is the first Joad the reader is introduced to and one of the main characters.⁴²⁷ At the start of the novel, the reader discovers that Tom was released from McAlester prison because he had killed someone in self-defence, later in the novel he kills another person – again in self-defence.⁴²⁸ The new clothes he is given when leaving prison do not last long. As soon as he can, he takes off the shoes and throughout the novel the cap he wears gets more and more deteriorated – symbolic of the conditions the family goes through. Tom later joins the rioters and protesters regarding the wage and conditions of employment among the labourers in California. He is regarded as a trouble-maker and inciter.⁴²⁹

Tom's uncle, John, is described as a good farmer who kept his land nice, but after the death of his wife, which he blames himself for, he becomes a drunk and abuses alcohol. Although he is still a willing and hard worker, he also wastes his money on alcohol.⁴³⁰ At one point when there is no money or food he finally hands over a five dollar bill he had been keeping to use to get drunk with. He asks for two dollars to use to buy alcohol with.

"You take this here an' gimme two dollars. I can get good an' drunk for two dollars. I don' want no sin of waste on me. I'll spend whatever I got. Always do."⁴³¹

... he would drink jake or whisky until he was a shaken paralytic with red wet eyes...⁴³²

"... he got couple pints of whisky an' he didn' say a thing. He pulled the cork an' tipped up the bottle... I never seen such drinkin'... He wasn't takin' pleasure in his drink."⁴³³

Tom's parents, Tom Joad senior is described as a powerful and strongly built man for his age and Tom's mother, heavy but not fat with strong freckled arms with a dignity and a clean calm beauty.⁴³⁴ Both are depicted as hard-working poor whites. Steinbeck portrays Tom's eldest brother Noah as:

⁴²⁶ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking Press, 1939, eBook, Chapter 5.

⁴²⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 2.

⁴²⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapters 2 & 26.

⁴²⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 28.

⁴³⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The grapes of wrath*, Chapter 8.

⁴³¹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 20.

⁴³² J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 10.

⁴³³ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 20.

⁴³⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 8.

... tall and strange, walking always with a wondering look on his face, calm and puzzled. He had never been angry in his life. He looked in wonder at angry people, wonder and uneasiness, as normal people look at the insane. Noah moved slowly, spoke seldom, and then so slowly that people who did not know him often thought him stupid. He was not stupid, but he was strange. He had little pride, no sexual urges. He worked and slept in a curious rhythm that nevertheless sufficed him. He was fond of his folks, but never showed it in any way. Although an observer could not have told why, Noah left the impression of being misshapen, his head or his body or his legs or his mind; but no misshapen member could be recalled.⁴³⁵

Noah leaves the family and before they reach their destination. He feels he is a burden to his family who are getting poorer and more desperate the closer they get to California. He decides to live along the river. Noah walking away is the last the reader sees of him.

The family is described as hard and willing workers. When they get to California the entire family, children and Tom's pregnant sister, work to earn money this included picking peaches and cotton the entire day.⁴³⁶

"... they been choppin' cotton, all of 'em, even the kids an' your grampa."⁴³⁷

"... I seen the han'bills fellas pass out, an' how much work they is, an' high wages an' all... That'd be nice work, Tom, pickin' peaches... An' it'd be nice under the trees, workin' in the shade... I wonder—that is, if we all get jobs an' all work..."⁴³⁸

"Them kids is gettin' to be good pickers."⁴³⁹

"Wonder where Tom got work?... Well, if he can, we can."⁴⁴⁰

Even the grandparents are willing to work:

"Got a feelin' it'll make a new fella outa me. Go right to work in the fruit." Ma nodded.

"He means it, too... Worked right up to three months ago, when he threwed his hip out the last time."

The Joads were a family willing to work to retain their dignity with a dream of settling on land of their own. However, due to a number of factors, they were unable to recover their former positions. According to the Carnegie Commission Categorisation, they fall into the Rural and

⁴³⁵ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 8.

⁴³⁶ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapters 26, 27 & 28.

⁴³⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 6.

⁴³⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 10.

⁴³⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 28.

⁴⁴⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

Accidental Group. Tom and his uncle also fall into the Pathological Group due to their respective vices. Noah also falls into the Natural Group due to his strangeness. The Joads do try to rise above their circumstances and are willing and hardworking people, however, by the end of the novel, the reader still does not know if they would be able to be classified as part of the Recovering Group.⁴⁴¹ These are not your typical American poor whites and are presented as good people who have fallen on hard times. These are people who have become poor due to circumstances out of their control and although they desperately try to rise above it, the system is against them.

There were people who chose to remain in Oklahoma, although they had been forcefully removed from the land. Muley Graves, a former neighbour of the Joads, was one such character. His family moved, but he remained and lived roughly in the area, trespassing on the land that was seized. Steinbeck described him and his conditions in the following statements:

He was a lean man, rather short. His movements were jerky and quick. He carried a gunny sack... His blue jeans were pale at knee and seat, and he wore an old black suit coat, stained and spotted, the sleeves torn loose from the shoulders in back, and ragged holes worn through at the elbows. His black hat was as stained as his coat, and the band, torn half free, flopped up and down as he walked. Muley's face was smooth and unwrinkled, but it wore the truculent look of a bad child's, the mouth held tight and small, the little eyes half scowling, half petulant.⁴⁴²

"For a while I let frogs an' squirrels an' prairie dogs sometimes. Had to do it. But now I got some wire nooses on the tracks in the dry stream brush. Get rabbits, an' sometimes a prairie chicken. Skunks get caught, an' coons, too."... Muley fidgeted in embarrassment. "I ain't got no choice in the matter."⁴⁴³

"... I don't sleep near no house. If you fellas wanta come along, I'll show you where to sleep..." ... "Is it a cave in the bank?"⁴⁴⁴

According to the Carnegie Commission Categories, Muley falls into the Rural and Accidental Group. The blow of losing his land caused him to become a poor white, living off the land

⁴⁴¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

⁴⁴² J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁴³ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 6.

⁴⁴⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 6.

around where he used to reside. He makes no attempt to recover or to improve his conditions or situation and thus falls into the Natural Group.⁴⁴⁵

A Reflection on Who the Poor White Was

There does not exist a clear-cut definition of the term “poor white” and over time, it has become a diverse, layered and complex definition. Experts in both South Africa and the USA, as well as those who were transnational, brought their own views, opinions and definitions to express what the term “poor white” meant – defining them as urban or rural, deserving or undeserving, adding a derogatory connotation or stereotyping them. Regardless, poor whites were regarded as a process, a disease, a moral condition and even an inherited trait. The term was a work in progress, never a fixed identity.⁴⁴⁶ This is no more evident than in the novels, which reflect and substantiate the definitions and details discussed in the first half of this chapter. These are likewise a range of different characteristics, personalities and situations that create a plethora of poor whites, some of whom are easy to categorise and place in a single grouping, while the majority are complex and difficult to simply categorise. There are those who are hard and willing workers who have fallen on bad times; there are the vagabonds and criminal type; there are those who are trying to make it as best as they can, navigating through their poverty; there are those who know no better and this has always been their lives; as well as those who have some infirmity or disability and this attached to their poverty means that they are doomed to be stuck as a poor white for the rest of their lives; and lastly there were the lazy, ignorant, good- for-nothings that epitomise the term poor white. These different types of poor whites make an appearance in the novels and substantiate graphically the multifaceted meaning of the term “poor white”. (See Table Four)

⁴⁴⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

⁴⁴⁶ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 33.

Table Four: Types of Poor Whites Apparent in the Novels

Type	Characteristics	South Africa	The South (USA)
Natural Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social inheritance • Normal Intelligence • Generational inferiority • May be educated • Also includes: • Chronic sick • Dumb • Deaf • Blind • Some defect – unable to care or support themselves 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ampie (<i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i>) • Sitman (<i>Bywoners</i>) • Datie (<i>Droogte</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anse Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Darl Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Dewey Dell Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Thomas Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Wash Jones (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Flem Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Ab Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • I.O. Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Eck Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Wall Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Mink Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Isaac Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • The Lester family (<i>Tobacco Road</i>) • The Joad family (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>)
Rural Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live in the Rural area • Rural existence • Includes: • <i>Trekboer</i> • <i>Bywoner</i> • Woodcutters • Bushveld type • Isolated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ampie (<i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i>) • Lambertus Bredenhand (<i>Die Sprinkaanbeempte van Sluis</i>) • Sitman (<i>Bywoners</i>) • Willemse (<i>Bywoners</i>) • Niklaas (<i>Bywoners</i>) • Jaap Gous (<i>Bywoners</i>) • Soois (<i>Droogte</i>) • Sagrys (<i>Droogte</i>) • Luikes (<i>Droogte</i>) • Stoffel (<i>Droogte</i>) • Datie (<i>Droogte</i>) • Antonie Reys (<i>Die Plaasverdeling & Die Trekboer</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anse Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Darl Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Dewey Dell Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) • Thomas Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Wash Jones (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Judith Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Rosa (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) • Flem Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Ab Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • I.O. Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Eck Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Mink Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • Isaac Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) • The Lester family (<i>Tobacco Road</i>) • Ty Ty Walden (<i>God's Little Acre</i>) • The Joad family (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>) • Muley Graves (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>)

Industrial Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lives in the urban areas Labourers pushed off land Seeks new existence Unskilled/Rural skills Seeking relief Unable to adapt to urban life Diggers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ampie (<i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i>) Niklaas (<i>Bywoners</i>) Jaap Gous (<i>Bywoners</i>) Soois (<i>Droogte</i>) Luikes (<i>Droogte</i>) Stoffel (<i>Droogte</i>) Antonie Reys (<i>Die Plaasverdeling & Die Trekboer</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flem Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) I.O. Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Eck Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Wall Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Will Thompson (<i>God's Little Acre</i>)
Pathological Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aberrations: Alcohol abuse Indolence Improvvidence Dependency Crime Low economic and social standard No sympathy for them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bart (<i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i>) Sitman (<i>Bywoners</i>) Sagrys (<i>Droogte</i>) Luikes (<i>Droogte</i>) Stoffel (<i>Droogte</i>) Datie (<i>Droogte</i>) Antonie Reys (<i>Die Plaasverdeling & Die Trekboer</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anse Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) Darl Bundren (<i>As I Lay Dying</i>) Thomas Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) Wash Jones (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) Flem Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Ab Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) I.O. Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Mink Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) The Lester family (<i>Tobacco Road</i>) Tom Joad (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>) John Joad (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>)
Accidental Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Were self-supporting Were respectable Victims of some calamity Causes out of their control If aided will rise up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lambertus Bredenhand (<i>Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis</i>) Willemse (<i>Bywoners</i>) Jaap Gous (<i>Bywoners</i>) Antonie Reys (<i>Die Plaasverdeling & Die Trekboer</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Judith Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) Rosa (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) The Joad family (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>) Muley Graves (<i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>)
Recovering Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Able to recover from poverty Move from poor white class 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lambertus Bredenhand (<i>Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis</i>) Willemse (<i>Bywoners</i>) Herklaas Reys (<i>Die Plaasverdeling & Die Trekboer</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thomas Sutpen (<i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>) Flem Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) I.O. Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Eck Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>) Wall Snopes (<i>Snopes Trilogy</i>)
Future poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No change 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ty Ty Walden (<i>God's Little Acre</i>) Pluto Swint (<i>God's Little Acre</i>)

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Hand of God and the Hand of Man

What nature does blindly, slowly and ruthlessly, man may do providently, quickly and kindly.¹

As previously mentioned, the poor-white problem both in South Africa and in the American South was multi-causal. Although the majority of these causes are similar, there are also a number of unique factors. This chapter examines the reasons for white poverty in these two regions by examining the selected novels and comparing them to determine if there were any similarities or differences. The causes of the poverty will be divided into what Van Onselen refers to as the “Hand of God” and the “Hand of Man”.² The Carnegie Commission was also aware of the different causes of poverty.³ The “Hand of God” includes all causes that were out of the control or influence of the individuals concerned, thus natural causes such as drought, disease and pests. The “Hand of Man” encompasses all man-made causes. However, this category can also be further divided into causes beyond the control of the individual, but which are still man-made, such as war, depression and commercialisation and then causes for which the poor whites themselves were to blame for, such as ignorance, laziness and traditions. Thus, this chapter will use these three categories to categorise the causes featured in the novels.

The idea of the “Hand of God” vs the “Hand of Man” is apparent in the following examples spanning over a century. In an 1893 report on education in the Cape, compiled by Haldane Murry, he blamed the poverty of the poor whites on “external forces”. While in 2005, former South African President Nelson Mandela gave his “poverty speech” in London, where he stated that poverty was not natural, but rather man-made.⁴ This similarity can also be seen in the USA. Writing for *National Review* in March 2016, Kevin Williamson, a white journalist, was quick to state that white poverty was man-made and no great disaster created these people.⁵ La Toya R. Jefferson-James, a black female professor of literature, states in her blog that there are poor whites in America who are living in poverty through no fault of their own and she believes that the government had never truly dealt with the poor-white problem.⁶

¹ F. Galton, “Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims”, *The American Journal of Sociology*, 10 (1), 1904, p. 5.

² C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 321.

³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 42.

⁴ G. Davie, *Poverty Knowledge in South Africa: A Social History of Human Science, 1855-2005*, pp. 2 & 42.

⁵ A. MacGills & ProPublica, ‘The Original Underclass: Poor White Americans’ Current Crisis Shouldn’t Have Caught the Rest of the Country as Off Guard as it Has’, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/09/the-original-underclass/492731/>>, September 2016. Accessed: 28 February 2023.

⁶ L.R. Jefferson-James, ‘White Poverty: Lying by Omission in America’,

The Hand of God

One of the most recurring causes for the creation of white poverty, especially in South African literature, is factors that the poor whites had no control over, such as the “acts of God”. According to historian C.W. de Kiewiet, one of the biggest contributing factors to poor-white poverty was the large group of subsistence farmers who were vulnerable to natural disasters.⁷ B. Cecil-Fronsman states that misfortunes could quickly transform a family of independent producers into dependent poor whites.⁸ This is linked to the idea that the poor whites were not poor due to their own fault and that they were deserving of being saved. In the Southern literature, there are cases where natural disasters were the cause, however, with the exception of *The Grapes of Wrath*, they are only mentioned as a passing reference.

Drought features as the most prominent cause of poverty in the South African literature and has played a huge role in the history of the country. South Africa was afflicted with a number of serious droughts during the second half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. Agricultural statistics revealed that an average of 2 300 000 sheep and goats and 340 000 heads of cattle were lost during this period, with drought being the main cause.⁹ It was calculated using the low prices in 1931 that the losses amounted to £ 2500 000 annually, which was a huge amount of money.¹⁰ Wasteful animal husbandry and overgrazing weakened the vegetation and drained the underground water source, which further weakened the power of the land to resist drought.¹¹ In another situation, farms that usually could accommodate ample stock in good years became grossly overstocked in the years of drought.¹² The land’s power of resistance against drought was diminished by man’s reckless and uneducated use of the *veld* (land). The Drought Commission of 1921 reported on the Midland districts in the Cape and stressed that the *veld* (land) was being robbed of its natural resources. This was partly due to drought, but mostly ascribed to overstocking and erosion caused by farming. This resulted in the drying of natural springs and the denudation of the earth’s vegetation cover. These factors caused a decreased resistance of the land to drought, a lowering of the water table and quicker run-off.¹³ Rainfall may not have decreased in its

<https://latoyarjeffersonjames.medium.com/white-poverty-not-dealing-with-it-and-lying-by-omission-in-america-2c1533dcd8de>, 13 May 2021. Accessed: 1 March 2023.

⁷ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 189.

⁸ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 16

⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 85.

¹⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 85.

¹¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 189.

¹² C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 190.

¹³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 85.

volume, but in its efficiency, doing less good when it did fall.¹⁴ Drought plunged white farmers into debt, claiming their cattle, their land and even their attachment to the soil, causing large numbers to become poor whites.¹⁵ A lack of water and rainfall also seriously limited the potential of growing certain crops.

Drought is the main theme and cause of the poverty experienced by the brothers in the novel of the same name *Droogte* (Drought) by Van den Heever. Van den Heever begins the novel with a poem about drought and throughout the novel the reader is constantly made aware of the extent of its impact on the land, animals and people. The land is described as an *eindeloose horingdroë aarde* (unending bone dry plain) and the hot *dwarrelwinde* (whirlwinds) are a sign that the drought will continue.¹⁶ With regards to the livestock, the sheep are described as thin and roam around aimlessly, without a purpose¹⁷ and the cattle appear twisted due to hunger and starvation.¹⁸ Some are described as falling over and needing help to get back up because they are so thin and weak.¹⁹ Many of the surrounding farmers state that it is this *vreeslike droogte* (terrible drought) that will ultimately finish them.²⁰ Almost every character remarks on or mentions the drought that permeates the entire novel.

*“Die laaste een kla net oor die droogte. Ek hoor die twee Neethlings het al boedel oorgegee.”*²¹

(“Everyone is complaining about the drought. I heard the two Neethlings surrendered their estate.”)

In *Die Plaasverdeling* (The farm division), Jonker also examines drought. Through the division of land, the drought has impacted Antonie and his sheep and has accentuated the problem. Antonie inherits a large number of his father’s sheep and initially counts himself lucky. His brother inherits the “better” land and less sheep. When the drought comes his land is inadequate to deal with the large number.²² He considers cutting the throats of his sheep, but decides to leave his farm in search of green pastures for his sheep.²³ He reminisces back to the last rains, approximately eight months ago and how the summer had started hot. He knows that if the rains do not come soon, matters will not look good.²⁴ The land is too dry and

¹⁴ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 189.

¹⁵ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 190.

¹⁶ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 43 & 86.

¹⁷ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 20.

¹⁸ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 76.

¹⁹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 76-77.

²⁰ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 21 & 86.

²¹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 23.

²² A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 204-205, 232-235 & 257-262.

²³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 230.

²⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 228.

there is no food for his flock in the surrounding areas. This becomes a motivating factor for him to leave.²⁵ He had hoped to make quite a bit of money from the sale of his sheep, but many had died and the remaining sheep are in such a bad condition that no buyer would have looked at them. Antonie believes the drought is a *straf* (punishment).²⁶

In a second novel by Jonker, *Die Trekboer* (The moving or migrating farmer), the drought has dragged on for a year. After four months on the road, Antonie has already lost a large number of his sheep and has still not come out of the drought or found green pastures.²⁷ He feels that he is too crossing a desert the same way Moses did, searching for the “promised land”, ‘*n plekkie waar daar gras en kos en geld is* (a place where there is an abundance of grass, food and money).²⁸

In the *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis* (The Locust Official of Sluis) by Van Bruggen, the farming area is also experiencing a drought:

*Die groen akkers het na uitgedorde lande in die droogte begin lyk voor die oë wat magteloos die ramp moes aanskou, en die kwynende vee het dwalend op die veld na l rondgesoek.*²⁹

(The green acres began to turn into dried out fields in the drought, the disaster which your eyes had to watch helplessly and the dwindling livestock wandering aimlessly on the fields in search of food.)

In Van Bruggen’s other novel *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, drought also comes to Kasper Booysen’s farm. It is also one of the factors that causes Ampie to leave the farm as a *bywoner* to go to the diggings to seek his fortune. Van Bruggen describes nature as being *hartloos* (heartless) and that farming again suffered as a result of the *banvloek* (curse) – drought. The drought is described as a *kastyding wat kort-kort neersak* (reprimand that often descends) on the countryside.³⁰ Booysen explains that many farmers are leaving their land and inheritance in order to migrate to the cities in search of waged work on the roads, doing maintenance or, like Ampie, are turning to the diamond fields to try their luck.³¹

²⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 327.

²⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 346.

²⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 9.

²⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 47.

²⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 11.

³⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 243.

³¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 243.

Whereas South Africa is considered dry, the American South is considered more humid.³² However, the USA was also not spared drought and this likewise caused a number of whites to fall into dire poverty. Three severe droughts affected the USA between the mid and late nineteenth century. The drought of the mid-1850s to mid-1860s is also called the “Civil War drought”. According to tree ring analysis conducted in Texas, the Civil War drought was one of the worst droughts in the last 300 years. The westward movement of people and animals across the USA, especially the Plains, impacted the land and led to competition for resources.³³ Counties were unable to produce enough food for their populations, which resulted in many poor white families starving or resorting to thieving and foraging.³⁴ The latter two droughts also had negative effects on farmers, especially the 1890s drought, which resulted in the reopening of the frontier through depopulation. This drought predicted worse things to come.³⁵

It was the droughts in the first half of the twentieth century that had the most horrendous impact. The 1930s drought is widely considered to be the “drought of record” for the USA. It lasted for almost a decade and was actually four distinct droughts.³⁶ Moreover, these droughts occurred in such quick succession with very little recovery time.³⁷ The first of these droughts swept across eight Southern States.³⁸ Previously, droughts were severe, but short in duration. However, the 1930s droughts intensified and lasted up to and in some cases more than a year. Arkansas lost between 30-50 percent of its crops, resulting in famine.³⁹ The lack of rain affected wildlife, plant life and domestic needs.⁴⁰ Livestock also perished under drought conditions.⁴¹ Lush fields turned to baked clay, the heat caused stunted plants and stagnant water and a lack of fresh milk and vegetables, causing typhoid and pellagra cases to break out.⁴² The losses endured during the 1930s resulted in an agricultural depression that

³² R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12.

³³ R. Seager & C. Herweijer, ‘Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America’,

<<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

³⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 38, 44 & 62.

³⁵ R. Seager & C. Herweijer, ‘Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America’,

<<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

³⁶ 1930-1931, 1934, 1936, 1939-1940.

³⁷ National Drought Migration Center, ‘The Dust Bowl’,

<<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

³⁸ Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Virginia and West Virginia.

³⁹ N.E. Woodruff, “The Failure of Relief During the Arkansas Drought of 1930-1931”, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 39(4), 1980, p. 302.

⁴⁰ National Drought Migration Center, ‘The Dust Bowl’,

<<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 286.

⁴² N.E. Woodruff, “The Failure of Relief During the Arkansas Drought of 1930-1931”, *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, 39(4), 1980, p. 305.

contributed to the Great Depression.⁴³ As was the case in South Africa, human intervention caused the drought conditions to be exacerbated. Natural prairie grass which bound the surface and soil together during drought was removed and replaced with wheat or cotton. The wheat and cotton could not survive the conditions that resulted in the exposure of the soil to wind erosion.⁴⁴ Poor land management, land use and cultivation with little knowledge of the region's climate, inaccurate information, lack of farming experience, the changing climate and environment due to human intervention, nutrient leaching and soil moisture depletion saw large areas of the USA become vulnerable to drought.⁴⁵ Overgrazing of natural grasses by imported cattle also exhausted the land.⁴⁶ In 1935, the term "Dust Bowl" was coined by reporter Robert Geiger to describe the drought that affected south central USA and the aftermath of the horrific dust storms that accompanied the drought and was a result of man's mismanagement of the land.⁴⁷ Between 1933 and 1935, these dust storms saw the air filled with millions of tons of finely ploughed fertile top soil, darkening the skies.⁴⁸ These dust storms affected not only the land, but people's health and caused infestations in animals.⁴⁹ It resulted in a large migration of poor whites, mostly from Oklahoma, Arkansas and Texas to move to California, adding approximately 300 000 Southerners to its already substantial population.⁵⁰

It was not only the rural and farming areas that were hit by drought, but in some cases, the textile mills were also hit when cotton supplies ran short and the streams that powered them ran dry.⁵¹ The effects of drought and the Dust Bowl are brought to life in the novels, especially

⁴³ National Drought Migration Center, 'The Dust Bowl', <<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴⁴ R. Seager & C. Herweijer, 'Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America', <<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.; J.N. Gregory, "'The Dust Bowl Migration' Poverty Stories, Race Stories', <<http://faculty.washington.edu/gregoryj/dust%20bowl%20migration.htm>>, 2004. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴⁵ National Drought Migration Center, 'The Dust Bowl', <<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴⁶ R. Seager & C. Herweijer, 'Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America', <<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴⁷ National Drought Migration Center, 'The Dust Bowl', <<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.; Technically it refers to the western third of Kansas, south-eastern Colorado, the Oklahoma Panhandle, the northern two-thirds of the Texas Panhandle and the north-eastern New Mexico, but the Dust Bowl came to symbolise hardship and difficult times for the entire USA, but especially the poor whites of the South during the 1930s.

⁴⁸ J.N. Gregory, "'The Dust Bowl Migration' Poverty Stories, Race Stories', <<http://faculty.washington.edu/gregoryj/dust%20bowl%20migration.htm>>, 2004. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁴⁹ National Drought Migration Center, 'The Dust Bowl', <<https://drought.unl.edu/dustbowl/#:~:text=The%20term%20%22Dust%20Bowl%22%20was,aftermath%20of%20horrific%20dust%20storms.>>, 2023. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁵⁰ J.N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005, p. 30.

⁵¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. xi.

The Grapes of Wrath by Steinbeck. The clouds that may have brought rain dissipated, “the sharp sun struck day after day” and the corn that was planted turned “more brown” each day. “The surface of the earth crusted...”⁵² The novelist paints a vivid picture of the desperateness of the situation

Now the wind grew strong and hard and it worked at the rain crust in the corn fields. Little by little the sky was darkened by the mixing dust, and the wind felt over the earth, loosened the dust, and carried it away. The wind grew stronger. The rain crust broke and the dust lifted up out of the fields and drove gray plumes into the air like sluggish smoke. The corn threshed the wind and made a dry, rushing sound. The finest dust did not settle back to earth now, but disappeared into the darkening sky... The dawn came, but no day... Now the dust was evenly mixed with the air, an emulsion of dust and air... An even blanket covered the earth.⁵³

Similarly, floods and extensive rainfall also had terrible consequences. In South Africa parts of the Karoo, where rainfall was good, it had a harmful effect on the quality of soil by stripping it of its lime. This is what is referred to as the *suur* (sour) veld and it is impossible to grow crops. Districts of the Western Province along the coast experienced heavier rain than the Karoo, however, these rains were less regular and when it did rain, it did so in floods.⁵⁴ There are areas in South Africa where it hardly rains, but when it does, it comes down in the form of thunderstorms – hard and unrelenting.⁵⁵ According to the Carnegie Commission, years of drought were harsher and years with normal rainfall had less economic value, whereas years with high rainfall caused floods with nothing preventing the flow of water and the run-off of the fertile top soil.⁵⁶ Valleys that lost vegetation, the paths made by stock driven animals and cracks produced by droughts were all defenceless before the onslaught of rushing water. This descent of water created gullies and *sloots* (channels or canals) that carried off precious soil. The barer the soil was of its vegetation, the more moisture was lost due to evaporation and exposure. The water and wind carried away fertility that was never in abundance to begin with. Ruined crops, crop failure and a loss of grazing and veld were the result.⁵⁷ Rainfall in South Africa differs from region to region and was not predictable to those moving through it trying to find a place to settle. In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Kasper Booyesen’s comments on the late rainfall for the season:

⁵² J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 1.

⁵³ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 1.

⁵⁴ W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, pp. 65 & 68.

⁵⁵ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 188.

⁵⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 85.

⁵⁷ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 188.

“Laaste Desember sou dit vir ons voorspoed gebring het vrou; nou kom hy soos ‘n maaltyd vir iemand wat honger dood is.”⁵⁸

(“Last December it would have brought us prosperity, wife, now it comes like a meal to someone who has already died of hunger.”)

Floods in the USA are not uncommon and a number have occurred with great damage. It usually occurs with intense rainfall over a short period of time, ice or debris jamming rivers or streams and weather conditions such as hurricanes and is a coast-to-coast threat throughout the year. Flooding also results from the lack of a water control structure, rain and snowmelt that accumulates faster than the soil can absorb it or rivers carry it away and as a result of dry wash. Approximately seventy-five percent of all Presidential disaster declarations are associated with flooding.⁵⁹ Similar to South Africa, the rainfall in the USA differs from district to district and was initially not predictable. Between 1850 and 1950, approximately fifty-eight major floods took place across the USA.⁶⁰ Less than half of the floods in the USA occurred in the South, however, the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, the worst and most devastating flood in US history occurred in the South.⁶¹ These floods drowned livestock and ruined crops.⁶² Prosperous large farmers could survive such calamities, but the marginal yeomen could not resulting in reduced income, increased mortgages, foreclosures and descent into tenancy and poor whittism.⁶³

Flood destruction can be found in both the novels *As I Lay Dying* by Faulkner and in *The Grapes of Wrath* by Steinbeck. In the former, the rainfall is hard, but does not flow away quickly and soon the river floods to the extent that the bridge is submerged. Anse and his family are determined to cross it and in the process their wagon is swept away with their two mules, who drown.⁶⁴

... then that bridge was gone, too. They hadn't never see the river so high, and it not done raining yet. There was old men that hadn't never see nor hear of it being so in the memory of man.⁶⁵

⁵⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 245.

⁵⁹ National Weather Service, “Flood Related Hazards”,

<<https://www.weather.gov/safety/flood-hazards#:~:text=Flooding%20is%20a%20coast%20to,overflow%20onto%20the%20surrounding%20area>>, n.d. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁶⁰ Wikipedia, ‘Lists of Floods in the United States’,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Floods_in_the_United_States>, 22 March 2022. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁶¹ J.P. Rafferty, Britannica, ‘Mississippi River Flood of 1927: American History’,

<<https://www.britannica.com/event/Mississippi-River-flood-of-1927>>, n.d. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁶² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 176.

⁶³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 63.

⁶⁴ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Tull 67-68, Darl 105-111, Vardaman 112, Darl 120.

⁶⁵ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 83.

It was nigh up to the levee on both sides, the earth hid except for the tongue of it... and except for knowing how the road and the bridge used to look, a fellow couldn't tell where was the river and where the land... 'And three days ago. It's riz five foot since.'⁶⁶

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the rains cause extreme flooding and forced the Joad family to lose the little that they had.⁶⁷ The novel presents the dire consequences and helplessness in the wake of natural disasters. Steinbeck explains that the rain started as showers and settled into a tempo. At first, the land absorbed the moisture, however, quickly it was saturated, but the rain continued and then the excess rainfall came down from the mountains and filled the streams and rivers. It then became too much for the streams and rivers to handle and began to sweep away trees and spill the banks "into the fields, into the orchards, into the cotton patches where the black stems stood. Level fields became lakes..." but the rain continued. "Then the water poured over the highways, and cars moved slowly, cutting the water ahead, and leaving a boiling muddy wake behind..." Soon most of the land was flooded and then the rain stopped. "On the fields the water stood, reflecting the gray sky, and the land whispered with moving water."⁶⁸

It was not only the weather that played havoc on the land, animals and people, but plagues and diseases were another "Hand of God" factor poor whites had to contend with. Drought was either accompanied by or followed by locust infestations in both South Africa and the USA.⁶⁹ Locusts thrive in droughts because the dry conditions increase the nutritional value of vegetation due to the concentration of sugars and nutrients, which reduces the plants defences. The dry conditions also reduce fungal disease that attacks locusts. The heat fast-tracks locust maturation and aids them in winning battles with predators.⁷⁰

Locusts were probably the worst of the plagues that devastated South African farms. Swarms of various species are a recurring feature of the ecology. Records show that South Africa experienced continued problems with locusts from the end of the nineteenth century well into the twentieth century, which devastated crops and ruined income.⁷¹ During the 1890s and

⁶⁶ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Tull 92-93.

⁶⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 30.

⁶⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 29.

⁶⁹ S. Dovers, R. Edgecombe & B. Guest, *South Africa's Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons*. Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003, p. 80.; R. Seager & C. Herweijer, 'Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America', <<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁷⁰ R. Seager & C. Herweijer, 'Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America', <<https://ocp.ideo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁷¹ R.A. Lewis, "A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa", M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1973, p. 27.

1930s, most of South Africa was affected by swarms of red–brown locusts. When drought occurred locusts hatched and swarmed in large numbers and devastated crops after the first rains after a drought.⁷² Farmers were mostly helpless and watched as their fields were eaten raw within half an hour. The swarms came in clouds and destroyed all types of crops. The loss was considerable and subsistence and commercial farmers both suffered immensely as a result.⁷³ The locust problem is examined in *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis* and is the main cause of the poverty, among others: *Sprinkaan! Skuld! Boedel!* (Locust!, Debt!, Estate!).⁷⁴ The locusts are described as:

*Soos rooi stofstorms het die swerms bo die vlakke uitgekom, daarop neergesak na hul laaste skof, om volgens hul wintertaktiek in verspreide aanval eers die veld en daarna die gesaaide by te trek, stadig, gewis, onkeerbaar.*⁷⁵

(Like red dust storms, the swarms came from above the plains and descended on the land, deploying their winter tactics in a multiple attack on first the veld and then the fields, slowly, surely, unstoppable.)

It was a disaster witnessed by those *magteloos* (powerless) to do anything.⁷⁶ The farmers felt that it could have been a profitable year had the locusts not become a nuisance.⁷⁷ The farms felt that they had only “fed” the locust for the past two years.⁷⁸ Many farmers suffered as a result of the plague and many had the same concerns. Farmers could lose everything due to such a disaster, as was evident in the case of Lambertus Bredenhend in *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*.⁷⁹

In *Droogte*, drought is the main cause of the poverty, however, drought is usually followed by plague – locusts. The following statement emphasises how much those living in the rural areas depended on nature and how quickly it could turn on them, causing them to lose everything.

*“Net soos jy bo is, kom die droogte of sprinkane en dan is jy waar jy begin het.”*⁸⁰

(“Just when you get on top, the drought and locusts arrive and then you are back where you started.”)

⁷² S. Dovers, R. Edgecombe & B. Guest, *South Africa's Environmental History: Cases and Comparisons*, p. 80.

⁷³ A. Minnaar, “The Locust Invasion of Zululand 1933-1937”, *Natalia*, 20, 1990, pp. 35-36.

⁷⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 11.

⁷⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 4.

⁷⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 59.

⁷⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, pp. 2-4, 16, 33 & 59.

⁸⁰ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 80.

A plague of locusts is also mentioned in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. During the drought, Kasper Booysen and his wife wistfully looked for some sign of rain. He remarks:

*“Altemit sal my lande volgende jaar net weer kos gee vir sprinkane; die swerm wat hulle nou uitroei, help niks! Ons land en volk lê onder die banvloek, vrou!”*⁸¹

(“Mayhaps next year my fields will just be food for the locusts, the swarms they are eradicating now do not help! Our country and nation lie under a curse, wife!”)

In the USA, it was the 1870s drought that assisted in creating the “perfect” conditions for the dreadful locust swarms. La Niña-like conditions caused changes in atmospheric circulation, which created the 1870s drought and the conditions for the catastrophic swarms of locusts. The 1875 swarm involved 305 trillion of these insects. They ate everything in their way and destroyed crops and were a difficult obstacle to settlement of the West. The Plains were often plagued by swarms of Rocky Mountain Locusts until the start of the twentieth century when they mysteriously became extinct.⁸² Crops, especially cotton, were also affected by a number of pests and diseases, such as cotton rust and cotton caterpillars, which ruined crops for several years during the 1870s.⁸³ Although the locust plague ended at the start of the twentieth century, it was the beginning of the plague of boll weevils. The 1890s saw the small beetle, native to Central or South America, move across the Mexican border into the vicinity of Texas and spread across the cotton growing regions. It is not known if it flew across or was carried in seed cotton to be ginned.⁸⁴ The boll weevil adapted easily to various conditions and poisons, its main crop of choice remained cotton.⁸⁵ By the 1920s, it had caused more economic damage than any agricultural pest in the history of the USA.⁸⁶ The losses caused by the boll weevil were direct and indirect and extended throughout practically the entire economic and financial structure of the Cotton Belt. An average annual loss of over \$200 000 000 was the result.⁸⁷ The invasion of this pest was termed a “disastrous experience” and its impact is enshrined in

⁸¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 245.

⁸² R. Seager & C. Herweijer, ‘Drought Research: Causes and Consequences of Nineteenth Century Droughts in North America’, <<https://ocp.ldeo.columbia.edu/res/div/ocp/drought/nineteenth.shtml>>, 2011. Accessed: 6 March 2023.

⁸³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 63.

⁸⁴ W.D. Hunter, ‘The Boll-Weevil Problem’, *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Farmers’ Bulletin*, 1329, 1923, p. 1.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930.*, p. 96.; G.C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*, p. 80.

⁸⁵ S. Hall, Library of Congress Blogs, ‘The Life and Times of the Boll Weevil’, <<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2013/12/the-life-and-times-of-boll-weevil/>>, 11 December 2013. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁸⁶ S. Hall, Library of Congress Blogs, ‘The Life and Times of the Boll Weevil’, <<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2013/12/the-life-and-times-of-boll-weevil/>>, 11 December 2013. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁸⁷ W.D. Hunter, ‘The Boll-Weevil Problem’, *U.S. Department of Agriculture: Farmers’ Bulletin*, 1329, 1923, p. 2.

folklore and songs.⁸⁸ The boll weevil destroyed large regions and much of the wealth of the South depended on cotton crops, which was a devastating factor.

The poor suffered the most, however, some farmers, such as those in Alabama changed their crop production in order to survive.⁸⁹ A number of farmers, yeomen and poor whites suffered as a result of plague and thus, they had a number of similar concerns. Farmers and yeomen could lose everything due to a disaster. Without a crop, they were unable to create an income, settle debt or pay bills. With plague returning year after year, there was no relief and many joined the ranks of poor whites.

In Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*, Ty Ty Walden is worried about the small crop of cotton his sharecroppers have planted. "If the cotton did not thrive, or if the boll weevils ruined it, he did not know what he was going to do the coming fall and winter."⁹⁰ In *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell mentions the boll-weevil, how its impact could reduce a farmer's income and how farmers tried to rid their land of this pest. Furthermore, backward farming methods still seemed to continue, regardless of the fact that there was proof they did not work:

In the springy the farmers burned over all of their land. They said the fire would kill the boll-weevils. That was the reason they gave for burning the woods and fields... Bollweevils were never killed in any great numbers by the fire; the cotton plants had to be sprayed with poison in the summer, anyway. But everybody had always burned over the land each spring, and they continued if only for the reason that their fathers had done it.⁹¹

A bale to the acre was the goal of every cotton farmer around Fuller, but the boll-weevil and hard summer rains generally cut the crop in half...⁹²

Edmund Ruffin, the Virginia agricultural scientist, complained that the poor whites set the piney woods on fire each spring so that they could provide grazing for their cattle and further states that they had a callous attitude towards nature.⁹³ Farmers also had to deal with other pests and vermin. In *Tobacco Road*, Jeeter tries to raise a crop of turnips, however, his entire crop is ruined by turnip-worms.

⁸⁸ F. Lange, A.L. Olmstead & P.W. Rhode, "The Impact of the Boll Weevil, 1892-1932", *The Journal of Economic History*, 69(3), 2009, pp. 685-686.

⁸⁹ G.C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*, p. 81.; S. Hall, Library of Congress Blogs, 'The Life and Times of the Boll Weevil', <<https://blogs.loc.gov/folklife/2013/12/the-life-and-times-of-boll-weevil/>>, 11 December 2013. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

⁹⁰ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 54.

⁹¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, eBook, Chapter 14.

⁹² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 19.

⁹³ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 123.

“All my turnips has got them damn-blasted green-gutted worms in them, Lov. What God made turnipworms for... I worked all the fall last year digging up a patch of ground to grow turnips in, and then when they're getting about big enough to pull and eat, along comes these damn-blasted green-gutted turnipworms and bore clear to the middle of them...”⁹⁴

It was not only weather and plague that could cause a calamity, but also diseases both to animal stock and people that affected those in the rural and urban areas. In South Africa, scab and red water disease, rinderpest, horse sickness, gall sickness, and East Coast fever were only some of the diseases with which farmers needed to contend. Many subsistence and commercial farmers were completely ruined by these diseases.⁹⁵ It was, however, the rinderpest that became the most notorious of the diseases, with the worst outbreak taking place 1896-1897. It was an acute and usually infectious disease, that affected cattle and wiped-out herds in large parts of southern Africa. In the Transvaal alone, it destroyed two-thirds of the farmers' cattle herds and in Natal, it destroyed just under half of the cattle herds.⁹⁶ It affected not only the poor whites in the rural areas, but also those who had left the rural area to seek work and make a living in the urban areas. As previously mentioned, many of these poor whites did not possess the skills needed to work in the urban areas and thus used the skills, cattle and wagons that they had brought with them from the rural areas to earn a living as transport riders.⁹⁷ They transported goods, water and even people to the urban areas and mines and due to the rinderpest, many lost their only means of income. Many were unable to recover from the loss and fell into the unemployed slump, becoming destitute poor whites.⁹⁸ In southern Africa, rinderpest spread mainly along the transport routes. The animals used in transport were draught animals such as oxen, also the same animals used on the farms, because African horse sickness⁹⁹ prevented the use of horses.¹⁰⁰ The mortality rate was approximately 70-90%.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 1.

⁹⁵ D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 68.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 157.

⁹⁶ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 322.; H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, p. 166.

⁹⁷ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, p. 149.

⁹⁸ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 322.

⁹⁹ Between 1854-1855 an estimated amount of 70 000 horses succumbed to horse sickness in southern Africa.

¹⁰⁰ H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, p. 164.

¹⁰¹ African Horse Sickness Trust, 'African Horse Sickness',

<http://www.africanhorsesickness.co.za/about_ahs.asp>, 2005-2014. Accessed: 19 November 2014.

Isolated farming communities ground to a halt, the rinderpest killed oxen,¹⁰² horse sickness and anthrax killed horses and mules. Severe famine broke out because no slaughter animals survived and crop production became impossible without the necessary draught animals. Donkeys were the only animals not decimated by the disease, but many suffered from footrot.¹⁰³ In some areas, the famine, created by drought, locusts and finally the rinderpest in combination with malaria affecting the poorly nourished population, also killed thousands of people. Survivors left the rural areas to search for cash salaries and many ended up in the urban areas such as the mines in Kimberley and Johannesburg, creating some of the first slums in South Africa.¹⁰⁴ The only known means of eradicating the epidemic at the time was the “stamping out” policy, which resulted in major losses.¹⁰⁵ The monetary loss for the ZAR amounted to three million Pounds Sterling; today’s equivalent is an estimated two billion Rand.¹⁰⁶

Another epidemic and disease that the poor whites had to deal with was sheep scab. In itself, scab was highly contagious and spread easily and rapidly through contact, sheep to sheep or indirectly through rubbing on the same fence or post. It was eventually fatal. It weakened the sheep and many died as a result of the dipping process to try and eradicate the disease. A sheep with scab had a major effect on the price of the animal and many farmers and poor whites lost large parts of their flocks to scab.¹⁰⁷ However, compulsory dipping to control animal diseases resulted in a lot more poverty.¹⁰⁸

There were no cases of rinderpest mentioned in the selected South African novels, however, sheep scab does feature. In *Droogte*, Soois’s sheep are infected with the disease and the desperation and annoyance at the potential of it spreading is expressed in the following extract: *Soois se skape het brandsiekte, en as hulle wragtig syne aangesteek het...*¹⁰⁹ (Soois’s sheep have scab and if they have actually infected his...) In Jonker’s *Die Trekboer*, Antonie is

¹⁰² The price for surviving oxen and thus immune went from £6 to £60.

¹⁰³ H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, p. 166.

¹⁰⁴ H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, pp. 164-165.

¹⁰⁶ H. Vogel & S.W. Heyne, “Rinderpest in South Africa – 100 Years Ago”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 67(40), 1996, p. 167.

¹⁰⁷ J.A. Turton, Department of Agriculture, ‘Sheep-Scab’, <<http://www.nda.agric.za/docs/Infopaks/scab.htm>>, n.d. Accessed: 17 November 2014. and SCOPS – Sustainable Control of Parasites in Sheep, ‘Sheep Scab’, <<http://www.scops.org.uk/ectoparasites-sheep-scab.html>>, n.d. Accessed: 17 November 2014. J.D. Bezuidenhout, “A Short History of Sheep Scab”, *Journal of the South African Veterinary Association*, 82(4), 2011, p. 188.

¹⁰⁸ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 198.

¹⁰⁹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 44.

made to dip his sheep against scab, which kills many.¹¹⁰ Although he came from a clean district, the law required the dipping of cattle and sheep before entering a new district to prevent the spread of the disease.¹¹¹

Many diseases affected livestock in the USA, which in turn affected the poor whites who had herds or flocks. These diseases affected among others sheep, oxen, hogs and cattle.¹¹² It was however, cattle fever which caused the most concern. This disease could wipe-out large herds.¹¹³

Poor whites also suffered from a number of diseases. These diseases did not cause their poverty, but in many cases, they were caused by their poverty or contributed towards it, with many becoming too weak to work. As mentioned in previous chapters, certain illnesses were associated with poverty and poor whites. These included hookworm, pellagra and malaria, among others. The majority of these diseases were regarded as “rural” diseases, whereas tuberculosis was considered a poor “urban” disease.¹¹⁴

In South Africa, poor whites suffered from a number of diseases,¹¹⁵ especially those who had moved to the urban areas and lived and worked in confined spaces with poor sanitation.¹¹⁶ Poor whites working on the mines, who had insufficient food, lived in overcrowded and unsanitary environments were usually infected by pneumonia, tuberculosis and phthisis–lung diseases.¹¹⁷ The effects of urban disease are evident in *Bywoners* when De Klerk moves from the urban area to the rural area after picking up a lung-disease from working on the mines. He hopes the bountiful fresh air will help him overcome the illness.¹¹⁸

Some also suffered from what was termed *vuilsiekte* (dirty disease) from not bathing or washing regularly. This created sores on the body and many children had black feet due to a

¹¹⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 68.

¹¹¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 69 & 72.

¹¹² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 7 & 179.

¹¹³ USDA, National Agricultural Library, 'Texas Cattle Fever',

<<https://www.nal.usda.gov/exhibits/speccoll/exhibits/show/parasitic-diseases-with-econom/parasitic-diseases-with-econom/texas-cattle-fever>>, n.d. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹¹⁴ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 73.

¹¹⁵ Some included: cholera, the bubonic plague, typhoid, smallpox and flu such as the outbreak in 1918, as well skin diseases.

¹¹⁶ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 78-80.

¹¹⁷ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 78-79 & 220.

¹¹⁸ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 25-26 & 39.

lack of shoes and not being cleaned regularly.¹¹⁹ The poor whites, especially those in the rural areas, were believed to be the long-term victims of malaria, which weakened their bodies and caused them to be lethargic.¹²⁰ It had a debilitating effect on those who suffered from it for lengthy periods.¹²¹ Malaria is carried by infected mosquitos that pass the parasite to the humans they bite. The Carnegie Commission also investigated the theory that malaria caused whites to become poor and found that this was not the case.¹²² Although debilitating, poor whites with malaria were found to be of normal intelligence and ability. The Commission found that the cause of poverty was not a physical attribute, but rather ignorance that led to malnutrition, which weakened the poor whites' resistance to disease.¹²³ Many poor white families suffered chronically from insufficient or unbalanced diets. Their diets were mostly carbohydrate based and many lacked protein and fresh fruits and vegetables.¹²⁴ In the Knysna forest, many poor whites could only grow sweet potatoes.¹²⁵ Thus, poor whites lived off a diet of starch and meat, which led to many being malnourished.¹²⁶ This resulted in lassitude of ill health, mental fatigue, poor physique and retardation. Furthermore, this lowered their resistance to diseases such as malaria and bilharzia. Their poor housing and unhygienic and unsanitary conditions added to their poor health conditions.¹²⁷

During the twentieth century, the US scientific and medical community identified several diseases, such as malaria, hookworm and pellagra, which appeared to be confined to the South.¹²⁸ These states also saw a large number of poor whites suffer from malaria, especially in extensive flats of the lower reaches of sluggish river areas. However, pellagra and hookworm were the largest causes of concern and investigation. Hookworm is an extremely unpleasant intestinal parasite. It causes chronic disease, mainly anaemia, and occasionally death.¹²⁹ It is associated with soil and faeces and is spread through unavoidable and regular

¹¹⁹ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 236-237.

¹²⁰ E.J. Bottomley, "Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa", PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 15.

¹²¹ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12.

¹²² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*, pp. 126-127.

¹²³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Health Factors in the Poor White Problem IV*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia 1932.; E.J. Bottomley, "Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa", PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, pp. 113-114

¹²⁴ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 190.

¹²⁵ A. Grundlingh, "'God Het Ons Arm Mense die Houtjies Gegee': Poor white Woodcutters in the Southern Cape Forest Area, c. 1900-1939" in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992, pp. 41-42.

¹²⁶ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12

¹²⁷ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp. 190-191.

¹²⁸ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 62-64.

¹²⁹ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 97.; R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12.

contact with dirt and the soil.¹³⁰ In South Africa, the disease only occurred on a very small scale among underground workers in the gold mines. It is believed that the dry climate prevented its spread.¹³¹ Poor whites in the America South chiefly worked on the land and were well known for not wearing shoes.¹³² In other instances, some poor whites were known to eat dirt and soil, which could also have led to the hookworm disease.¹³³ The hookworm was dubbed the “American killer”¹³⁴ and by 1905 is thought to have infected more than 40% of the Southern population.¹³⁵ The hookworm disease also soon became known as the “germ of laziness”¹³⁶ or “lazy sickness”.¹³⁷

The “laziness” or “shiftlessness” associated with the poor whites was synonymous with the hookworm infection. The parasite caused stunted growth and weakness in its poor, malnourished victims. The victims had a pale, sallow complexion, their eyes were listless and their pupils were not very responsive to light, giving them a blank fish-like character. Their hair was dry and scant, chests flat, shoulder blades prominent and in some cases, retardation in development. Children were the worst affected, as the parasite caused attention deficit disorders, lower IQ and inflicted strange food cravings¹³⁸ such as chalk, clay and dirt.¹³⁹ The poor whites who had hookworm were described as a “pale, flabby, useless hulks of flesh”.¹⁴⁰ Although hookworm was discovered in the twentieth century, the poor whites of the South had been suffering its affliction from the antebellum period.¹⁴¹ As some of the novels indicated, much of the breeding and spread of hookworm was due to ignorance and bad hygiene caused

¹³⁰ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 98.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 177.

¹³¹ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 13.

¹³² S. Emerson, ‘Southerners Weren’t ‘Lazy,’ Just Infected with Hookworms’, <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wnxxq5/southerners-werent-lazy-just-infected-with-hookworms-stereotype>>, 28 April 2016. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹³³ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 99-100.

¹³⁴ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 102 & 105.

¹³⁵ S. Emerson, ‘Southerners Weren’t ‘Lazy,’ Just Infected with Hookworms’, <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wnxxq5/southerners-werent-lazy-just-infected-with-hookworms-stereotype>>, 28 April 2016. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹³⁶ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 105.; E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 97.

¹³⁷ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 106.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 198-199.

¹³⁸ The cravings were for iron.

¹³⁹ S. Emerson, ‘Southerners Weren’t ‘Lazy,’ Just Infected with Hookworms’, <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wnxxq5/southerners-werent-lazy-just-infected-with-hookworms-stereotype>>, 28 April 2016. Accessed: 10 March 2023.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, pp. 108-109, 112 & 115.; N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 67-68, 72 & 76-79. P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, pp. 45-46.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 198. K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 254.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 177.

¹⁴⁰ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 77.

¹⁴¹ P.H. Buck, “Poor Whites of the Ante-bellum South”, *The American Historical Review*, 31(1), 1925, p. 45.

by the poor whites' own filth.¹⁴² Conceptions of Southerners as lazy were combined with the notion of poor whites being unclean and unhygienic. This moved the focus away from the fact that many were unable to produce enough food for themselves, causing some to be desperate enough to eat dirt and also not having access to clean water to wash and drink. The focus also remained on hookworm being caused by their own filth and not on the poor whites' inability to afford to buy shoes or medicine. Thus, many considered the poor whites to be poor because they chose not to work and not because a large number were severely ill.¹⁴³

In both countries, an inadequate and ill balanced diet increased the problem among poor whites. Their nourishment consisted largely of scrap meat and starch, which resulted in a lack of important vitamins that had a serious detrimental effect on their physical and mental health.¹⁴⁴ Pellagra¹⁴⁵ is a disease caused by severe deficiency of niacin or vitamin B3.¹⁴⁶ First diagnosed in 1902, the symptoms included skin reddening, skin crusting and peeling, leaving a smooth, shiny layer of tissue underneath. Symmetrical lesions on the hands, arms, feet, and ankles often with a butterfly shape across the nose.¹⁴⁷ If left untreated, it spread to the digestive tract. From there, it produced a listlessness and malaise. Constipation or diarrhoea, burning sensation and weakness accompanied symptoms. In severe cases, it also affected mental processes causing hallucinations, melancholy, confusion and depression. It was often a chronic disease and could be fatal.¹⁴⁸ Although common in the American South, it did not occur in South Africa to any marked extent.¹⁴⁹ The disease was caused by dietary inadequacies, particularly foods with very little niacin, such as fatback rinds, cornmeal and molasses. It could be prevented by consuming fresh milk, meat, eggs and vegetables, food that was simply not available to the poor. Poor white poverty and diet were intertwined, which caused the perfect conditions for pellagra.¹⁵⁰ In the early 1920s, it was discovered that brewer's yeast was the quickest and cheapest cure.¹⁵¹ As mentioned in chapter seven, in Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*, the Red Cross and State gave out yeast in the mill town which

¹⁴² S. Emerson, 'Southerners Weren't 'Lazy,' Just Infected with Hookworms', <<https://www.vice.com/en/article/wnxxq5/southerners-werent-lazy-just-infected-with-hookworms-stereotype>>, 28 April 2016. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹⁴³ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, pp. 13-14.

¹⁴⁴ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12

¹⁴⁵ Meaning "sour skin" in Italian.

¹⁴⁶ Cleveland Clinic, 'Pellagra', <<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/23905-pellagra>>, 18 July 2022. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹⁴⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 174.

¹⁴⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 174-175.

¹⁴⁹ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12

¹⁵⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 175.; C. Bertelsen, 'The Curse of Corn: Poverty and Politics and Pellagra', <<https://gherkinstomatoes.com/2012/07/24/26520/>>, 24 July 2012. Accessed: 10 March 2023.; K. Clay, E. Schmick & W. Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra in the American South", *NBER Working Paper Series*, 23730, 2017-2018, <https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/w23730.pdf>, p. 8.

¹⁵¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 176.

could be mixed in a glass of water to drink "...and you feel pretty good for a while. They started giving out yeast because everybody in the Valley has got pellagra these days from too much starving."¹⁵² It caused thousands of deaths during the first half of the twentieth century and was mostly prevalent in the American South.¹⁵³ It affected the ability to work and function normally. It was often referred to by the four "Ds": dermatitis, diarrhoea, dementia and death.¹⁵⁴ It was a disease rooted in economics and was a "hard time" disease almost unique to the poor.¹⁵⁵

Many of the poor whites worked as sharecroppers after the Civil War and cultivated a labour-intensive mono cash crop – cotton, they were not allowed to grow their own food. The plantation commissaries, where they could spend the vouchers they were given instead of cash, stocked little besides cornmeal, bacon and molasses and most sharecroppers could afford little else. The soil was exploited and after the boll weevil invaded, food prices rose, the American South faced a severe agricultural depression and the poor whites were hard affected.¹⁵⁶ However, it was the invasion of the boll weevil, and later the depression, that broke the mono-crop of cotton and saw the introduction of other alternative crops with a higher niacin content being planted.¹⁵⁷

Pellagra was a serious epidemic in the South and two characters in Caldwell's *Tobacco Road* suffered from it mainly due to a lack of food and nutritious food. The Lesters lived mainly off of fatback rinds and corn meal.¹⁵⁸

There had been very little in the house again that day to eat; some salty soup Ada had made by boiling several fatback rinds in a pan of water, and corn bread, was all there was when they had sat down to eat. There had not been enough to go around even then...¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 29.

¹⁵³ K. Clay, E. Schmick & W. Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra in the American South", *NBER Working Paper Series*, 23730, 2017-2018, <https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/w23730.pdf>, p. 7.

¹⁵⁴ C. Bertelsen, 'The Curse of Corn: Poverty and Politics and Pellagra', <<https://gherkin tomatoes.com/2012/07/24/26520/>>, 24 July 2012. Accessed: 10 March 2023.

¹⁵⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 175.

¹⁵⁶ M.K. Crabb, "An Epidemic of Pride: Pellagra and the Culture of the American South", *Anthropologica*, 34(1), 1992, pp. 92-94.; K. Clay, E. Schmick & W. Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra in the American South", *NBER Working Paper Series*, 23730, 2017-2018, <https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/w23730.pdf>, pp. 3-4 & 8.; R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁷ K. Clay, E. Schmick & W. Troesken, "The Rise and Fall of Pellagra in the American South", *NBER Working Paper Series*, 23730, 2017-2018, <https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w23730/w23730.pdf>, pp. 8-9.

¹⁵⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 12.

¹⁵⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 1.

They had been living off of fatback rinds several days already, and after they were gone, there would be nothing for them to eat.¹⁶⁰

Old Mother Lester knew there was no food for them to cook...¹⁶¹

Ada had been ill with pellagra for several years...¹⁶²

Ada believed she would die almost any day. She was usually surprised to wake up in the morning and discover that she was still alive. The pellagra that was slowly squeezing the life from her emaciated body was a lingering death. The old grandmother had pellagra, too, but somehow she would not die. Her frail body struggled day after day with the disease; but except for the slow withering of her skin and flesh no one was able to say when she would die. She weighed only seventy-two pounds now; once she had been a large woman, and she had weighed two hundred pounds twenty years before.¹⁶³

Malnutrition also featured in the selected the American South novels. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, two of the children suffer from it. The eldest daughter, Rosasharn, who is pregnant loses her baby. The most likely cause is that she did not get enough food or the right types of food.¹⁶⁴ Throughout the novel the reader is made aware of the food the family eats gets less and less and of a poorer quality. At the end, mush¹⁶⁵ is the last thing they can afford.¹⁶⁶

“I ain’t had milk like they said I ought.” ... “I know. We jus’ didn’ have no milk.” ... “... she ought to have milk. The lady nurse says that.”¹⁶⁷

Similarly, in the *Snopes* Trilogy by Faulkner, Mink Snopes has very little food in his house, a small pot of peas, a pot of made coffee, some sugar and some cornmeal.

... the pot of cold peas on the stove while they lasted and drank down to its dregs the pot of cold, stale coffee while it lasted, and when they were gone he would eat hands-full of raw meal from the almost empty barrel.¹⁶⁸

The Hand of Man (part one)

The Hand of Man part one examines the causes of white poverty that were caused by man, but were still out of the control of poor whites, such as heredity poverty and cost of living. In both the South African novels and the American South novels, with the exception of *The*

¹⁶⁰ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

¹⁶¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

¹⁶² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 3.

¹⁶³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

¹⁶⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapters 26 & 30.

¹⁶⁵ Mush is a cornmeal porridge made either with milk or water, the South African equivalent would be mealie pap. In this case, it was made with water.

¹⁶⁶ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 30.

¹⁶⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 26.

¹⁶⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 220.

Grapes of Wrath, these reasons are not explicitly examined as causes of white poverty in the literature. There are brief mentions of them and thus it does become important to examine them. The closing of the borders in South Africa and the closing of the frontier in the USA created a number of poor whites to lose the little bit of independence and freedom to seek better conditions for themselves. Both of these were examined in the histories of the respective countries in Chapters 3 and 4.

With regards to South Africa, the Boer Republics were proclaimed in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶⁹ Each resident was entitled to choose a piece of land that had not been taken by another and apply to have it surveyed and registered in his name. Regardless of this opportunity, there were still those who chose to continue *trekking* (migrating) and who did not want to settle down. Between 1860 and 1890, it was unnecessary to worry about land and property. However, in 1889, Cecil John Rhodes and his British South African Company were responsible for closing the borders to the north by creating Rhodesia (today Zimbabwe). This resulted in many Afrikaners being prevented from moving north when land became overpopulated or exhausted and when many wanted to once again get away from British rule, which they felt threatened their nation, culture and ultimately their way of life. The border closing caused many to settle in one area and restricted others from *trekking*. Thus, the best land had been taken and it was the unproductive land many were forced to settle on. Land exhaustion and overpopulation led to poverty prevailing.¹⁷⁰

As mentioned, in *Die Plaasverdeling*, Antonie decides to *trek* with his flock. He reminisces about the time before the borders were closed. This implies that this quality and spirit of *trekking* would have made Antonie an excellent farmer a hundred years before. It was a time without the adjustment of the fast changing developments, a time when the world was open and free for every man to move where he wanted.¹⁷¹ The old man, uncle Jool, a previous *trekboer*, states with regards to the drought:

*“In die ou dae het ons in so 'n tyd lankal met ons veegoed getrek.”*¹⁷²

(“In the old days, in times like this we would have already taken our flock and moved.”)

¹⁶⁹ The ZAR in 1852 and the OFS in 1854.

¹⁷⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, pp. 36-39.; R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 9.; R. Ross, A. Klerk Mager & B. Nasson, *The Cambridge History of South Africa: Volume II 1885-1994*, pp. 262-263.; F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 309.

¹⁷¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 329.

¹⁷² A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 329.

In the USA, the situation was similar, but also different. Whereas in South Africa, the migration was from south to north, in the USA, it was from east to west. In both cases, the people migrating had very little idea of what awaited them in terms of terrain, indigenous people and wild animals. Another similarity was that the people became isolated.

As mentioned in chapter four, in the USA, many poor whites lived on the frontier, constantly moving and choosing a nomadic life. The elite whites amassed land and resources and closed opportunities for “free” whites, resulting in many being unable to achieve upward mobility, thus resulting in a landless mass of poor white squatters constantly moving westwards.¹⁷³ Landless poor whites had a loose definition of property rights and believed in the right to use unoccupied land.¹⁷⁴ Land was very expensive and the purchasing of land became a near impossible deed due to a number of factors discussed in chapter four. Similarly to South Africa, in 1890, the US Census Bureau stated that the frontier was closed and that there was no empty land to be settled.¹⁷⁵

Although no mention is made of the closing of the borders in the American South novels, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the border patrol on the California line tried to prevent the migrant workers from crossing as these people were coming to California in their thousands.¹⁷⁶ Thus, certain state borders remained closed to the poor whites. War also contributed to this situation. Although poor whites existed in both South Africa and the American South before the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and the Civil War (1861-1865), these Wars and the post-War period and conditions not only resulted in many poor whites being negatively affected, but also caused a number of whites and yeomen to join the ranks of poor whites.

As mentioned in chapter three, in South Africa, the Anglo-Boer War was one of the major catalysts of the poor-white problem. After being unable to quickly deal with the Boer uprising due to their use of guerrilla warfare, the British introduced the “scorched earth policy”. Once the peace was signed, 15 000 Boer fighters returned to their former homes, but were unable to resettle on their farms due to the consequences of the scorched earth policy.¹⁷⁷ In some cases, the Boers returned to find that a black family had moved onto their land and refused to

¹⁷³ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 42 & 48.; M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 105.

¹⁷⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 41.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 4.

¹⁷⁵ State Historical Society of Iowa, “Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission”, 1909, <<https://iowaculture.gov/history/education/educator-resources/primary-source-sets/rural-life-modern-age/special-message>>, 2022. Accessed: 21 October 2022.

¹⁷⁶ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 12.

¹⁷⁷ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 322.

vacate.¹⁷⁸ In other instances, both sides had made use of the farms' assets and very few farmers were compensated adequately after the War ended. In less than three years, these whites had lost everything and found themselves in abject poverty.¹⁷⁹ Although not one of the selected novels, a short story by J. Lub presents an account of the effects of the War:

But when the war was finished, Duvenhage was finished too. His few head of cattle had been taken, his house destroyed. The small piece of ground he had to sell, so as to feed and clothe his family.¹⁸⁰

In *Bywoners*, Van Bruggen illustrates how many farmers, who became impoverished due to the War, were forced to become *bywoners* (sharecroppers/tenants).

*Na die Anglo-Boereoorlog was hy in staat om, in betreklik kort tyd, sy woning en werf van verwoesting se merke reg te dokter. Aan hulp het dit hom daarvoor nie ontbreek nie, want baie verarmde boere was maar te begerig om 'n sitplekkie te kry as bywoner in daardie dae...*¹⁸¹

(After the Anglo-Boer War, in a relatively short time, he was able to repair his home and yard from the marks of destruction. He did not lack for help because many impoverished farmers were only too eager to get a piece of land as a *bywoner* in those days...)

As discussed in chapter four, the Civil War also involved and caused white poverty. Drought broke out in the American South, which resulted in insufficient food production and many poor whites suffered starvation, as the counties could not assist the growing numbers.¹⁸² Children picked wild berries and mothers boiled potato vines to prevent starvation. Numerous letters were written to those in charge begging for assistance for the poor white families.¹⁸³ Both Union and Confederate soldiers stole, confiscated and raided farms; took and slaughtered livestock; helped themselves to crops and food; and destroyed what was left. These losses created an economic crisis for a number of yeomen, which propelled them into tenancy and the ranks of poor whites.¹⁸⁴ The consequence of wartime foraging and Reconstruction thievery saw the Alabama livestock herds decline from \$43 million in 1860 to \$26 million in 1870.¹⁸⁵ By the end of 1864, the number of indigent poor families had drastically increased.¹⁸⁶ The end of

¹⁷⁸ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 225.

¹⁷⁹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 157.

¹⁸⁰ J. Lub, "Trapped" in *Dark Johannesburg*. Potchefstroom: Het Westen Printing Works, 1912, p. 165.

¹⁸¹ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 23.

¹⁸² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 38.

¹⁸³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 43.

¹⁸⁴ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 172.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 43 & 62.

¹⁸⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 62.

¹⁸⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 44.

the War saw peace, but a continuation of anarchy and starvation and bad weather continued. The *Athens Post* reported on the suffering in the white-mountain counties to being equal in ghastliness to the Irish famine years.¹⁸⁷ For many, the calamity was the beginning of a long decline into poverty. Small farmers were unable to pay the taxes on their lands, which were eventually sold, leaving them landless and wartime destruction reduced many yeomen to insolvency.¹⁸⁸

In Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen returns from the Civil War to find "... his plantation ruined, fields fallow except for a fine stand of weeds, and taxes and levies and penalties sowed by United States marshals and such and all his niggers gone..." His hundred square mile plantation was reduced to one square mile by the carpetbaggers.¹⁸⁹ He had no labour force and land had to be sold to settle debts. What was left was insufficient to support his family and thus, he resorted to opening a little crossroads store selling mostly cheap items to blacks and poor whites.¹⁹⁰

Both World Wars affected the poor whites in both countries. In South Africa, many poor whites went to fight in the First World War, as it ensured them a stable salary for a time. This is evident in Van Bruggen's novel *Bywoners*. Gouws, one of the *bywoners*, decides to leave the farm, as he is unable to make a living working off the land. He initially leaves the rural area to become a wage worker in the urban area. Months later, he returns to visit his old friends. In the interim, he joined the army to fight in the First World War and has come to tell them about the perks of joining the War, "*die gereelde salaris elke maand*" ("the regular salary every month") and "*elke kind kry 'n toelae*" ("every child gets an allowance"). At first many are apprehensive, but most leave because "*goed twee maal so duur as voor die oorlog!*" ("prices of goods are twice as expensive before the War!") and many were unable to survive on their harvests.¹⁹¹

However, many people returned to similar or worse conditions after the War. Post the First World War, there was an increase in poverty because many people returned from the War without the income they had received during the War and inflation rose 50% between 1917

¹⁸⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 173; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 48 & 62-63.

¹⁸⁹ Carpetbagger is a historical term used by Southerners to describe opportunistic Northerners who came to the South after the Civil War, during the Reconstruction era, who were perceived to be exploiting the local population for their own financial, social and political gain.

¹⁹⁰ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom*, pp. 123 & 138-139.; W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 238.

¹⁹¹ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 31, 35 & 73.

and 1920.¹⁹² In 1914, a number of Afrikaners, including poor whites rebelled against having to participate in the First World War as part of the British Commonwealth.¹⁹³ The rebellion was mostly a fight between Afrikaners and the rebels were eventually fined and given sentences.¹⁹⁴

The after-War effects can be seen in *Droogte* with regards to the differences in the lives of the brother who joined the English during the Anglo-Boer War and those who supported the Boers. There were a number of perks for joining the British, such as compensation in the form of livestock and other materialist gains.¹⁹⁵ The bitterness of those who lost is evident in the following statement.

*“Ek en die ander wat alles verloor het vir ons land sit brandarm en “joiners” is ryk en ge-eerd.”*¹⁹⁶

(“Me and the others like me who lost everything fighting for our country are dirt poor and the “joiners” are rich and honoured.”)

In the USA before the First World War, the Federal Government targeted the South for “upliftment” and “readjustment” to wrench the South from its backwardness and poverty.¹⁹⁷ The World War provided much needed employment to the American South with its massive mobilisation of economic resources. The Federal Government set up temporary agencies to employ people in communication, production and manufacturing, as well as to set up draft boards to conscript troops. Although the Southern draft boards conscripted many African-Americans, they were deemed to be unreliable for front-line combat and therefore, the conscription fell to the poor whites. Unlike South Africa, the poor whites did not resort to armed rebellion, but chose desertion, some armed resistance and other widespread evasion. Approximately 12% of these poor whites ultimately deserted.¹⁹⁸ It was during the conscription of poor whites that the extent of hookworm and pellagra in poor whites became apparent, and many were deemed physically unfit.¹⁹⁹ In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the novel is set in a time period that falls between the two World Wars. The farmers hoped that with the wars, the price of

¹⁹² H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 245.

¹⁹³ The general feeling at the time: Many of these Boers still harboured ill feeling towards the British and the Anglo-Boer War. After years of drought that devastated most of the OFS poor farmers longed for a government such as that of Paul Kruger, ready to help them remain in the rural areas. It had become impossible for poor men to acquire land. In the urban areas the government’s brutal suppression of the 1913 and 1914 strikes alienated Afrikaner workers.

¹⁹⁴ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 379-383.

¹⁹⁵ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 216.

¹⁹⁶ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, p. 22.

¹⁹⁹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 79

cotton and the demand would rise: “Don’t they make explosives out of cotton? And uniforms? Get enough wars and cotton’ll hit the ceiling. Next year maybe.”²⁰⁰

Economic depressions also fall under the “Hand of Man” and seriously affected the poor and caused wide-spread poverty. Most post-War conditions resulted in some form of depression. In South Africa, post-Anglo-Boer War conditions caused a serious depression from 1904-1909, which also coincided with the 1907 depression in America. The post-First World War depression resulted in a number of whites losing the little they had as they were unable to pay their debts.²⁰¹ The Great Depression negatively impacted the poor whites. The price of goods fell drastically, wages dropped and unemployment increased. More poor whites joined queues at the soup kitchens and many others began to beg openly on the streets.²⁰² Farmers were the worst hit and many were forced off the land. Manufacturing also suffered as the profits from the mines were shattered. It was during this time, the 1930s, that the overall number of poor whites, who were reduced to dire poverty, reached its highest level.²⁰³ The 1930s depression further coincided with one of South Africa’s worst droughts. The government was forced to help the poor whites in the rural areas to prevent them from migrating to the urban areas.²⁰⁴ Conditions only began to drastically improve when South Africa left the gold standard.²⁰⁵ In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Booysen the farmer thinks: *Die Wêreldoorlog is lankal verby, maar hy maak sy nadraai hier.*²⁰⁶ (The World War has long ago past, but its consequences are felt here.)

The USA also suffered a number of depressions.²⁰⁷ After the American Revolution or War of Independence, a post-War depression caused widespread suffering. The War years had taken their toll, taxes were drastically increased, many soldiers had no other choice than to sell their “scrip and land bounties” and wealth was transferred upwards from the pockets of the poor soldiers and farmers.²⁰⁸ The USA suffered from a number of minor depressions, however, it was the Great Depression that was the worst in its history.²⁰⁹ The Great Depression discussed in Chapter Four always affected the poor the worst. However, many poor whites remember

²⁰⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 5.

²⁰¹ E.L.P. Stals (red.), *Afrikaners in die Goudstad I, 1886-1924*, p. 32.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 174.

²⁰² D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 333.

²⁰³ J.D. Omer-Cooper, *History of Southern Africa*, p. 175.

²⁰⁴ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 281.

²⁰⁵ J. Seekings, “The Carnegie Commission and the Backlash Against Welfare State-Building in South Africa, 1931–1937”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 34(3), 2008, p. 535.

²⁰⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 244.

²⁰⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, pp. 4, 110 & 134.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 5, 21, 83, 94, 258 & 281

²⁰⁸ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 96.

²⁰⁹ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 206.

the depression as an episode in their lives filled with trouble and complexities, but not a sudden reversal of fortune.²¹⁰ The Great Depression was felt across all of the USA and Hooverilles,²¹¹ the traditional marks of poverty began appearing everywhere.²¹² Unlike South Africa, the migration patterns among the poor changed. As news of the rising unemployment spread, rural people had reason to stay where they were. As discussed, in the difficult years, large numbers of people left the urban areas and returned to the rural areas seeking help.²¹³ The American South was distinct and set it apart from the rest of the USA.²¹⁴ It had its own economic problems to begin with and the depression caused agricultural prices to fall drastically. Cotton had already been depressed during the 1920s. This, combined with droughts and floods, devastated crops and many farms were lost to foreclosure or tax default. Although the New Deal attempted to raise commodity prices through the Agricultural Adjustment Act programme of crop reduction, even more livelihoods were lost, which forced landowners to let their sharecroppers and tenants go. These factors caused many to see opportunities available in California and elsewhere.²¹⁵ Many moved to the urban areas.²¹⁶ It was not only the rural areas that suffered. Many urban areas saw people lose their jobs and livelihoods when the mills cut the number of workers or shut down.²¹⁷

Although the end of the Depression itself is only mentioned in *The Grapes of Wrath*²¹⁸ and not at all in the other American South novels, the effects of depression throughout the novel *The Grapes of Wrath* is clear²¹⁹ as is the case of the depression and its affects after the Civil War in *Absalom, Absalom!* Hooverilles and the conditions in these shanty towns appear throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*. They are described as:

The rag town lay close to water; and the houses were tents..., paper houses, a great junk pile. The man drove his family in and became a citizen of Hooverville—always they were called Hooverville. The man put up his own tent as near to water as he could get;

²¹⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 281.

²¹¹ A "Hooverville" was a crudely built camp, usually on the edge of a town or city which housed the many poverty-stricken people who had lost their homes during the 1930s Great Depression. These shanty towns sprung up across America and were named Hooverilles after Herbert Hoover who was president at the start of the depression and who was widely blamed for it. The term was first coined by Charles Michelson who was the Publicity Chief of the Democratic National Committee. The term was first used in print media by *The New York Times* in 1930 and the term quickly caught on and spread throughout the USA.

²¹² N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 209.

²¹³ J.N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, pp. 28-29.; B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, p. 380.

²¹⁴ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 134.

²¹⁵ J.N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America*, p. 29.

²¹⁶ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 134.

²¹⁷ B. Simon, "The Novel as Social History: Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre" and Class Relations in the New South", *Southern Cultures*, 2(3/4), 1996, pp. 380-381.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 93.

²¹⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 26.

²¹⁹ R. Demott, "Introduction" in J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking Press, 1939, eBook.

or if he had no tent, he went to the city dump and brought back cartons and built a house of corrugated paper. And when the rains came the house melted and washed away.²²⁰

Competition for work also falls under the “Hand of Man”. As mentioned in chapter three, in South Africa, many poor whites had to compete for work and employment with not only immigrants who were better skilled, trained and qualified than them, but also with the black population who were willing to work as cheap labour and thus, for a lot less.²²¹ Many whites had left the rural areas due to a number of different factors and moved to the urban areas to earn a wage.²²²

In *Die Trekboer*, Antonie finds work harvesting a farmer’s crops alongside blacks and coloureds.²²³ His family comes to assist with the work, which is unusual for an Afrikaans family, but reflects on the desperate situation. The farmer does not differentiate in his payment and also pays him the same wage as the people of colour. The farmer states that *hy maak geen onderskeid tussen sy werkmense nie... 'n gerf is 'n gerf, of 'n wit man of 'n bruin man of 'n swart man hom nou ook al gesny het* (he makes no distinction between his workers... a sheaf of wheat is a sheaf of wheat regardless whether a white man or brown man or black man cut it).²²⁴ Antonie is desperate for the wage and thus takes the employment, however, he is uncomfortable working on an equal footing with blacks.²²⁵

Similarly, in chapter four, the poor whites in the American South had to compete with the enslaved people and after the Civil War, with the free blacks for employment, especially in the rural plantation areas. Slavery resulted in work being limited, regulated to a seasonal supplemental status and low wages.²²⁶ Without land and having to constantly compete with enslaved people for labour and wages, poor whites were burdened by slavery.²²⁷ Slavery displaced unskilled and skilled labour in the South.²²⁸ Planters rented out their skilled enslaved people.²²⁹ After the War, many conditions remained the same, although poor whites were now able to compete in a free labour economy, although it was a surplus labour economy.²³⁰ Many

²²⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 19.

²²¹ H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 202.

²²² The disasters that befell the poor whites in the rural areas and caused their poverty and move to the urban areas also affected the blacks. Along with a number of other factors blacks were also seeking relief and work in the urban areas thus, there was a large number of desperately poor people competing for employment.

²²³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 184.

²²⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 185.

²²⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 185.

²²⁶ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 17 & 99.; R.W. Griffin, “Poor White Laborers in Southern Cotton Factories, 1789-1865”, *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 61(1), 1960, p. 31.

²²⁷ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 61.

²²⁸ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 63.

²²⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 7.

²³⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 6 & 321.

remained landless and had little chance of improving their conditions. Poor whites remained as short-term contractors or day labourers performing agricultural work.²³¹ However, many landowners preferred to employ blacks because they were more tractable and would often settle for lower standards of living.²³² Many poor whites had to also compete with convict labour as well for work,²³³ as well as immigrants such as Mexicans.²³⁴ Those who obtained more permanent employment were constantly made aware that thousands of black strike-breakers stood ready to take their jobs should they ask for better wages and working conditions.²³⁵ Unlike the post-War South Africa Reconstruction, aid and assistance was offered to the poor regardless of race and many poor whites were either too proud or racist to accept it.²³⁶

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck does not mention the completion of work between races, but rather the competition for work. Some farmers know how desperate the migrants are and exploited them, paying them a very low wage, knowing that there are many more workers who would take the opportunity. Thus, the workers are pitted against each other for the chance to earn something.

“This here fella says, ‘I’m payin’ twenty cents an hour.’ An’ maybe half a the men walk off. But they’s still five hunderd that’s so goddamn hungry they’ll work for nothin’ but biscuits. Well, this here fella’s got a contract to pick them peaches or—chop that cotton. You see now? The more fellas he can get, an’ the hungrier, less he’s gonna pay. An’ he’ll get a fella with kids if he can...”²³⁷

When there was work for a man, ten men fought for it—fought with a low wage. If that fella’ll work for thirty cents, I’ll work for twenty-five. If he’ll take twenty-five, I’ll do it for twenty. No, me, I’m hungry. I’ll work for fifteen. I’ll work for food.²³⁸

In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Jones is allowed to squat on Supten’s land and does small jobs for him. Jones also helps provide for Supten’s family while he is away at War. However, he remarks that the enslaved are better housed and clothed than him and thus they and their labour are regarded as worth more.²³⁹ In *Tobacco Road*, the only steady wage job in the county was held by Lov.²⁴⁰

²³¹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 63.

²³² G.C. Fite, *Cotton Fields No More: Southern Agriculture 1865-1980*, p. 46.

²³³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 243.

²³⁴ N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, p. 175.

²³⁵ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 64.

²³⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 53-54.

²³⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 16.

²³⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

²³⁹ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 237.

²⁴⁰ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

As mentioned in chapter three, industrialisation, commercialisation and mechanisation had an impact on rural and urban areas. With the discovery of precious minerals in South Africa, in the late nineteenth century, industrialisation took place at an extremely rapid pace and a number of poor whites were left behind, unable to make the adjustment to the modern economic order.²⁴¹ The increased population in the urban areas, in the form of local and immigrant workers saw an increased demand for produce and food, which opened the market for commercial farming. Most Afrikaner farmers used out-dated methods and techniques to make a subsistence living for themselves, sometimes with a little over to sell.²⁴² Through outdated principles and a lack of modernity, they did not acquire business-like habits or learn the commercial principles on which profitable farming is based. They did not keep books, study market fluctuations, correct deficiencies in the soil or combat nature's short comings and thus completely lacked economic rationalism.²⁴³

Mercantile intermediaries limited small subsistence farmers from developing modern farming techniques. Chronic poverty resulted in a dependence on credit facilities and a lack of working and investment capital, as well as their mercantile enslavement hampered their transition to commercial agriculture and helped bankrupt smaller farmers on uneconomical units.²⁴⁴ Many subsistence farmers did not have the means or know-how to adjust to the fast-growing capitalistic economy and the rural areas, as they knew it was also changing.²⁴⁵ Commercial farming took place and a number of land owners asked their *bywoners* to leave the land in order for them to fully utilise it.²⁴⁶ Land became harder to access if it was not owned.²⁴⁷ These wealthy and large commercial farmers began growing crops to sell and were able to purchase land from smaller farmers who were unable to adjust to new methods and changing times and thus fell into debt.²⁴⁸ New, improved and efficient farming methods allowed commercial farmers to sell more to the urban areas. Poor whites who sold their labour were soon replaced by machines that performed the work faster and cheaper and thus, fewer manual workers

²⁴¹ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 41.

²⁴² W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, p. 71.

²⁴³ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 183.

²⁴⁴ J. Fourie, "The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today", *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, p. 1278.

²⁴⁵ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 45.

²⁴⁶ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 86.

²⁴⁷ L. Pretorius, "Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie", PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 45.

²⁴⁸ D. Oakes, (ed.), *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, pp. 330-331.; C. Van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 8.

were needed.²⁴⁹ By 1917, capitalist farming was taking off in the southern ZAR and the OFS.²⁵⁰ Regardless, there were still a number of small-scale farmers unable make the transition to market-orientated farming and a cash economy.²⁵¹ The majority of small farmers were unable to adjust to the changing times, while others overworked the soil and produced less. Many smaller farmers were isolated and far removed from the popular urban areas, having to resort to selling their produce and goods to local markets at a loss.²⁵²

In *Bywoners*, Andries Vry's farm and farming style is described as: *alles bly in die ou sleur, volgens gewoonte, wat sy opvoeding hom geleer het* (everything remains the same with hardly any changes or expansions, exactly as he was taught). Vry is also described as not trusting new developments in the agricultural sector, including machinery and would rather have his *bywoners* do the work.²⁵³ Vry exclaims with regards to changes on his farm:

*“Dis mos origheid om my boerdery te verander... Daardie nuwerweste gedoentes is net in die wêreld om te knoei en om die duiwel te help...”*²⁵⁴

(“It is just silly to change my farming... Those new western methods and ideas are just introduced to tamper and to help the devil...”)

However, towards the end of the novel, all except two of the *bywoners* have left his farm to earn a wage. Vry is forced to purchase machines to do the farm work, but is very unhappy and yearns for the days where his *bywoners* did the work.²⁵⁵

*Sy oog dwaal vol weedom oor die ou lande. Hy sien die hawerland vol stoere werkers en die roer van so baie hande en die gees van vrye arbeid na elkeen se aard en kragte en dis of daar 'n stuk uit sy ou lewe geskeur word. Sy hart heg alte vas aan die gemeensame lewe, waarin hy as 'n koning was.*²⁵⁶

(His eye wonders full of woe across the old fields. He sees the oat fields full of sturdy workers and the movement of many hands and the spirit of free labour according to each

²⁴⁹ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 46. L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 105.; L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 31.; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 194.; R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. 5.; J. Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today”, *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, p. 1278.

²⁵⁰ N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa*. London Macmillan, 1993, p. 242.

²⁵¹ J. Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today”, *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, p. 1278.

²⁵² N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa*, p. 242.

²⁵³ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 23.

²⁵⁴ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 24.

²⁵⁵ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 75.

²⁵⁶ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 75.

one's nature and strengths and it is as though a piece of his old life is torn out. His heart longs for the communal life, where he was regarded a king.)

In the USA, the American South had fallen behind the North in terms of industrialisation as they clung to the plantation system and slavery.²⁵⁷ As discussed in chapter four, small farms were purchased and consolidated into productive plantations. Yeomen and poor whites tried to resist this, but economic conditions saw many sell their land. However, the plantation system and cotton gin that arose also created an economic order that resisted technological change, as it did not require it. In the North, it at least provided the poor whites economic mobility.²⁵⁸ After the Civil War, industrialisation took place at a faster rate, however, poor whites remained poor and remained in the rural areas living off the land as best they could.²⁵⁹ Credit and commercialised agriculture continued after the War.²⁶⁰ Some farms were split and divided for farm tenancy. With the introduction of new farming methods and equipment, many poor whites shied away from the oncoming changes and continued producing subsistence crops and small unproductive harvests for sale.²⁶¹ Cotton was one of these crops, however, by the 1930s, the mechanisation of cotton production, as well as the impact of the Agricultural Adjustment Act (1933)²⁶² on sharecroppers and tenant farmers, saw the system of cotton tenancy collapse. The relentless encroachment of technological innovation made modernisation all but inevitable. The poor white were again forced to change, adapt and move to the urban areas to make a living due to the displacement through technology.²⁶³

The New Deal Agriculture Adjustment Act programme resulted in the consolidation of small farms into larger, more efficient units operating with expensive farm machinery. Thousands of poor whites were displaced through the programme and machines and only a fraction was absorbed by the new commercial farms.²⁶⁴ Mechanisation encouraged consolidation and the new machines required large land to be efficient, resulting in wealthier farmers buying out their less fortunate neighbours.²⁶⁵ Although large numbers of poor whites migrated due to the Dust Bowl, drought, windstorms and locusts, it was the mechanisation of farming that expelled more

²⁵⁷ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 43.

²⁵⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, pp. 6-7.

²⁵⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 55.

²⁶⁰ G.D. Crothers, *American History*, pp. 131-132.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 182-185.

²⁶¹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, pp. 44-46.

²⁶² A US federal law of the New Deal era designed to boost agricultural prices by reducing surpluses. The government bought livestock for slaughter and paid farmers subsidies not to plant on part of their land. This was supposedly to help during the Great Depression.

²⁶³ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 134.; N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, p. 136.

²⁶⁴ N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, p. 140.

²⁶⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 337.

small, poor white farmers.²⁶⁶ The Agriculture Adjustment Act programme also offered commercial farmers incentives, subsidies and government pay-outs, which resulted in many landowners reducing the number of tenants. They used the rental and parity payments to purchase machinery, displacing many tenants, who were the poorest people at the bottom of the agricultural ladder and forcing them to become roaming agricultural workers. Thus, industrialisation of agriculture led to a number of poor whites falling into degeneracy and having to rely on relief.²⁶⁷

Machines soon replaced human labour and for a time poor whites had to compete with the machines as they saw their wages slowly decrease.²⁶⁸ The tenant labour and sharecroppers had a love of the land, but those who worked the machines such as tractors only regarded it as job.²⁶⁹ This was the case in *The Grapes of Wrath* and is explained as follows:

And at last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won't work any more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop.²⁷⁰

In *Tobacco Road*, the land that the Lesters live on belongs to Captain John Harmon. Before the First World War, Jeeter worked for him on shares.²⁷¹ However, it soon became unprofitable and Harmon sold up his livestock and equipment and moved, however, he allowed the Lesters to continue living on the land. The following excerpt explains his reason and the possibilities of what could have been if he had commercialised:

Rather than attempt to show his tenants how to conform to the newer and more economical methods of modern agriculture, which he thought would have been an impossible task from the start, he sold the stock and implements and moved away. An intelligent employment of his land, stocks, and implements would have enabled Jeeter, and scores of others who had become dependent upon Captain John, to raise crops for food and crops to be sold at a profit. Cooperative and corporate farming would have saved them all.²⁷²

In Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, Anse longs for the days before technological advancements. All his anger is directed at the road that was built near his home and blames it for his taxes, his

²⁶⁶ N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, p. 165.

²⁶⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 316 & 337.; N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, pp. 165 & 179.

²⁶⁸ N. Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture*, p. 135.

²⁶⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 5.

²⁷⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 5.

²⁷¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

²⁷² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

son getting carpenter notions and then injuring himself and for taking his other son to the First World War, leaving him to struggle alone on the land.²⁷³

Laws that affected and led to whites becoming poor will be the last factor examined under the “Hand of Man” part one. There were a number of laws that led to the eventual poverty of poor whites. In South Africa, many laws were enacted to help and protect the poor whites, however, there were others that hindered them and caused poverty. Roman Dutch Law was one of the largest contributing factors and exacerbated the crisis over land. The Roman Dutch Law of inheritance compelled the division of property equally amongst the sons.²⁷⁴ The majority of Afrikaners were Calvinists and believed that all male children should inherit equally (not female children).²⁷⁵ The result was that inherited land became increasingly smaller the more it was divided and soon overpopulated in terms of people and livestock, to the extent where it became nearly impossible for many whites to make a living from the land.²⁷⁶ These families were often large and each son wanted his own farm.²⁷⁷ Furthermore, large pieces of land were required to produce enough for the family’s survival due to their isolation, out-dated farming techniques and conservatism. Linked to the fact that there was no more land available, many became destitute.²⁷⁸ Furthermore, it is evident in *Die Plaasverdeling* that there were also a number of costly legal procedures that needed to be undertaken for the land to become rightfully inherited.²⁷⁹ In both *Droogte* and *Die Plaasverdeling* the impact of Roman Dutch Law is evident. The land had been divided and when drought came, the small piece of land was incapable of providing for the livestock.²⁸⁰

Legislation also impacted a number of woodcutters in the Humansdorp, Knysna and George areas²⁸¹ who made their living from chopping wood. These poor whites had to pay a specified amount to either the private land owners or to the government for every tree they felled. The start of the twentieth century saw timber become scarce and the government implemented a law that restricted wood cutting. Overcutting continued, as for many poor whites this was their

²⁷³ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Anse 32-33.

²⁷⁴ E.J. Bottomley, *Poor White*, p. 33.; J. Bottomley, “The Orange Free State and the Rebellion of 1914: The Influence of Industrialisation, Poverty and Poor Whitism”, in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992, p. 37.

²⁷⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 42.; J. Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today”, *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, p. 1281.

²⁷⁶ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 309. R.A. Lewis, “A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1973, pp. 16-19.

²⁷⁷ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, p. 86.

²⁷⁸ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 309.

²⁷⁹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 286.

²⁸⁰ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 14.; A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 360 & 378

²⁸¹ These were regions of high rainfall.

only source of income. The government responded by instituting special registered woodcutters through the Forest Act of 1913. The state allotted an individual the timber he could fell and if he overstepped, his name would be deleted off the register and his licence revoked. However, this resulted in many poor whites cutting illegally or facing becoming destitute.²⁸² One of the best novel examples can be seen in *Kringe in die Bos (Circles in a Forest)* by Dalene Matthee.²⁸³ This historical novel was written retrospectively and done by doing research regarding the people and period, rather than being based on the author's own experience.

There were a number of such laws. As mentioned, in *Die Trekboer*, Antonie is forced by the law to dip his sheep against scab before entering a new district regardless of whether or not his sheep had the disease. Not only was this a costly exercise in terms of money, but it also resulted in many of his sheep, who were already ill and starving, to die, causing him to lose a part of his only livelihood.²⁸⁴ Antonie also has other encounters with the law and finds them to be especially disadvantageous to poor whites.²⁸⁵ He becomes very angry about all the laws and feels they were put in place to keep the poor, poor. He states:

*“Die Wet vereis...” was al wat hy gehoor het. Alweer 'n slag die Wet! Waar 'n mens kom bedreig hulle jou met die Wet. Met jou eie vee mag jy nie trek soos jy wil nie: die skaapinspekteur kom met 'n Wet; die vlees van jou skape kan jy nie op die delwery verkoop soos jy wil nie, dit moet juis in kwarte wees: die slagter se Wet; en nou is hier alweer 'n Wet – en wat vir 'n Wet?*²⁸⁶

(“The law requires...” was all he heard. The law again! Wherever you go they threaten you with the law. You cannot move around where you want with your own sheep: the sheep inspector comes with a Law, you cannot sell the meat from your sheep as you want to on the diggings, it must be in quarters: the butchers Law, and now again another Law – and what for a law?)

In the USA, laws of inheritance were different and depended on state laws. During the colonial period, English laws of inheritance, primogeniture, were followed whereby titles and property²⁸⁷ were left to the eldest male child. However, the primogeniture laws were repealed

²⁸² Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, pp. 146-147.; A. Grundlingh, “‘God Het Ons Arm Mense die Houtjies Gegee’: Poor white Woodcutters in the Southern Cape Forest Area, c. 1900-1939” in *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, pp. 44 & 51-55.

²⁸³ D. Matthee, *Circles in a Forest*. Harmondsworth: Viking, 1984.

²⁸⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 72.

²⁸⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 76.

²⁸⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 174.

²⁸⁷ Land, material wealth, wealth and people

at the time of the War of Independence and saw a number of states codify common-law provisions while making changes to English law and procedures. Children could inherit equal shares regardless of whether they were male or female and later provision was also made for widows.²⁸⁸ Debt could also be inherited from an estate which is evident in *Tobacco Road*. Initially, Jeeter's grandfather had owned the land. By the time Jeeter's father inherited it, approximately one-half was used to pay taxes and satisfy the county's claim from year to year. When his father died, what was left of the Lester lands and debts was willed to Jeeter. The foreclosure of the mortgage soon happened to pay the creditors, the timber was all cut and another large portion of the land sold.²⁸⁹

There were also a number of other laws that restricted poor whites and caused poverty, such as the Agricultural Adjustment Act (1933) and others mentioned in Chapter four. In the 1880s and 1890s, the Alabama legislature responded to demands by landowners that livestock must be fenced in. The "Fence Law" was used by the wealthy with access to power to control yeomen and poor whites. Prior yeoman, small farmers and some poor whites maintained large herds that had been allowed to roam the forests freely, with the only legal requirement being that they be branded. These laws made it harder for these small farmers to maintain their independence and large herds forced them to scale down and thus forced them into tenancy.²⁹⁰

As discussed in the previous chapter, in the *Snopes* Trilogy, Mink Snopes' cow enters Houston's pasture. Houston states: "I warned you. You know the law in this country. A man must keep his stock up after ground's planted, or take the consequences."²⁹¹ Mink does not fetch his cow until the spring and tries to pay Houston for wintering it, however, Houston feels the price had gone up because he had fed her and his bull had inseminated her. Mink seeks justice. "I'll jest step over to the store and have a word with Uncle Billy and the constable." It is decided that he needs to work off the money owed to Houston at 50 cents a day. After he completed all the work, he returns the next day to get his cow, but Houston informs him that he owes two more days of work at 50 cents a day because of the pound fee. "The law says that when anybody has to take up a stray animal and the owner don't claim it before dark that same day, the man that took it up is entitled to a one-dollar pound fee."²⁹²

²⁸⁸ L. Acosta, Library of Congress, 'United States: Inheritance Laws in the 19th and 20th Centuries', <<https://stuff.coffeecode.net/www.loc.gov/law/help/inheritance-laws/unitedstates.php>>, March 2015. Accessed: 24 April 2023.

²⁸⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

²⁹⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 10, 67-68 & 243.

²⁹¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 100.

²⁹² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 649-663.

The Hand of Man (part two)

There were a number of reasons and causes of poor white poverty that were out of the control of the poor whites, however, there were a number of them who were not blameless or victims of circumstance and whose poverty rested on their own shoulders.²⁹³ This part of the “Hand of Man” examines the reasons and causes of white poverty that were regarded as of their own doing and fault. These include choices and a way of life, to mention a few. However, many of these causes are also a result of ignorance and lack of education.

The pioneer period in both South Africa and the USA had an impact on the poor whites. The conditions of life during these periods led to the development of attitudes and habits that were passed on as traditions to their descendants. The persistence of these “traditions” under new changed conditions led to maladjustment. In both countries, there was a disinclination to settle down and a readiness to move at any provocation. In South Africa, this was known as the *trek* (move) spirit and originally came to pass when stock farmers would move their herds in search of pastures. In the American South tenants and sharecroppers, who are similar to the South African equivalent *bywoners*, had no land of their own and little incentive to devote energy to someone else’s land. These types of farmers had a strong tendency to move to more favourable conditions.²⁹⁴

This way of life often resulted in isolation and it cannot be overestimated as a cause of poverty in terms of ignorance and illiteracy and allowed the pioneer mentality to develop and continue.²⁹⁵ In South Africa, it caused church traditions, family life and farming methods to become a fixed social pattern. New ideas, especially farming techniques, methods and advancements, were looked upon with suspicion and strongly opposed²⁹⁶ and much of what they knew and practiced was inherited or passed down.²⁹⁷ Many poor whites who lived in rural areas were completely isolated, living miles apart with virtually no common bond of organisation. It created a people who were uninformed and unsociable.²⁹⁸ Social isolation resulted in the hindrance of new ideas and developments. Thus, isolation created a type of “poor culture” and inherited poverty with specific characteristics.²⁹⁹ The isolation prevented

²⁹³ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 42.

²⁹⁴ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, pp. 2-3.

²⁹⁵ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 5.

²⁹⁶ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 11.

²⁹⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 12.

²⁹⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 34.

²⁹⁹ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 43-44.

young people from getting to know other young people they did not grow up with and often intermarriage and inter-breeding resulted and was also encouraged to keep land in the family.³⁰⁰

Isolation remained a popular theme in a number of the selected South African novels. In Van Bruggen's *Bywoners* the distance and isolation from other people is emphasised when an urban dweller, De Klerk, wanted to farm high up on the ridge which is described as so *uit die koers* (so far out of the way).³⁰¹ However, when De Klerk returned to the urban area, Sitman, a *bywoner*, and his family remained behind, *alleen in die wye ruimte* (alone in the wide open space) until they too finally returned to Vry's farm.³⁰²

Isolation created a suspicion for outsiders. In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Ampie marries his cousin Annemie, this is because there are most likely not many young girls his age in the area who come from the same poor-white background as him and whose parents would allow such a marriage. Annemie's father states that in the Bible Jacob married two of his cousins and was blessed and therefore has no problem with this marriage.³⁰³ The dependency on the Bible as a sole source of information or reference is also evident.

The American South experienced similar conditions as isolation occurred among poor whites as they continued to live in the barren outback and on the fringes of the westward expansion. The wealthier land owners hoarded land, resources and closed opportunities.³⁰⁴ In their isolation, the poor whites developed a unique subculture.³⁰⁵ Plantation owners had no need for poor whites and thus, poor whites were forced from the land confined to fringes of society, which limited them to isolated and unfertile patches of land to scrape a living from.³⁰⁶ Attitudes towards Southern poor whites played a central role in their early isolation.³⁰⁷ Many plantation owners bought up small farms around them not to have any poor white neighbours.³⁰⁸ Physical isolation caused poor whites to be shut out of the institutional life of the community.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. 22.; W.M. Macmillan, *Complex South Africa: An Economic Footnote to History*, p. 67.

³⁰¹ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 26.

³⁰² J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 74.

³⁰³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 172.

³⁰⁴ M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 28.

³⁰⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. xvii.

³⁰⁶ A.E. Thompson, "Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White", D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, pp. 33 & 43.; W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 30 & 65.

³⁰⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 3.

³⁰⁸ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 50.

³⁰⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 10.

In *Absalom, Absalom*, Thomas Sutpen lived in isolation as a child with his family on a mountain, in what would become West Virginia. The family was isolated and ignorant of the events and deeds happening off of the mountain, which is clear in the following extract.

“... he was born in West Virginia, in the mountains... where he had never even heard of, never imagined, a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing... Because where he lived the land belonged to anybody and everybody and so the man who would go to the trouble and work to fence off a piece of it and say “This is mine” was crazy... everybody had just what he was strong enough or energetic enough to take and keep... there was nothing in sight to compare and gauge the tales...”³¹⁰

Later, when Sutpen owned his plantation, he allowed a poor white to squat on his property, however, this was away from his house and enslaved people:

Jones who lived with his granddaughter in the abandoned fishing camp with its collapsing roof and rotting porch...³¹¹

Again, in *As I Lay Dying*, the reader encounters a poor white family living far out of the way in relative isolation again on a mountain ridge:

“Walk up that darn wall?”... Even with the horse it would take me fifteen minutes to ride up across the pasture to the top of the ridge and reach the house... Anse has not been in town in twelve years. And how his mother ever got up there to bear him... being hauled up and down a damn mountain on a rope.³¹²

In *Tobacco Road*, the Lester family also lived in isolation along a former Tobacco Road. Their exclusion from society is explained as follows:

There was nothing Jeeter could find to do in the sand hills that would pay him even a few cents a day for his labor. There were no farmers within twenty miles who hired help, because practically all of them were in Jeeter's condition, some of them in an even worse one; nor were there any lumber mills or turpentine stills anywhere near the tobacco road that would employ him.³¹³

³¹⁰ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 170-172.

³¹¹ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 140-141.

³¹² W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Peabody 36-37.

³¹³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

Furthermore, Jeeter refuses to leave the land to look for work in the urban areas or on another farm. He lived his whole life on the “Lester plantation”. He believes that ‘City ways ain’t God-given,’ ‘It wasn’t intended for a man with the smell of the land in him to live in a mill...’³¹⁴

Isolation impacted the poor whites on a number of different levels, which will be examined and include farming mismanagement and land overuse, as well as the lack of education. In both countries, antiquated and inefficient methods continued to be followed under changed conditions, resulting in impoverishment. The quantity of stock was deemed more important than the quality.³¹⁵ As mentioned under the “Hand of Man”, this was acceptable in areas of high rainfall where grazing was plentiful, however, when the borders and frontier were closed, this became more difficult to maintain, as well as when livestock needed to be fenced and when droughts hit.³¹⁶ Although not expressively clear in the selected South African novels, the fact that Antonie loses most of the sheep he owns in *Die Plaasverdeling* after the land is divided and the drought hits gives credence to this.³¹⁷

The exploitation of natural resources is another factor of isolation and pioneer mentality. Soil depletion or soil exhaustion has taken place in both countries on a large scale. This is due to the repeated planting of crops without conserving the soils’ fertility and adding manure or using crop rotation. It also resulted from overgrazing and trampling out natural grazing. The increase in population and the need to gain more than a subsistence living from the land resulted in the extraction and destruction of the land.³¹⁸ It was not only nature, but also bad veld/field management and farming practices that resulted in soil erosion and soil infertility. As mentioned in chapter four, in the American South, it was the tobacco crop that robbed the soil of nutrients and quickly depleted it. Once the soil was depleted, they simply moved on to the next piece of land, leaving large unproductive pieces of land in their wake.³¹⁹ These were usually the places where the poor whites ended up.³²⁰

The overuse and mismanagement of land is also referred to in the American South novels. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, this is apparent in an extract between bank workers and the tenants:

³¹⁴ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 8.

³¹⁵ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 3.

³¹⁶ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 190.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 10, 67-68 & 243.

³¹⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1932.

³¹⁸ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, pp. 3-4.

³¹⁹ J.W. Harris, *The Making of the American South: A Short History, 1500-1877*, pp. 12-14. W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Vol. 1, p. 15.

³²⁰ W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, p. 22.; .M.R. Mell, “Poor Whites of the South”, *Social Forces*, 17(2). 1938, p. 157.; W.J. Cooper & T.E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Vol. 1, p. 260.

You know the land is poor... If the dust only wouldn't fly. If the top would only stay on the soil, it might not be so bad... You know the land's getting poorer. You know what cotton does to the land; robs it, sucks all the blood out of it... The squatters nodded—they knew, God knew. If they could only rotate the crops they might pump blood back into the land... Well, it's too late... The tenant system won't work any more. But you'll kill the land with cotton... We know. We've got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we'll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land.³²¹

Similarly, in the *Snopes* Trilogy, Mink examines "...the yellow and stunted stand of his corn, yellow and stunted because he had had no money to buy fertiliser to put beneath it and owned neither the stock nor the tools to work it properly with..."³²² He also had no one to help him and it was solely his physical strength and endurance that kept the crop growing in a normal climate. With the dry summer and subsequent continuous rain, the odds were against him.³²³

The mismanagement of land is again explained in *Tobacco Road*. When Jeester's grandfather owned the land it had been the most desirable soil in the entire west-central part of Georgia. His grandfather used the land to cultivate tobacco. When Jeeter's father inherited the land he used it to raise cotton exclusively. However, with "the sandy loam he found it necessary to use more and more fertiliser each year. The loose sandy soil would not hold the guano³²⁴ during the hard summer rains, and it was washed away before the roots could utilise it."³²⁵ By the time Jeeter is old enough to work in the fields the land had become too expensive to work, the soil was depleted by the constant raising of cotton and it was not possible to get a quarter of a bale to the acre. The land was stripped of all its nutrients due to the farming techniques and extractive crops that were planted.³²⁶

In South Africa, it was the move to the urban areas that ultimately ended the isolation, which is evident in a number of the selected South African novels. People were forced together in smaller spaces, worked side by side and lived right next to one another, which resulted in much more interaction. Isolation had no place where people had to stick together to gain certain needs. This was the case in the American South when many moved to work in factories. However, there were still large communities that remained isolated.

³²¹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 5.

³²² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 214.

³²³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 214.

³²⁴ A type of fertiliser made of the excrement of birds or bats.

³²⁵ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³²⁶ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

Isolation caused the poor whites to become ignorant of the changing times. The poor white never kept account in a business-like way of income and expenditure. Many lived in a self-sufficing domestic economy and thus, bookkeeping was not required. Many lacked the knowledge and economic possibilities the land and natural resources could provide and thus, allowed material riches to slip through their fingers. For example, in South Africa, the development of the great diamond and gold industries was carried out by immigrants and in the American South the commercialisation of coal deposits and forests also fell into the hands of others.³²⁷ In South Africa, poor whites were unfamiliar with business methods and practices, such as signing contracts. Economic competition and the accumulation of large debts that they were unable to pay back resulted in many losing everything they owned and becoming destitute.³²⁸

Through a number of the selected South African novels, the reader is made aware that most poor whites were unable to work with money and accumulated debts they were unable to pay back, forcing them from the rural area to the urban area to earn a wage. In *Bywoners*, a shop account arrives for Gouws. “*Nugter weet hoe ek dit sal betaal kry! My hele oes gaan daarmee heen!*” (“Goodness knows how I will pay it! My whole crop will have to go.”). He decides to go to the mines rather than remain in poverty.³²⁹ In *Droogte*, Soois and his brothers have to sell their farms in order to pay their debt. *Die Jood, by wie oom Soois die meeste skuld het, het die plasie van driehonderd morges... gekoop en die ou klompie maer skape...* (The Jew, to whom Soois had the most debt purchased the farm of three hundred morgen and the flock of thin sheep). They too move to the urban area *waar oom Soois van nou aan as 'n spoorwegarbeider sal werk* (where Soois finds work as a railway labourer).³³⁰ In *Die Plaasverdeling*, Antonie is also unable to settle his debts due to a range of factors. A number of his sheep die and the others are so thin that he is unable to sell them. He too has no other option than to *trek* (move).³³¹ In *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, Bredenhand loses his farm due to failed crops, no markets, locusts, ground tax, debt and the estate after his wife's death. Unlike the others, he remained in the rural area doing odd manual work for the farmers to earn a living. *Die ewige kwessie tussen dagwerk en stukwerk... Die mense bekribbel sy dagwerk, omdat hy oor hulle verleë is en hulle nie oor hom nie, of uit armoede of vreksuinigheid.* (The eternal issue between day work and piece work... People skimp on his day work because he is dependent on them and they are not dependent on him, or out of poverty or stinginess).³³²

³²⁷ R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 3.

³²⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 41-43.

³²⁹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 31 & 35.

³³⁰ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 140.

³³¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 346 & 363-365.

³³² J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 20.

In the selected American South novels, with the exception of Flem Snopes, Wall Street Snopes and Thomas Sutpen who pull themselves out of poverty, the other poor whites do not have much money at all. The Joad family in *The Grapes of Wrath* do try to work with the little they have very sparingly.³³³ However, Anse Bundren in *As I Lay Dying* wastes money, after he is plunged into debt, on new teeth and getting cleaned up and shaved to find a new wife.³³⁴

Poor business practices could also lead to ruin. Signing surety was one such practice because if the farmer failed it was the person who signed the surety who would be held responsible for the debt. Ignorance in business dealings, debt, the unexpected and being unprepared for the worst are some of the main causes of poverty throughout the selected novels. For those who lost it all in the rural areas and were unable to make a living otherwise, the urban areas appeared to be their only option to earn a living by selling their labour.

In *Droogte*, Gert makes the point that he could not sign surety for Soois. He explains

“My oorlee vader bet almelewe gesê:’ Leen of gee ’n man liewers geld voor jy vir hom borgstaan!”³³⁵

(“My deceased father always said rather loan or give a man money, but never sign surety for him.”) He knew that the misfortunes of others could ruin the person who signed the surety.

Similar situations existed in the American South, however, during the antebellum period poor whites were kept ignorant and excluded from the wider economy by the elite plantation owners out of fear that the poor whites would corrupt the enslaved.³³⁶ Sharecroppers and tenants would sign contracts to which they would be held regardless of whether the crop failed. Many poor whites could not read and contracts were often verbal, which also led to disputes and destitution.³³⁷

In *Tobacco Road*, Jeeter does not consider his loss of land and goods used to pay his debts as anything other than a man-made calamity brought about by others. However, throughout the novel the reader is reminded how lazy he is. When he worked for Harmon, he had been allowed to buy on credit, but when Harmon had given up farming, the credit had also ended

³³³ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*. New York: Viking Press, 1939, eBook.

³³⁴ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Cash 194-195.

³³⁵ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 92-93.

³³⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 87.

³³⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 59-60.

and no one in the area or closest town would grant Jeeter credit, as he virtually owned nothing.³³⁸

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the farmers explained that the land had always been in their family, but that a bad year came and some money needed to be borrowed from the bank and then slightly more until: “The bank owned the land then, but we stayed and we got a little bit of what we raised.” They felt they had measured it and broke it, were born on it and some had died for it. Many eventually lost the land they owned by constantly borrowing.³³⁹

Ignorance about contracts and the law in terms of business dealings is also evident in the *Snopes* Trilogy. A poor white, Henry Armstid, tries to purchase a horse. However, the auctioneer will not accept his money. The auctioneer then gives the money to Flem Snopes, the owner of the horses, to keep and tells Henry’s wife she can get the money from Flem. Henry never gets the horse nor his wife the money. His wife takes Flem to court, but the court rules in favour of Snopes when his cousin lies and says Snopes gave the money back to the auctioneer.³⁴⁰

Lastly, although justified, in *God’s Little Acre*, Will Turner and the other mill workers go on strike because their wages were cut, however, they did not expect the mill to close. Thus, they rushed to a decision without considering the consequences and Will again acted rashly when trying to turn the mill on again and gets shot.³⁴¹

In chapter seven, laziness and dependency are associated with poor whites and are viewed as character traits, but laziness could also be viewed as a cause of poverty. In both cases, the poor whites in South Africa and the American South had to rely on their own work and labour to set themselves up after settlement.³⁴² Due to their subsistence way of life many poor whites were regarded as lazy because they did not do more to help themselves.³⁴³ In South Africa, this laziness was linked to the labour that some poor whites considered inferior or “black work”. Many would not perform certain jobs unless desperate and if they did, would not work for the same wages or less than blacks would receive.³⁴⁴ This racist attitude prevented many from obtaining employment, which would have ensured some form of income.³⁴⁵ Like South Africa,

³³⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³³⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 5.

³⁴⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 280-281 & 307-308.

³⁴¹ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*. New York: Viking Press, 1933.

³⁴² R.W. Wilcocks, *Rural Poverty Among Whites in South Africa and the South of the United States*, p. 1.

³⁴³ A.E. Thompson, “Trashed: The Myth of the Southern Poor White”, D. Phil. Dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2014, p. 10.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 107.

³⁴⁴ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 340.

³⁴⁵ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 351.

in the American South, there was an aversion to certain work. The slave system created a stigma that all forms of physical labour, especially agricultural labour in the South was enslaved or “nigger” work and thus, poor whites who refused to do such work were considered lazy.³⁴⁶ However, Merritt provides a few cases where poor whites held out for a better price for their labour and felt that their worth was more than what was being offered. In another case, work was offered to poor whites that was deemed too dangerous and risky for valuable enslaved labour.³⁴⁷ Regardless, the majority of poor whites in South Africa and the American South were willing to work, however, there always existed an element who would not help themselves and were content to remain shiftless and dependent.

Education or the lack of education was the main and most important cause of poor whiteness. The lack of education and ignorance filters across all aspects and of the “Hand of God” and the “Hand of Man” and it is the foremost reason for white poverty. A lack of proper education often made poor whites unemployable. The Carnegie Commission realised the importance of education for poor whites and thus, *Education and the Poor White* became one of the key five aspects they investigated.³⁴⁸ The biggest contributing factor to poor-white poverty was the large group of subsistence farmers where a relatively low education prevailed.³⁴⁹ When the *trekboers* (moving/roaming farmers) left the Cape and headed into the interior, they also outran the slow march of education, modernisation and development.³⁵⁰ Rural, isolated whites gave their children a rudimentary education. Children were taught to read and write for the purpose of confirmation. Teachers were scarce and virtually unqualified for the task. Qualified teachers and proper schools were initially only to be found in the Cape Province.³⁵¹ Education in the South and North also differed. It was believed that pioneer Afrikaners were deprived of educational facilities, professional training, professional differentiation and schooling, but they believed they did not need them as long as there were no cities.³⁵²

However, with the discovery of precious minerals, South Africa moved rapidly from a subsistence system and economy to a commercial system and cash economy and this move caught many whites unaware and made their lack of education evident.³⁵³ Due to isolation,

³⁴⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 97.; J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 7.

³⁴⁷ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 195.

³⁴⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*. Stellenbosch: Ecclesia, 1932.

³⁴⁹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 189.

³⁵⁰ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 183.

³⁵¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*, pp. 13-17.

³⁵² F.A. Van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 308.

³⁵³ J. Fourie, “The South African Poor White Problem in the Early 20th Century: Lessons for Poverty Today”, *Management Decision*, 45(8), 2007, pp. 1275-1276.

poor whites in South Africa had to learn other skills in order to survive, some of which they were able to use for a time in the urban areas.³⁵⁴ According to the Carnegie Commission, a considerable portion of labour on the farm/rural area was non-agricultural.³⁵⁵ Schools became more formal with the introduction of church schools and mission schools, but many only received a primary school education. It was towards the middle of the nineteenth century when the DRC recognised that the educational needs in rural areas remained inadequate and also stepped in.³⁵⁶ Many Afrikaners did not see any need to provide their children with a proper education and were reluctant in allowing them to receive training in skills from industrial schools, resulting in many remaining unemployable.³⁵⁷ However, the government became aware of the importance of educating children and preparing them for industrial life. Thus, after the Anglo-Boer War, free, compulsory education was introduced.³⁵⁸ However, there are often accounts which state parents still had to pay fees.³⁵⁹ This is evident in *Die Trekboer*.

“*Ek verneem dat u kinders het wat skoolgaande ouderdom bereik het en wat nie op skool is nie. Nou kom ek as sekretaris van die Raad u maar net aansê dat die Wet vereis dat... op die dorp... jy kan betaal om jou kinders daar in die koshuis te laat inwoon.*”³⁶⁰

(“I understand that you have children who have reached school age and who are not in school. Now, as secretary of the Council, I have come to tell you that the Law requires that... in the town... you can pay to let your children live in the residences.”)

After the War, the government realised the importance of educating the poor whites as part of the nationalistic outlooks.³⁶¹ As mentioned in Chapter six, language and Anglicisation were factors that also deterred children’s education and mixed-race schools were also frowned upon. Many children only received a little schooling and were kept from schools, as parents had a need for their labour to help work the farm or because they could earn money from their wages.³⁶² This is again evident in *Die Trekboer*. “... *My kinders bly hier: ek het hulle nodig om*

³⁵⁴ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 66.

³⁵⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, p. 142.

³⁵⁶ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 50.

³⁵⁷ H. Gillomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 319.; D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, p. 76.; R.A. Lewis, “A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1973, p. 15.; E.J. Bottomley, *Poor White*, p. 33.

³⁵⁸ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 221-222.; L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa III. A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, p. 12.

³⁵⁹ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa III. A Place in the City: The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid*, pp. 9 & 27.

³⁶⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 174-175.

³⁶¹ L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, p. 224.

³⁶² L. Callinicos, *A People’s History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*, pp. 31, 219 & 249.

*vir meneer Gerber te werk.*³⁶³ (“My children remain here: I need them to work for Mr Gerber.”) However, education remained one of the most important solutions to end the poor-white problem³⁶⁴ and this was stressed by every conference and commission.³⁶⁵

In *Bywoners*, De Klerk’s wife is concerned for Sitman’s children and exclaims:

“Daardie Sitmantjies moet 'n opvoeding kry soos enige kind van christelike ouers. Nou groei hulle op soos heidings! Daar is die Weeshuis, waar hulle sal kan leer die onderskeid van wat goed en wat kwaad is en ook boweal van die liefde van God. Hulle sal daar onderwys ontvang en naderhand 'n ambag leer en werk vir hulle brood!”³⁶⁶
(“Those little Sitmans’ must receive an education like any child belonging to Christian parents. They are growing up like heathens! There is the Orphanage where they will learn to differentiate between good and evil and above all else the love of God. They will receive an education and afterwards learn a trade and work for their bread!”)

In *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, after Bredenhands wife passes away, his oldest daughter, age 15, is taken out of school to help look after the running of the home as well as the younger children. She is forced to take on this responsibility.³⁶⁷ In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Ampie does not remain in school, as he lacked the ability to grasp concepts as easily as the other children, even those younger than him and thus he becomes a little “wild”.³⁶⁸ Schooling and education were evidently not a top priority. Ampie’s father is illiterate, which is made evident when he needs to pretend his hand is injured and requires Ampie’s help to sign his own name.³⁶⁹ In *Die Trekboer*, Antonie’s children do not attend school as they are on the road constantly moving. His children help with the work concerning the livestock, harvesting and on the diggings.³⁷⁰

Similarly, the American South suffered from the problem of illiteracy and lack of education.³⁷¹ Especially during the antebellum period (before the Civil War), when the majority of poor whites lived in rural isolation, there were limited educational opportunities and plantation

³⁶³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 176.

³⁶⁴ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 615.

³⁶⁵ R.R. Vosloo, “The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations”, *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae*, 37(2), 2011, pp. 67-85.

³⁶⁶ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 66-67.

³⁶⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, pp. 46-47.

³⁶⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 8.

³⁶⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 61.

³⁷⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, pp. 175 & 185.

³⁷¹ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 33.

owners kept them uneducated and illiterate³⁷² because they wanted to keep them uninformed and politically apathetic.³⁷³ Like South Africa, there was little need for education at first,³⁷⁴ but unlike the poor whites in South Africa, the majority of Southern poor whites were illiterate.³⁷⁵ Many were unable to sign their own name or tell their own age and very few could read and write.³⁷⁶ Poor whites in the South moved around often, which disrupted their chances of training and education.³⁷⁷ They were not encouraged to strive to be more than low-wage labourers.³⁷⁸ Many were unable to pay the price per head that the school required.³⁷⁹ In the 1840s, an advocate for public education in North Carolina claimed that education would help eliminate poverty and a prominent citizen of Iredell County stated that it was ignorance and illiteracy that were preludes to poverty and that those suffering were not even aware of their suffering. He further expressed the fact that education would lead to progress.³⁸⁰ It was only after the Civil War that the extent of the Southern poor white ignorance and illiteracy came to light.³⁸¹ There were schools available, but it depended on the parents if the children could attend and poor whites were the least likely group to take advantage of an education system.³⁸² Poor white children either never attended school or only attended a couple of months a year.³⁸³ This was mostly because children were needed to help work on the farms or because the parents needed their wages.³⁸⁴ Some children on the mills had to work full twelve-hour days and thus did not obtain an education and many grew to adulthood unable to read and write.³⁸⁵ Obtaining an education was neither easy nor a priority.³⁸⁶ Reconstruction and the move to becoming more industrialised through agricultural transformation dragged the poor white into embracing education to improve and better their lives, especially when free public education and trade schools became widely available.³⁸⁷ A lack of education often

³⁷² Due to the high rates of illiteracy, poor whites left virtually no written records of their own.

³⁷³ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 1.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 162.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 9, 24, 26 & 143. M. Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*, p. 58.; N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. 98.

³⁷⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 3.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 147.

³⁷⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 193.

³⁷⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 143 & 146.

³⁷⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 22.

³⁷⁸ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 144.

³⁷⁹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 146.

³⁸⁰ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 54-55

³⁸¹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 152-155.

³⁸² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, pp. 55 & 58.

³⁸³ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 147-148.

³⁸⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 87, 235 & 301.

³⁸⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 193.

³⁸⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 87

³⁸⁷ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 36.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 337.

determined the occupation of a poor white. They had no relevant job skills or the functional literacy to learn any. Illiteracy afforded them little opportunities, whereas industrial work was one way out of poverty.³⁸⁸ Education became to be regarded as a cure to child labour and poverty.³⁸⁹

The lack of schooling is also apparent in the selected American South novels. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Thomas Sutpen states that he had some schooling, “he was sent to school for about three months one winter—an adolescent boy of thirteen or fourteen in a room full of children three or four years younger than he and three or four years further advanced...” His father sent him, but he does not know why he decided to do so all of a sudden.³⁹⁰ In *Tobacco Road*, Jeeter’s son Dude never attended school and was never encouraged to do so, as Jeeter stated: “he was needed at home to help him do the work.” His daughter Ellie May does attend, but “she returned home before noon and never went back. The teacher told her she was too old to attend with the little children...”³⁹¹ The two younger children in *The Grapes of Wrath* also do not attend school because the family is constantly moving and when they find work the children are expected to help with the picking. However, their mother is adamant that once they settle, the children should attend school. “Soon’s we get set down, they’ll go to school...”³⁹²

The only exception comes in the *Snopes* Trilogy. Wall Street Snopes realises the importance of schooling and education. Wall is twelve when he moves to the town and finds out about school. He forces his parents to let him go and also takes his younger brother with him. They started together in the kindergarten class and Wall works hard. In a week, he is moved to the first grade and by the Christmas to the second. He moved quickly to the third and the following year he went to the fourth grade. When asked why he wanted to attend school, he answered: “I want to learn how to count money.” The message is that with his education, he pulled himself out of poverty and continued to encourage his brother to go to school.³⁹³

Although the lack of education was not always the fault of the poor white due to isolation or costs, the lack of education resulted in: difficulties transitioning from subsistence to cash economies; the division and inheritance of land and debt; mismanagement and the destruction of land leading to man-made droughts; the eventual becoming of a tenant, sharecropper or

³⁸⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 124 & 163.

³⁸⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 87, 163 & 273.

³⁹⁰ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, pp. 186-187.

³⁹¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³⁹² J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapters 6, 17, 24, 26 & 28.

³⁹³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 444-445 & 459.

bywoner, due to land being lost; inefficient farming methods; dependency; laziness; health problems and illnesses; lack of dietary knowledge; inability to deal with animal diseases and pests; feelings of inferiority and ability to compete with blacks and immigrants; and difficulty adapting to changes such as industrialisation. Nearly every cause of poor whiteness can be linked to a lack of education and its importance in bringing the poor white out of poverty.

Poor whites in both South Africa and the American South were involved in the making and selling of alcohol, which was illegal.³⁹⁴ As discussed in chapter seven, alcohol abuse was another character trait of the poor whites. It was, however, the participation in the consumption thereof that led to poverty and destitution. According to the Carnegie Commission, the isolation in which many of the rural poor whites lived made it difficult for them to obtain alcohol regularly, as did their poverty and lack of cash. However, there were cases of intemperance that played a role in eventual impoverishment.³⁹⁵ Alcohol was seen as a social evil to which previously ignorant rural Afrikaners were now exposed, which resulted in many referring to Johannesburg as “Judasburg”.³⁹⁶ Those in urban areas, especially the diggings, spent large portions of their earnings on purchasing alcohol. In South Africa, many poor whites confessed to drinking alcohol as an incentive to alleviate their suffering both physically and emotionally.³⁹⁷ This addiction caused entire families to resort to beggary and broke up many homes.³⁹⁸

In the American South men were unable to provide adequately for their families as they spent all their money on liquor.³⁹⁹ Drunkenness and alcoholism became very serious problems. Alcohol was central to a majority of problems and poor white vices. Southern poor whites were predisposed to becoming addicts with many dying from alcoholism or alcohol poisoning.⁴⁰⁰ Regardless, drinking continued to rise. Settlers on the westwards fringes lived in more rural, desolate places and claimed to use alcohol to relieve feelings of anxiety and loneliness. Other poor whites used drunken sprees to turn their thoughts from the failure of their own lives.⁴⁰¹

In *Tobacco Road*, the Lesters do not abuse alcohol, but as mentioned in chapter seven, they do waste their money on snuff that they appear to be addicted to and constantly think about. They believe the snuff helps stave off the hunger. Jeeter even admits that he buys jars of snuff

³⁹⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. 84.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 267.

³⁹⁵ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, p. 84.

³⁹⁶ E. Pretorius, “Die Briels: Smartlappe en Tranetrekkers van Weleer”, *De Kat*, 4 (2), 1988, p. 19.

³⁹⁷ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White II*, pp. 84-85.

³⁹⁸ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 40-41.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 207-208.

³⁹⁹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 195-196.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 207.

⁴⁰⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 201-202.

⁴⁰¹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 201-202.

instead of food and Ada states that it helps calm her. Ada had been using snuff since the age of eight, which affected her health. Her teeth had all fallen out and she had a constant desire for more snuff.⁴⁰² Jeeter places the importance of snuff next to the necessity of food in the following statement: “Without snuff and food, life seemed not worth living any longer.”⁴⁰³

Lastly, there were poor white people who were responsible for their own poverty due to the senseless ideas they came up with to get rich quickly, while others were naïve enough to be taken advantage of. In the selected South African novels, a number of the characters are too trusting and naïve. In Chapter seven, it was indicated that villainous poor whites deceive and take advantage of other gullible poor whites.⁴⁰⁴ Similarly in *Die Plaasverdeling*, Antonie’s brother Jacob is completely different from him. Jonker states that if you placed the two brothers next to one another, a stranger would automatically see Antonie as the foreman and Jacob as the boss.⁴⁰⁵ Antonie suffers from an inferiority complex and is done in time and time again by his brother, who also secretly wants to own the whole farm and is deceitful with the division of inheritance.⁴⁰⁶

“Die saailande, die huis, drie-kwart van die rivier, die dam, die sandveld, ’n goeie lappie weiveld en ’n stukkie van die rante vir skuiling as die suidewind kwaai word!”... “En Antonie s’n?”... “Die rante en ’n kwart van die rivier!”⁴⁰⁷

(“The arable land, the house, three quarters of the river, the dam, the sand veld, a good piece of grazing land and a piece of the ridge for shelter when the southern wind starts up!”... “And Antonie's?”... “The ridge and a quarter of the river!”)

In *God’s Little Acre*, Ty Ty Walden has arable, fertile land that he could be farming, however, he is convinced that there is gold on his land. He employs two black sharecroppers to cultivate a small piece of land for him, while he and his sons spend their days digging large holes across his property searching for gold. By the end of the novel, they had still not found any gold.⁴⁰⁸ This was a waste of time and resources and this belief caused him to be classified as a poor white.

⁴⁰² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapters 3, 7, 8, 9 & 13.

⁴⁰³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

⁴⁰⁴ Bart in *Ampie: Die Trilogy* deceives Ampie and Sagrys in *Droogte* deceives his brothers.

⁴⁰⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 53. Jacob farms with seed and is very entrepreneurial in regard to business practice. He lives a decent life in good conditions. Antonie farms with sheep and has no idea about business or how to work with money. He is naïve and a day dreamer. He lives in a *hartbeeshuisie* in the same manner as a *bywoner*.

⁴⁰⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, pp. 65 & 306.

⁴⁰⁷ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 239.

⁴⁰⁸ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, pp. 3 & 7.

A Reflection of the Hand

There were numerous causes and reasons for the poverty of poor whites in both South Africa and the American South. In all instances, the “Hand of God” and the “Hand of Man” (part one: those causes over which they had no control and part two: those which they caused themselves) play pivotal roles. The circumstances may have differed as well as the times, but a number of causes were very similar in nature in both countries. (See Table Five) This is evident in both the academic literature, as well as in the novels, once again underscoring that poor whiteness was a transnational problem.

Table Five: Comparative Causes of Poor Whitism

Hand of God		
Cause	South Africa	The American South (USA)
Drought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Die Sprinkaanbeamppte van Sluis</i> • <i>Droogte</i> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Flood		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i>
Pests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Die Sprinkaanbeamppte van Sluis</i> • <i>Droogte</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>God's Little Acre</i>
Animal disease	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Droogte</i> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	
Human diseases		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Snopes Trilogy</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Hand of Man 1		
Closed borders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
War	<i>Bywoners</i> <i>Droogte</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i>
Depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Competition for work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Industrialisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bywoners</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Droogte</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Snopes Trilogy</i>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i>
Hand of Man 2		
Trek spirit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	
Isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Bywoners</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i>
Poor land management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Snopes Trilogy</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Poor business sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Bywoners</i> • <i>Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis</i> • <i>Droogte</i> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Snopes Trilogy</i> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>God's Little Acre</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Laziness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Bywoners</i> • <i>Droogte</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i>
Lack of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Bywoners</i> • <i>Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis</i> • <i>Droogte</i> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Snopes Trilogy</i> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> • <i>As I Lay Dying</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>God's Little Acre</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Alcohol/drug abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Droogte</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Absalom, Absalom!</i> • <i>Tobacco Road</i> • <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>
Naïve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ampie: Die Trilogie</i> • <i>Die Plaasverdeling</i> • <i>Die Trekboer</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>God's Little Acre</i>

CHAPTER NINE

Religion, Superstition and Perceptions

The poor whites in both South Africa and in the American South developed a unique, different and separate culture, with a specific outlook as a result of their poverty, class and position in society. They were regarded as different and pushed to the periphery of white society thus, different ideas, traits, traditions, cultural stances and views were formed. A few examples of these differences in culture can be observed in the creation of their own type of music,¹ past-times,² language as well as their religion and superstitions. This chapter considers religion, superstition and perceptions in the novels. In a sense this contributed to their stereotyping as “other” and in turn their own stereotyping of whom they perceived as “others”.

Religion

In both the case of South Africa and the American South, the religion and superstition of the poor whites were very closely linked and integrated with each other. In this section, the religion and superstitions of the poor whites in both countries are examined and compared and examples from the novels are used to further illustrate the differences and similarities.

As is evident in previous chapters, there are a number of similarities and differences between the poor whites in South Africa and those in the American South. Both countries were colonised by Europeans and thus, the poor whites are third and fourth generation descendants of these colonising people.³ The whites interacted and mixed with the indigenous or first people, as well as with others that also came later to South Africa and America. Thus, these whites were affected and shaped by a range of cultures and they were subjected and exposed to a number of different influences and traits, which in turn made them different from those in their respective “motherlands”. The influences included both spiritual and material culture and impacted the development of their own culture as they became South African poor whites and American South poor whites.

There is no consensus regarding what religion constitutes, but it can be defined as a range of social-cultural systems, which include: practices, behaviours, beliefs, views, morals, ethics, sanctified places, texts, prophecies and organisations, that relate humanity to specific

¹ In South Africa *smartlappe* became known as poor white music and presented a realism of the conditions and lives of the poor white South African. Similarly, in the USA country music, initially known as hillbilly music, also portrayed the difficulties and hardships of life in the South and was created and listened to by poor whites.

² In both countries, stock-car racing was a hobby or past-time for a large majority of poor whites, some even participating.

³ G.M. Fredrickson, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study in American and South African History*, pp. xxii-xxiii.; E.J. Bottomley, “Governing Poor Whites: Race, Philanthropy and Transnational Governmentality Between the United States and South Africa”, PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2016, pp. 27-28.

transcendental, spiritual and supernatural elements.⁴ Different religions may contain a number of different elements, such as faith, the divine, sacredness, ritual and a supernatural being(s).⁵ It is a way people deal with the ultimate concerns concerning their lives, as well as their fate after death. The relation and concern are expressed in terms of a relationship or attitude towards spirits, gods or a deity.⁶

Poor White Religion in South Africa

As previously stated, the Afrikaners made up the largest part of the group of poor whites in South Africa. Although approximately one-fifth of poor whites were English speaking, they were never as visible as the Afrikaner poor. Some also assumed Afrikaner identity as was evident in the early 1930s when a Dutch Reformed minister remarked that approximately 95% of his parish were Dutch and that the poor-white English speakers tended to become or adopt the “Dutch” language and outlook.⁷ Thus, it is the Afrikaner religion and beliefs that will be focused on in this section.

The majority of Afrikaners and thus the majority of poor whites in South Africa were Protestant Calvinists. The *Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church or DRC/NGK) and its two sister churches, the *Nederduitsch Hervormde Kerk* (Dutch Reformed Church or NHK)⁸ and the *Gereformeerde Kerk* (Reformed Church or GK), were the dominant churches among the Afrikaner.⁹ According to the Carnegie Commission, the poor white population in South Africa mainly fell under their jurisdiction.¹⁰ The European ancestors of the Afrikaner poor whites had a strong Calvinist tradition and the settlement in the Cape was built on the foundation of a Calvinist outlook before Calvinism relapsed into Scholasticism.¹¹ The Afrikaners are the only nation that came into being as a Calvinist nation and from its “birth” through its development until it was formed, Calvinism dominated every aspect of their lives:

⁴ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘Religion’, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>>, 24 June 2023. Accessed: 24 June 2023.

⁵ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, ‘Religion’, <<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/religion>>, 24 June 2023. Accessed: 24 June 2023.

⁶ Britannica, ‘Religion’, <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/religion>>, n.d. Accessed: 24 June 2023.

⁷ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State’s Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 605.

⁸ The re-reformed church.

⁹ I. Hexham, “Dutch Calvinism and the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism”, *African Affairs*, 79(315), 1980, p. 195.; R. Ross, “The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism”, in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminantie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociali Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 201.

¹⁰ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 47.

¹¹ A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 922.; J. Dobošová, “Calvinism in the Context of the Afrikaner Nationalism Ideology”, *Asian and African Studies*, 18(2), 2009, p. 305.

social, spiritual, religious, economic and political.¹² However, as soon as these European settlers landed on African soil a new nation was formed with a variety of circumstances and influences that made a mark on the people who would become the Afrikaners.¹³

It is important to note that Afrikaner poor whites cannot be understood if their religion is not taken into account, as it forms part of their everyday lives.¹⁴ Children were brought up with a Christian foundation and by the time they were adults it was integral to their worldview.¹⁵ The Bible was the focal point of their religion,¹⁶ and in particular it was in the Old Testament where they “found” God, identifying as the chosen people.¹⁷ Calvinism and the Old Testament are also reasons why the Afrikaners remained mostly white. The indigenous Khoisan and Bantu-speakers were regarded as non-believers or “heathens” and this differentiation that was made between “civilised” and “uncivilised” and was eventually made on colour.¹⁸ The Afrikaners used history as the ancient Hebrews did, which was to explain the past in moral terms and to guide their planning for the future. Thus, they possessed a mythicism, folklore and a “history” or historical memories that were handed down.¹⁹

Calvinism formed part of the Afrikaners identity and after the British occupation in 1806 and the start of the Anglicisation policy, which was directed at all levels, including schools and churches, many felt their identity threatened.²⁰ The Afrikaners took their religion and beliefs with them when they moved into the interior and it was there that they associated themselves with the Israelites and “God’s chosen people”. They believed they were placed in Africa by God to fulfil “His purpose”.²¹ The difficulties and tribulations they also faced were seen as parallels faced by the Israelites such as deserts, droughts, fountains, plagues, the “captivity”²²

¹² E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1476.; F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Afrikaner Quo Vadis*. Johannesburg: Voortrekkerpers, 1971, pp. 31-32.; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 5-6.

¹³ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *Afrikaner Quo Vadis*, 1971, p. 31.; E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1470.

¹⁴ C.C. Neppen, *Die Sosiale Gewete van die Afrikaanssprekendes*. Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1938, p. 58.; J. Dobošová, “Calvinism in the Context of the Afrikaner Nationalism Ideology”, *Asian and African Studies*, 18(2), 2009, p. 306.

¹⁵ E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1472.

¹⁶ Their forefathers in France and in Holland had suffered for freedom in order to read it.

¹⁷ A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 923.; E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1472-1473.

¹⁸ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, pp. 37-38.; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

¹⁹ D.H. Akenson, *God’s People: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*. New York: Cornell University Press, 1992, p. 63.

²⁰ F.A. van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster 1652-1974: An Introduction to the History of the Republic of South Africa*, p. 79.

²¹ R. Ross, “The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism”, in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminantie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociale Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 203.

²² The flight from bondage in the land of Egypt.

by the British and exodus into the interior to the Promised Land.²³ The Afrikaners saw the Old Testament as a mirror image of their own lives.²⁴

In Van Bruggen's *Die Sprinkaanbeampste van Sluis*, the Afrikaner *volk* are compared to the Israelites.

*... En as 'n mens daardie omstandigheid in betragting neem en jy kom na ons ou volkie toe, dan loop die sake hier maar net dieselfde. Ons is – jy kan maar sê – ook 'n uitverkore volk. Die voorouers het ook as voortrekkers in die wildernisse onder hul Moses en Aäron rondgeswerwe en voortdurend onder mekaar getwis. Hulle is ook gestraf deur oorloë, droogtes en sprinkane. Daar was ook broederoorloë onder ons gewees.*²⁵

(... And if one considers those circumstances and you take our small nation, then the matter is the same. We are – you can say – also a chosen people. The ancestors were also involved as pioneers/voortrekkers wandering the wilderness under their own Moses and Aaron and constantly quarrelled among themselves. They were also punished through wars, droughts and locusts. There was also fratricidal war among us.)

In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Booysen remarks that there a number of poor whites like Ampie *wat die adel van die Voortrekkers se bloed nog in hulle are het* (who still have the noble blood of the Voortrekker's in their veins).²⁶ Again emphasising that the poor whites were still part of the Afrikaner nation.

Their religion was not restricted to the walls of a church, but was practiced in every aspect of daily life, which determined the management of affairs and determined their world view.²⁷ In *Bywoners* by Van Bruggen, this is evident in the life and views of Andries Vry, the owner of the farm. His religious outlook is described as follows:

*... die Bybel is vir hom sy bron van kennis en troos. As ouderling hou hy die diens in sy ruime voorhuis vir sy gebuurte en in alles erken en eerbiedig hy die leiding en wil van God, waarvoor hy sielsonderworpe buig. Selfs die kwaaieste teenspoed, wat sy boerdery tref, sal hy met berusting dra en slegs meer sy afhanklikheid van God besef.*²⁸

²³ A. du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology", *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, pp. 920 & 924-925.

²⁴ I. Hexham, "Dutch Calvinism and the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism", *African Affairs*, 79(315), 1980, p. 195.

²⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampste van Sluis*, p. 64.

²⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 77.

²⁷ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1474.

²⁸ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 23.

(The Bible is his source of knowledge and a comfort to him. As an elder, he holds the service in his spacious front living-room for his neighbourhood and in everything he recognises and respects the guidance and will of God, to whom he bows his soul. Even against the worst adversity, which may befall his farm, he will bear it with resignation and be only more aware of his dependence on God.)

Afrikaner frontiersmen, mostly transhumant, lived in the interior with minimal links to anyone. In their isolation, they had no intellectual resources other than the Bible.²⁹ In *Die Plaasverdeling* by Jonker, Antonie finds the *bywoner* Uncle Jool *op sy houtbedjie besig om sy Bybel te lees* (on his small wooden bed busy reading his Bible).³⁰ This is an indication that many of the poor whites also had no other source material to read and study other than their Bible. Later in *Die Trekboer*, also by Jonker, he is found sitting outside his tent reading his Bible on a Sunday, which also shows that the reading of the Bible was a persistent element and was taken seriously.³¹

As mentioned in chapter eight, the Bible became an important source of education. Many isolated Afrikaners learned to read and write in order to understand what was written in the Bible, as well as to participate in confirmation and communion.³² In Van Bruggen's *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, religious study still takes place in Dutch and Afrikaans. The Bible, songs and psalms were still in Dutch.³³ In many rural and isolated towns the Bible knowledge of the youth was much better than that of the youth living in urban areas.³⁴ In *Die Sprinkaan beampte van Sluis*, Lambertus Bredenhand reflects on his children in the following statement:

*Hy sien sy kinders gesond na liggaam en siel, en merk veral dat hulle kop en skouers uitsteek bo hul proture in Bybelkennis. Sels Klein kan al party plekke mooi onthou van wat hy saans vir hulle voorlees en Ouboet kon al aangeneem geword het, as hy nie so jonk was nie.*³⁵

(He sees to the health of his children, body and soul, and notices that they are in front of their peers in Bible knowledge. Even Klein can already remember some of the scripture he reads to them at night and Ouboet could be confirmed if he was still not too young.)

²⁹ R. Ross, "The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism", in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Ondersheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historiese Opstellen Over Discriminantie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociali Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 215.

³⁰ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 280.

³¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 5.

³² A. du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology", *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 924.

³³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, pp. 161 & 202.

³⁴ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1474.

³⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampste van Sluis*, p. 23.

In *Die Plaasverdeling*, the importance of the Bible and religious studies for the children is evident in the following statement:

*Dis maar goed dat sy die kinders nie hul kos gegee en bed-toe gestuur het nie. Dis wat hulle baie graag sou wou gehad het. Dan loop hulle mos die godsdien mis.*³⁶

(It is a good thing she did not give the children their food and send them to bed. That is what they would very much have wanted. But then they would miss the religious service.)

In *Bywoners*, even the poor white Sitman's have a Bible in their wattle-and-daub house. Although it is evident they do not often read it or use it to teach their own children from it, it is important to them that they have one and are able to present it to the minister when he comes to visit.

*“Waar is ons Bybel?... Ons moet hom hê... Waarna lyk dit as die predikant kom en ons het nie eers 'n Bybel op die tafel nie!”... “Jy weet mos dat Neelsman hom lankal in die water laat val het; toe jy hom daaruit haal, het jy hom in die son laat droë en daar vergeet en nou lyk hy te sleg om vir 'n predikant te wys. Hy lê glo onder in jou gereedskapkis”... “Ons moet hom darem uithaal”, sê Sitman.*³⁷

(“Where is our Bible?... We have to have it... What does it look like when the minister comes and we do not have a Bible on the table!”... “You know that Neelsman let it fall into the water a long time ago; when you took it out you left it to dry in the sun and forgot about it, and now it looks too bad to show the minister. It is probably under your toolbox”... “We have to get it out at least”, said Sitman.)

In Van den Heever's *Droogte*, it is clear that even the deaf-dumb brother has been raised and taught to understand his religion. This reveals the importance of God and religion to the soul of the Afrikaner.

*Hy het diep eerbied vir die leraar; vir sy swart klere en sy wit dassie. Die predikant lê sy hand op sy hart om so na die sielstoestand van die doofstomme sukkelaar te vra. Daar is trane in Ou-Datie se oë en pateties druk hy sy twee harige hande op sy bors en dis of hy wil beduie hoe diep die verlange in sy siel na God is... Hy wys met sy hand na die hemel, kyk omhoog, en die predikant word ontroer oor die gelowigheid wat hy kry by iemand by wie hy skaars verstand verwag het.*³⁸

(He has a deep respect for the teacher; for his black clothes and white tie. The minister puts his hand on his heart to ask about the state of mind of the deaf-mute sufferer. There

³⁶ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 195.

³⁷ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 68.

³⁸ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 51.

are tears in Old-Daties's eyes and his two hairy hands are pathetically pressed on his chest and it is as if he wants to indicate how deep the longing in his soul is for God... He points his hand to the sky, looks up and the minister is moved by the faith he finds in someone whom he hardly expected to have any sense.)

Through their isolation, their religion did not develop very much and remained static.³⁹ Although it was adapted to suit the Afrikaners and their place in Africa, it became a fixed, rigid, "primitive" type of Calvinism.⁴⁰ The turbulence and insecurity of the expanding frontier, as well as the isolation of the veld, helped to form the Boer character.⁴¹ In the absence of trained theologians among the Afrikaners on the frontier and further in the interior, in the republics, a lay piety developed among pious and respected leaders.⁴² Furthermore, slow transport, poor roads and the lack of modern technology, among numerous other factors, isolated farmers on farms, thus limiting their contact with people living in other villages and towns.⁴³ Every three months, the whole rural countryside travelled and met for Communion in a localised area. Small parishes were also formed as the people *trekked* further into the interior.⁴⁴ In *Die Sprinkaanbeampste van Sluis*, the importance of Communion is highlighted:

*Ja, dis mos môre Nagmaal. Hulle sal g'n Nagmaal oorslaan nie, of dood of siekte moet hulle keer!*⁴⁵

(Yes, tomorrow is Communion. They will not skip a Communion unless death or illness prevents them!)

The distance to the church and the isolation is demonstrated in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. Flip Stander, a *bywoner* on Booyesen's farm, asks Booyesen for help with oxen and a tent to travel to the church service for his daughter to be confirmed. He exclaims: "*Die groot moeilikheid lê ook nog voor. Hoe ons by die kerk sal kom, weet nugter!*" ("The big problem still lies ahead. Who knows how we will get to the church!").⁴⁶

³⁹ R. Ross, "The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism", in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminatie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociali Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 205.

⁴⁰ A. du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology", *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 923.; P. de V. Pienaar (red.), *Kultuurgeskiedenis van die Afrikaner*. Kaapstad: Nasionale Boekhandel, 1968, p. 18.

⁴¹ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1479.

⁴² D.H. Akenson, *God's People: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel and Ulster*, p. 60.

⁴³ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Mens en Land I*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1974, p. 158.

⁴⁴ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, p. 51.

⁴⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampste van Sluis*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 75.

The isolation also contributed to the building of a conservative character.⁴⁷ As explained in chapters seven and eight, improvements and change were frowned upon. This conservatism extended to their daily lives and witnessed generations observing the same customs and preserving their religion,⁴⁸ all of which remained unchanged.⁴⁹ As mentioned in chapter seven, this was the view of Andries Vry, the owner of the farm in *Bywoners*. They practiced “living faith” through their interpretation of the Old Testament.⁵⁰ Thus, their religion became removed from influences such as rationalism, naturalism and liberalism.⁵¹ The living faith and practice of their religion, in isolation, far removed from a church can be witnessed in the following passages, whereby the importance of religious and Bible study is apparent. In *Droogte*, the prayer hour takes place at a different house and the preparation for it is a big event.

*Dit is vandag biduur by oom Sagrys... Oom Sagrys het spesiaal dorp-toe gery om goedjies te koop en vanmore stryk hy in sy swart kerksklere op die werf rond en wag net op die dominee, wat ook op die biduur aanwesig sal wees.*⁵²

(Today it is prayer hour at uncle Sagrys'. Uncle Sagrys drove specially to town to purchase some things and this morning he flashes past in his black church clothes waiting for the minister, who will also be present.)

In *Die Plaasverdeling*, Antonie and his wife would practice their religion each evening with Antonie's father and brother, but as soon as Jacob was also married, the Bible study and scripture reading was the responsibility of the head of each family:

*Die taak van godsdiens hou vir sy eie gesin het so op die skouers van Antonie geval – behalwe Sondae, dan kom nog die hele familie in die ou woonhuis bymekaar waar oom Herklaas voorgaan in die diens.*⁵³

(The task of religious study for one's own family fell on the shoulders of Antonie – except Sundays, then the whole family gathered in the old house where uncle Herklaas⁵⁴ led the service.)

⁴⁷ E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1479.

⁴⁸ E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1479-1480.

⁴⁹ A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 923.

⁵⁰ E. Olivier, “Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture”, *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1476.

⁵¹ A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, p. 924.

⁵² C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 48.

⁵³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 27.

⁵⁴ Antonie and Jacob's father.

The Afrikaner first faced pressure from the San, Khoi and Bantu-speakers and from the end of the eighteenth century, the British. The Afrikaners way of thinking was out of date⁵⁵ and was confronted by foreign religions and beliefs and strange worldviews. They remained true to their identity by clinging to their religion, language and culture despite pressure to conform.⁵⁶ With the discovery of precious minerals during the second half of the nineteenth century, the Afrikaner saw his world turned upside down.⁵⁷ Through their isolation, it was their religion and faith that helped them face the new changing world. Many of the Afrikaner leaders during the Great Trek (1835-1846), Anglo Boer War (1899-1902) and thereafter had strong Calvinistic outlooks and views.⁵⁸

As mentioned, the Calvinism practiced by the Afrikaner was influenced by a number of factors. Romanticism⁵⁹ was one such factor and was soon incorporated as part of the Afrikaners' worldview to suit their needs and circumstances.⁶⁰ In this context, Romanticism is referred to as a trend in philosophy. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, advocates of Romanticism cultivated and valued the emotional and mystical side of human life, having a great regard for the beauty of nature and taking an interest in the distant past, as well as "primitive" cultures, which were viewed as more pure and better than their own civilisation and time.⁶¹ This influenced the Afrikaners' religion, they "saw the world, everything around them and everything that happened to them through religiously tinted glasses".⁶² No fact, proof or logic could change their minds and belief in the Bible. The historical focus of Romanticism, which for the Afrikaner was centred on the Bible, impacted their outlook on life. Furthermore, another characteristic of Romanticism that became synonymous with the Afrikaner was their love of freedom, independence and nature, which also gave rise to the need to *trek* (move).⁶³ Thus, it was the emphasis on religion, history and freedom that Romanticism provided that suited the needs of the Afrikaner, which was adopted and altered into a unique movement.⁶⁴

The Calvinistic outlook and the view the broader Afrikaner community had of themselves strengthened after the Anglo-Boer War and the disadvantage suffered at the hands of the

⁵⁵ R. Ross, "The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism", in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminatie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociali Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 205.

⁵⁶ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1480.

⁵⁷ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1476.

⁵⁸ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 177 & 270-272.; J.H. van Wyk, "Should We Blame Calvinism for the Development of Apartheid in South Africa? A Perspective from Reformed Churches in South Africa: A Case Study", *In die Skriflig*, 50(1), 2016, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2155>>, pp. 1-9.

⁵⁹ The reaction to Rationalism.

⁶⁰ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1477.

⁶¹ F.E. Deist, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1984, p. 147.

⁶² E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1477.

⁶³ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1477-1478.

⁶⁴ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, p. 1479.

British dominated (mining) industries, which assisted in the nation-building process and saving their *volk*, culture, language, traditions and also the poor whites who they believed should *nie agtergelaat word nie* (not be left behind).⁶⁵ The consequences of the War took away their ideals of freedom, independence and justice.⁶⁶ Their myths and histories were carried through and strengthened twentieth century Calvinism in South Africa. References to the Old Testament could be found in literature regarding decision making in society throughout the 1930s.⁶⁷

Thus, the doctrine of Calvinism can be summarised as follows: it involves the sinfulness and depravity of man, predestination by God, salvation, grace and perseverance in faith.⁶⁸ This is clear in a number of passages in the selected South African novels. In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Booyesen's wife tells Ampie about God's will:

*"Niks in God se werk gebeur onverwags of deur toeval nie!"*⁶⁹

("Nothing in God's work happens unexpectedly or by coincidence!")

This is proven later when lightning strikes very close to the Booyesen house. Their acceptance of God's will and fatalism, as well as their unquestioning faith, is clear in the following statements:

*"Sou die slag nie van ons beeste doodgemaak het nie?" "Bes moontlik, Grieta; en as dit God behaag het, moet ons tevrede wees!"*⁷⁰

("Would the strike have killed some of our cattle?" "It is possible, Grieta; and if it pleased God, we must be satisfied!")

Later, Booyesen is despondent due to the drought, the locusts and the depression after the First World War, his wife tries to comfort him with his unflinching faith and trust in God's will in the following statement:

⁶⁵ J. Dobošová, "Calvinism in the Context of the Afrikaner Nationalism Ideology", *Asian and African Studies*, 18(2), 2009, p. 312.; R. Ross, "The Fundamentalisation of Afrikaner Calvinism", in H. Diederiks & G.C. Quispel (reds.) *Onderscheid en Minderheid: Sociaal-Historische Opstellen Over Discriminatie en Vooroordeel Aangeboden Aan Professor Dik van Arkel Bij zijn Afscheid in de Sociali Geschiedenis aan de Rijksuniversiteit te Leiden*, p. 209.

⁶⁶ J.H. van Wyk, "Should We Blame Calvinism for the Development of Apartheid in South Africa? A Perspective from Reformed Churches in South Africa: A Case Study", *In die Skriflig*, 50(1), 2016, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i1.2155>>, p. 2.

⁶⁷ J. Dobošová, "Calvinism in the Context of the Afrikaner Nationalism Ideology", *Asian and African Studies*, 18(2), 2009, p. 313.

⁶⁸ F.E. Deist, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 23; E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1475-1476.; A. du Toit, "No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology", *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, pp. 925-926.

⁶⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 136.

⁷⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 139.

*“God het ‘n doel met alles, Kasper. Al die teenspoede gaan ons volkie lei volgens Sy voorbestemde plan...”*⁷¹

(“God has a purpose for everything, Kasper. All the adversities will lead our people according to His predestined plan...”)

Furthermore, the recognition and emphasis of the absolute sovereignty of God is part of the Calvinist belief. God practices free predestination by which sinners who are pressed by the guilt of their sin receive grace to be saved. The Calvinist had an attitude of acquiescence and fatalism.⁷² In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, Booysen’s wife explains God’s will and punishment, reflecting again in an unwavering belief:

*“... as Hy hulle wil straf, deur hael, verspoelinge, droogte en sy blitse, dan betaam dit ons nie of Sy planne te bepaal in die perke van ons bygelofies nie!”*⁷³

(“... if He wants to punish them, by hail, floods, droughts and his lightning/ashes, then it is not for us to question/determine His plans in the limits of our superstitions!”)

The constant feeling of guilt is also described by Ampie in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, and he is persistently afraid of being punished:

*Vrees bekruip hom; hy huiwer as hy in so 'n diensie die vreeslike God moet nader, wat net gereed is om die mensdom te straf; want liefde het sy lewe nimmer opgeluister nie. Hy voel magteloo... Ampie is benoud vir die onverwagte strafmaniere van die Almag.*⁷⁴

(Fear stalks him, he hesitates as if approaching the terrible God, who is ready to punish humanity, because love never featured in his life. He feels powerless... Ampie is worried about the unexpected punishments of the Almighty.)

*Hy voel dat hy 'n sondaar is waarop die godheid toorn en hy kan nêrens 'n wegkruipplek vind nie. – As hy tog maar kon bid, of sing, enigiets kon doen om die liewe Here te laat verstaan dat hy soebat om ontferming en behoud vir sy lewe.*⁷⁵

(He feels that he is a sinner about whom the deity is angry and he cannot find a hiding place anywhere. – If only he could pray or sing or do anything to make the dear Lord understand that he pleads for mercy and preservation for his life.)

⁷¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 245.

⁷² F.E. Deist, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms*, p. 23. A. du Toit, “No Chosen People: The Myth of the Calvinist Origins of Afrikaner Nationalism and Racial Ideology”, *The American Historical Review*, 88(54), 1983, pp. 925-926.

⁷³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 136.

⁷⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 14.

⁷⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 137.

As mentioned in chapter seven, Ampie admits that he has stolen and knows God saw what he did and punished him for his sins:

*God het die dinge almal raakgesien en so toornig op hom geword dat Hy ou-Jakob met een blits verpletter het. Dis deur sy eie sonde. Hy is oorsaak daarvan en God het hom tot inkeer gebring. Hy sal nooit weer steel nie... 'n Vader wat sy enigste seun laat sterf om die sondige mensdom te behou kan mos nie so vreeslik wreed wees nie...*⁷⁶

(God saw all those things and became so angry with him that he struck down old-Jakob with one lightning bolt. It was through his own sin. He was the cause of it and God has punished him. He will never steal again... A Father who allowed his only son to die to save the sins of man cannot be so terribly cruel...)

The fear of God and of punishment follows Ampie throughout the trilogy.

Moreover, a Calvinist believes he is chosen for his purpose and vocation. God will guide him and provide guidance. Man appears before God equally with no distinction and is directly responsible to God. Accordingly, the Bible is the supreme authority, the rule and guidance of his faith and everyday life.⁷⁷

In *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, this view of the Bible is made apparent: *Gods Woord die hoogste kennis is*⁷⁸ (God's word is the highest knowledge) and *Lewe na die Woord*⁷⁹ (Live according to the Word). Furthermore, the equality before God is evident in the following statement:

*Vir God is almal gelyk! Al dra die een 'n swart manel en jy't maar net jou werkklere om jou in te vertoon, dis vir God net dieselfde.*⁸⁰

(For God, everyone is equal! Even if one wears a black frock and you only appear wearing your work clothes, it is the same to God.)

Calvinism is very generally fairly conservative and this had a profound effect on the Afrikaner.⁸¹ When the Poor whites finally move to the urban area, they take their religion with them. However, initially they regarded urban areas as evil and places of corruption. As mentioned in chapter eight, Johannesburg was often referred to as "Judasburg", as well as "Sodom" and

⁷⁶ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 201.

⁷⁷ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1472-1473, 1475-1476 & 1484

⁷⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 154.

⁷⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 234.

⁸⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 186.

⁸¹ E. Olivier, "Afrikaner Spirituality: A Complex Mixture", *HTS Theological Studies*, 62(4), 2006, pp. 1478 & 1480.; H Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 269.

“Gomorrhah”, all biblical references.⁸² In line with this, in a number of the selected novels, the urban areas are seen as bad and evil places.⁸³

As mentioned in chapters three and five, the DRC and its sister churches were of the first to recognise and assist the poor-white problem in South Africa. They needed to save the *volk* (nation). As is evident in the selected South African novels, the “church” was very much involved in the lives of the poor whites, especially during the twentieth century. However, the help and charity that was offered by the church was conditional upon compliance with certain standards of behaviour and commitment to some form of reciprocation.⁸⁴ This is evident in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*:

“Niemand het in daardie hongerydae na my omgekyk nie; my kerk ook nie. En daar was genoeg rede vir hulle om my te kom besoek, want Saartjie en ek het meestal in onenigheid gelewe...”⁸⁵

(“Nobody looked after/cared for me in those days of starvation/difficult days; not even my church. And there was enough reason for them to visit me, because Saartjie and I were mostly living in sin...”)

The DRC was also involved in facilitating the Carnegie Corporation to provide the funds and assist in the investigating of the poor-white problem. Furthermore, the DRC also contributed funds and people to the study. The church was very much involved.

Poor White Religion in the American South

Like the white immigrants who brought their religion with them to South Africa, similarly the white immigrants who went to the USA also brought along their religion and beliefs in a similar way. Their religion changed and developed to suit their conditions and experiences, creating a new people and religion. Unlike South Africa, where the overwhelming majority were Protestant, there were also a number of Catholics who travelled to America. However, in the Southern backcountry large numbers of Irish Catholics adopted the religion of their neighbours who were either Methodists or Baptists. In the South, the majority of poor whites were Protestant and belonged to either Presbyterian, Baptist or Methodist Churches.⁸⁶ The South had relatively few immigrants to contribute to the religious diversity and the blacks in the South

⁸² E. Pretorius, “Die Briels: Smartlappe en Tranetrekke van Weleer”, *De Kat*, 4 (2), 1988, pp. 18-22.

⁸³ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 25-26 & 35.; A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 156.; J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, pp. 245-246 & 461.

⁸⁴ J.R. Cowlin, “Pathways to Understanding White Poverty in South Africa: 1902-1948”, M.A. dissertation, Stellenbosch University, 2018, p. 122.

⁸⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 330.

⁸⁶ G. McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South*, pp. 6-7.

were also mostly Protestant.⁸⁷ However, it is important to add that poor whites often attended different churches and adopted different superstitions⁸⁸ and thus, they were not as unified in a religious sense as the Afrikaner nation.

It was, however, the Anglican faith that first dominated, but with no American Bishop and its ministers having to come from Britain, many tended to view the backwards South and its parishioners with a degree of disdain. Furthermore, the plain folk, including the poor whites, found that they had little influence on the governance of their churches and received little nurturing and edification from their ministers.⁸⁹ It was between 1740 and 1770 that a series of developments occurred to awaken the South that saw the establishment of the following churches: Presbyterian (1745), Baptist (1755) and Methodist (1770).⁹⁰ This propagated an overreaching system of evangelical beliefs that were used to interpret temporal and spiritual situations and where these churches challenged the lapses and gaps in the Anglican establishment.⁹¹ The evangelical Baptists and Methodists challenged the Anglican hierarchies of race and rank, which was more appealing to the poor whites.⁹² The Presbyterians, who like the Afrikaners expressed a severe Calvinism, came to the America South in the late seventeenth century as chiefly Scotch-Irish settlers. Presbyterian churches appeared in Virginia and incorporated the Lutherans.⁹³ The Presbyterians had educated ministers and orderly services, did not constitute a threat to political or social institutions and had more affluent parishioners.⁹⁴

From the end of the seventeenth century there were several varieties of Baptist sects, but none were aggressively evangelistic or had many members. What would become the Southern Baptist Convention started with the “New England Great Awakening”.⁹⁵ Puritans and members of the Congregational Church who found themselves disagreeing with certain canons and advocated the autonomy of the individual church, austere piety, adult believer baptism and energetic evangelisation. Baptist ministers preached everywhere with little to no prior notice, ignoring colonial law requiring a licence to preach. Baptist services were a noisy commotion with emotional preaching, singing, tears of joy or contrition, touching such as hugging and foot-washing, sharing of the peace and right hand fellowship. Their worshippers

⁸⁷ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*. New York: Peter Lang, 1994, p. 7

⁸⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 27.

⁸⁹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 4-5.

⁹⁰ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 5-6

⁹¹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 6.

⁹² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 65.

⁹³ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 6-7.

⁹⁴ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁵ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 8.

included blacks and women who were allowed to testify. Furthermore, Baptist ministers were almost always unpaid, usually a farmer with no formal education and his ordination was the virtue of laying on of hands by a similar farmer-minister.⁹⁶

This scenario is graphically illustrated in Faulkner's *Snopes* Trilogy, where Brother Whitfield, the minister was described as follows:

... a farmer and a father; a harsh, stupid, honest, superstitious and upright man, out of no seminary, holder of no degrees, functioning neither within nor without any synod but years ago ordained minister by Will Varner as he decreed his school teachers and commissioned his bailiffs.⁹⁷

In *Tobacco Road* by Caldwell, the situation is a little different, although Bessie is not a Baptist, she claims herself as a preacher and when she marries Dude Lester she prays:

"Dear God, Dude and me is married now... I am a woman preacher of the gospel. You ought to make Dude a preacher, too... You ought to learn him to be a fine preacher..."⁹⁸

Evangelical fervour was strong among the Methodists. They represented a pietistic emphasis within the Church of England. Their name came from being ridiculed for the methodical nature of their devotions and efforts of self-improvement. Methodists were more emotional with their preaching and worship services and, similar to the Baptists appealed to plain folk, poor whites and the lower classes.⁹⁹ In the early nineteenth century Methodism was mocked as a "religion for Niggers and poor whites".¹⁰⁰ After the War of Independence, religious freedom was awarded and these churches, who had supported the War for religious reasons, thrived.¹⁰¹

It was only later that women too became preachers. In *Tobacco Road*, Sister Bessie's first husband used to be the preacher, however, when he died she took up his work in the sand hills. Some of the people in the area said "the kind of religion Sister Bessie talked about was far from being God's idea of what consecrated people should say and do." She claimed they knew nothing of God's religion and that most people belonged either to no sect or were Hard-shelled Baptists. She also indicated that she hated Hard-shell Baptists. Furthermore, there

⁹⁶ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 8-11.

⁹⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 196.

⁹⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 11.

⁹⁹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 11-12.

¹⁰⁰ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 65.

¹⁰¹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 11 & 28.

was no church to house her congregation, nor did she have organised communicants to support her.¹⁰²

It was the economic chasm that separated poor whites from landowners that resulted in many viewing blacks as their brothers and sisters in Christ, however, this was not the case among every poor white.¹⁰³ They represented a counterculture in the sense that they occasionally allowed women to preach or testify, rejected the dominant culture of competitive behaviour and dressed and classified popular recreations as sinful.¹⁰⁴ Most poor whites, who were religious, believed in strict discipline, they reinforced religious teachings and frowned upon dancing, alcohol, gambling, acting and mixed bathing.¹⁰⁵ This belief is evident in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*. Rosasharn is approached by a religious zealot. The woman tries to warn her about the "scandalous" things that are happening in the government camp, such as intimate dancing, stage plays and people pretending or acting, which influences the children.¹⁰⁶ She tells the pregnant Rosasharn:

"I seen it. Girl a carryin' a little one, jes' like you. An' she play-acted, an' she hug-danced. And... she thinned out and she skinned out, an' – she dropped that baby, dead."¹⁰⁷

She further states that the Camp Manager does not believe in sin and that he believed the girl lost her baby because she did not have enough to eat, which she did not believe. After the woman left Rosasharn admits that she did "hug-dance" and is terrified she will now lose her baby too.¹⁰⁸

The poor whites believed they were more religious than the upper class to whom they had assigned distinctive sins such as affluence, cheating, materialism, idleness and unethical business practices. Many identified riches with corruption and poverty with godliness.¹⁰⁹ In *The Grapes of Wrath*, this notion is expressed in the following statement: "Our people are good people; our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor."¹¹⁰

In *Tobacco Road*, Jeeter also reflects on the poor whites' relationship with God.

¹⁰² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 5.

¹⁰³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁴ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁶ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

¹⁰⁷ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

¹⁰⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

¹⁰⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 27-28.

¹¹⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 19.

“God is got it in good and heavy for the poor... Some of these days He'll bust loose with a heap of bounty and all us poor folks will have all we want to eat and plenty to clothe us with. It can't always keep getting worse and worse every year like it has got since the big war. God, He'll put a stop to it some of these days and make the rich give back all they've took from us poor folks. God is going to treat us right...”¹¹¹

Later, he tells the finance company:

“... It ain't right, I tell you. God ain't working on your side. He won't stand for such cheating much longer, neither. He ain't so liking of you rich people as you think He is. God, He likes the poor.”¹¹²

It would be the religions of the lesser folk, including poor whites, who would come to inherit the land south of the Dixie line.¹¹³ Baptist and Methodists found most of the parishioners among the poor, white and black, as fewer of them were slaveholders and because they identified themselves with the poor and oppressed. Their mission was to bring the Gospel message to “sinners”.¹¹⁴ Thus, it was the evangelical churches the poor whites joined and felt more at home in.¹¹⁵ The Presbyterians and Episcopalians were too concerned about a theologically trained and educated clergy.¹¹⁶ The evangelical clergy practiced emotional preaching uncomplicated by doctrine or much theology. Many of the poor whites could not read the Bible and thus, they received their fundamentalist religion from lay preachers who either visited them or they went to camp meetings.¹¹⁷ Their sermons were retold Bible stories with scriptural explanations with the aim of conversions. Every sermon was evangelistic and the worship service was devoid of liturgy with the intent to convince the lost souls to accept Christ.¹¹⁸

Disciplinary action and proceedings were more democratic than any aspect of antebellum life.¹¹⁹ In the *Snopes* Trilogy, Uncle Wesley Snopes, the revival song leader, was caught after church with a fourteen-year-old girl in the empty cotton house and they “tar-and-feathered him

¹¹¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 1.

¹¹² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 13.

¹¹³ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 14.

¹¹⁴ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 27.

¹¹⁵ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 65.

¹¹⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 29.

¹¹⁷ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 178.

¹¹⁸ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 28.

¹¹⁹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 30.

to Texas or anyway out of Yoknapatawpha County.”¹²⁰ Thus, the minister was also not spared from the church discipline.

The poor whites were aware of sins. Not unlike Ampie, after Jeeter steals his son-in-laws turnips, he realises he needs to confess his sins. He states: “God don't like for His people to do that...”¹²¹ When he returns, Bessie Rice, a female preacher, is waiting at the Lester house. She claims the Lord sent her to pray for him: “Lord, Jeeter Lester is a powerful sinful man, but I'll pray for him until the devil goes clear back to hell.”¹²²

Generally, the Bible was regarded as a holy treasure full of truths that could be applied to life. The ministers and parishioners were familiar with the Bible and most ministers were scriptural literalists.¹²³ Slave owners mocked them as ignorant, illiterate and knowing little of their Bibles. They lacked theological training and they compensated for it with charisma guiding their parishioners towards religious ferment.¹²⁴ They were described as being steeped in poverty and ignorance, which led them to become “insane” in their religion: shouting, testifying, spirited music and speaking in tongues brought consolation.¹²⁵ A.B. Hart describes their religion as “violent and primitive”.¹²⁶ Emotions were encouraged and expressed openly and this soon spread through all levels of Southern life.¹²⁷ This emotion is illustrated in *The Grapes of Wrath* when the former preacher Jim Casy tells Tom Joad: “... I use ta get the people jumpin’ an’ talkin’ in tongues, an’ glory-shoutin’ till they just fell down an’ passed out. An’ some I’d baptize to bring ‘em to...”¹²⁸ Tom adds that “...Jumpin’ an’ yellin’. That’s what folks like. Makes ‘em feel swell. When Granma got to talkin’ in tongues, you couldn’t tie her down. She could knock over a full-growed deacon with her fist.”¹²⁹

Although a lack of religion and education was not unusual for the rural poor whites during the antebellum period, by the middle of the nineteenth century it was becoming unacceptable.¹³⁰ In this period, these three churches were very critical of slavery and the enslaved and land owners, however, just before the outbreak of the Civil War they sided with the plantation

¹²⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 1012.

¹²¹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 5.

¹²² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 5.

¹²³ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 30-31.

¹²⁴ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 66.

¹²⁵ J.W. Flynt, “Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, pp. 26-27.

¹²⁶ A.B. Hart, *The Southern South*, p. 41.

¹²⁷ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 31-32.

¹²⁸ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 4.

¹²⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 27.

¹³⁰ D. Brown, “A Vagabond’s Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 818.

establishment to a new nation that supported slavery. Religion was used as an important factor to secede and to justify the development of Southern nationalism.¹³¹ The evangelical churches became the cheerleaders for a Southern way of life and slavery.¹³² Thus, politics entered religion and gone was the notion to “save the sinner”.¹³³ After the defeat, many Southerners, including the poor whites, regarded it as the will of God, as many had to come to terms with it and try to make sense of it. Many people’s faith was shaken as slavery had existed in the Bible.¹³⁴ A quiet acceptance emerged and religion was used as a healing balm. Soon, evangelists returned and their mission was once again to save sinners and present escapism and acceptance.¹³⁵ This acceptance and will of God is apparent in the following statement by Jeeter in *Tobacco Road*: “My children all blame me because God sees fit to make me poverty-ridden...”¹³⁶

After the Civil War, the South was solidly Protestant,¹³⁷ but few challenged the social ills that afflicted the people and the region.¹³⁸ It was the extreme poverty between the end of the Civil War and the Second World War that created a revival of Southern religion.¹³⁹ However, many poor whites, both before and after the Civil War, were indifferent, if not hostile, to institutional religion. This was mostly due to the evangelists unwavering strictures against gambling, drinking, music and dancing, which were some of the poor whites’ favourite pastimes. As a group, the poor whites were never dogmatic.¹⁴⁰ Helper commented that evangelic religion was mostly absent among poor whites and that their habits of sensuality and intemperance were regressive. According to him, these people did not have adequate ideas of duty to God, their fellow man or themselves.¹⁴¹ There was an upper-economic tier of landless whites who identified with a church and the truly impoverished whites rarely attended any religious services¹⁴² for a number of reasons, including not having appropriate clothes to wear and being embarrassed to be seen in public because of their poverty.¹⁴³ This is evident in *The Grapes of Wrath*: “We got no clothes, torn an’ ragged. If all the neighbors weren’t the same,

¹³¹ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 75.

¹³² J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 81.

¹³³ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 81, 85 & 88.

¹³⁴ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 96.

¹³⁵ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, pp. 97-101.

¹³⁶ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 2.

¹³⁷ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 73.

¹³⁸ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 101.

¹³⁹ J.W. Flynt, “Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, p. 14.

¹⁴⁰ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 65.; K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 137.

¹⁴¹ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 206.

¹⁴² K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 136.

¹⁴³ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 236.; J.W. Flynt, “Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, p. 17.

we'd be ashamed to go to meeting."¹⁴⁴ Some of the poor whites would attend church, but would also sell alcoholic refreshments outside or play cards.¹⁴⁵ Their inability to read the Bible, as well as not being able to purchase a Bible, added to their indifference.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, to South Africa, the American South colonies were sparsely settled, with poor roads and most rivers and streams unbridged which made travelling difficult.¹⁴⁷ Many poor whites lived on isolated farms and church participation was the only society they knew.¹⁴⁸ Rural Christianity provided a sense of purpose in their otherwise dismal lives.¹⁴⁹ However, for some, their lack of religion stemmed from their isolation – there were those who had never seen a church, heard a sermon or heard about the Redeemer. For those that could attend there may only have been a Baptist or Methodist meeting held near them every couple of months.¹⁵⁰

Although poor whites' apathetic attitude towards organised religion included factors such as illiteracy, isolation, distance and social segregations, Sundays were also the only day off working poor whites had.¹⁵¹ This is demonstrated in Caldwell's *God's Little Acre*. Ty Ty's son asks why he did not go to church more often, and he replies:

“That ain't a fair question, son. You know good and well how tired I am when Sunday comes, after digging all week long in the holes. God doesn't miss me there, anyhow. He knows why I can't come. I've spoken to Him about such things all my life, and He knows pretty well all about it.”¹⁵²

Most poor whites believed in a monotheistic God and considered Jesus as their saviour, but unlike the Afrikaners, organised religion was not generally an important factor in their daily lives.¹⁵³ Poor whites focused on the sovereignty of God and their cosmology. God controlled all, everything had meaning and God would turn all to his glory and purpose, including their poverty. God's triumph through Christ's return was the centre of their theological system. Thus, Calvinism played a large role in the religion of the poor whites in the South and they had a sense of God's providence as well.¹⁵⁴ Like the Afrikaners, the Southern poor whites' religion

¹⁴⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 4.

¹⁴⁵ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 66.

¹⁴⁶ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, pp. 136-137.

¹⁴⁷ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ J. Boles, *The Irony of Southern Religion*, p. 33.

¹⁴⁹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 91.

¹⁵⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 136.

¹⁵¹ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 137.

¹⁵² E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 104.

¹⁵³ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, pp. 28 & 30.; J.W. Flynt, "Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression", *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, p. 4.

was fundamental in the basic sense, in that it was the will of God and they believed all people were equal before God.¹⁵⁵ Religion offered the poor white some control of their own life and thus, their unpredictable lives lost some of its “terror”.¹⁵⁶ In Faulkner’s *As I Lay Dying*, a number of the character believe the events that unfold are the will of God. “Nobody cant guard against the hand of God. It would be sacrilege to try to.”¹⁵⁷

Poor white religion was an attempt to deal with the powerless situation and isolation, as for some it offered a sense of community.¹⁵⁸ The world of work was inseparable from a religious faith that justified, commended and supported daily toil.¹⁵⁹ Poor white religion was often described as otherworldly and naïve, but it dealt with realism and was more in touch with social reality. They tried to make sense of their circumstances and urged justice towards the poor and help for the needy and used the Bible as a basis for fairness.¹⁶⁰ Their religion offered self-worth, equality, kindness, charity, community, hope, vindication, release, stability and importance.¹⁶¹

Erskine Caldwell, one of the selected Southern novelists, was the son of a Presbyterian minister, he described the poor whites’ religion as “the only narcotic to dull the pain of living” and stated that religion appealed to the impoverished and unenlightened lives.¹⁶² He makes his views evident in *Tobacco Road*. The Lesters have naïve and limited knowledge of religion, they know right from wrong, but they do not practice a specific religion. Jeeter believes he is being punished for “being poor”, but also believes that “God will save him”.¹⁶³

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, Casy admits that he is no longer a preacher and that he has lost the spirit. He admits that he felt like a fraud and committed a lot of sin, he adds that although he does not know God or Jesus he still has a love for mankind and wants to help them: “Maybe we been whippin’ the hell out of ourselves for nothin’...” “It’s love. I love people... Don’t you love Jesus?... No, I don’t know nobody name’ Jesus. I know a bunch of stories, but I only love people... I want to make ’em happy, so I been preachin’ somepin I thought would make ’em happy.”¹⁶⁴ He travels with the Joad family who are depicted along with the rest of the migrants

¹⁵⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 233.

¹⁵⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Tull 114.

¹⁵⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁹ D. Brown, “A Vagabond’s Tale: Poor Whites, Herrenvolk Democracy and the Value of Whiteness in the Late Antebellum South”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 79(4), 2013, p. 815.

¹⁶⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 238.

¹⁶¹ J.W. Flynt, “Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, p. 7.

¹⁶² E. Caldwell, *Deep South: Memory and Observation*. New York: Weybright and Talley, 1968.

¹⁶³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

¹⁶⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapters 4 & 8.

moving to California like the Israelites moving to the Promised Land.¹⁶⁵ Like the South African poor whites, the majority of Southern poor whites were rural agrarian people who relied on the natural forces, over which they had no control. These natural forces governed their lives and their material well-being was dependent on nature, which shaped their outlooks.¹⁶⁶ Thus, with the focus on the Old Testament and like the ancient Hebrews they relied on primary causes to stay the wind, empty the clouds, make their crops fertile or restrain the rains. They tried to relate their own earthy reality to the divine.¹⁶⁷ Poor whites saw connections on a fundamental level.¹⁶⁸ In *The Grapes of Wrath*, this view is explained with regards to telling the weather and the coming of winter:

“Remember what we’d always say at home? ‘Winter’s a-comin’ early,’ we said, when the ducks flew. Always said that, an’ winter come when it was ready to come. But we always said, ‘She’s a-comin’ early.’ I wonder what we meant.”¹⁶⁹

“They’s clouds up... Fellas says it’s gonna be an early winter.” “Squirrels a-buildin’ high, or grass seeds?... By God, you can tell weather from anythin’. I bet you could find a fella could tell weather from a old pair of underdrawers.”¹⁷⁰

A survey taken during the first quarter of the twentieth century found that poor white tenant farmers were less frequent members of churches, not that they did not take their religion less seriously, and as tenancy increased church attendance decreased. In certain churches a service was not held every Sunday as very few churches had full-time ministers. The majority of ministers had no college or seminary training and approximately half of them were bivocational. The ministers could often identify with their poor congregation.¹⁷¹

In *God’s Little Acre*, Ty Ty tells his friend about “God’s little acre”:

“... I set aside an acre of my farm for God twenty-seven years ago, when I bought this place, and every year I give the church all that comes off that acre of ground... I’m proud to divide what little I have with God... Me and the boys and the darkies have been so busy with other things I just had to let God’s little acre lie fallow for the time being.”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Introduction.

¹⁶⁶ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, pp. 120-121.

¹⁶⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, pp. 28 & 241.

¹⁶⁸ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 122.

¹⁶⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 22.

¹⁷⁰ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 26.

¹⁷¹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 90-91.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 29.

¹⁷² E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, p. 9.

Furthermore, he explains that he is obligated to move it while they dig for gold because he is against digging on the “Lord’s ground” and adds “I’d hate to have to see the lode struck on God’s little acre the first thing, and be compelled to turn it all over to the church. That preacher’s getting all he needs like it is. I’d hate something awful to have to give all the gold to him: I couldn’t stand for that...”¹⁷³

Those who worked and lived in the urban setup used their religion to create social consciousness, economic order and unionism.¹⁷⁴ Casy, the former preacher in *The Grapes of Wrath*, uses his former leadership role and charisma and gets involved with organising the migrant workers into unions in order to improve their living conditions. Later, Tom follows his lead.¹⁷⁵ However, when tenants moved to the urban areas many were unlikely to join a church.¹⁷⁶ Some reasons were that the church was not moving with the times, and the more cosmopolitan poor whites enjoyed certain activities such as dancing which, as mentioned, was frowned upon by the church.¹⁷⁷

When the Great Depression hit it brought widespread suffering to many Americans. The poverty that plagued the poor whites worsened, however, many accepted their condition fatalistically and found solace in their religion. Thus, many endured the wretchedness of their condition and maintained their dignity and self-respect.¹⁷⁸ This outlook is explained in *The Grapes of Wrath*, when Sairy Wilson is one of the Joads companions for a time while they travel to California, and she is dying of cancer. She asks Casy to pray for her, she tells him “You got a God. Don’t make no difference if you don’ know what he looks like... I wanted you to pray. I wanted to feel that clostness, oncet more. It’s the same thing, singin’ an’ prayin’...”¹⁷⁹ Throughout the novel, through all their trials and tribulations the Joads hold onto their religion.

Religion played a role in the lives of the Southern poor whites as is evident in the novels. Although they may not have practiced a stolid doctrine, the belief in a higher power helped them deal with their everyday lives.

¹⁷³ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 99-101.

¹⁷⁵ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 24.

¹⁷⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 235.

¹⁷⁷ J.W. Flynt, “Religion for the Blues: Evangelicalism, Poor Whites and the Great Depression”, *The Journal of Southern History*, 71(1), 2005, p. 18.

¹⁷⁸ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 92.

¹⁷⁹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 18.

Superstition

Superstitions, similarly to religion, can be defined as centring on the fundamental experiences of all humans: birth, the struggle for life and death.¹⁸⁰ It was not only poor whites who were superstitious, however, their lack of control in almost all aspects of their lives caused them to believe more strongly in superstitions, especially things they could not explain and wanted to make sense of, and even linked them with their religion.¹⁸¹ These superstitions form a type of folklore or popular belief. It includes a community of people who share the same culture, language, history, development and events. These ways of life, manners and customs evolved to create a particular understanding of life and thus, a culture,¹⁸² that included myths as well as intellectual systems.¹⁸³

The most common superstitions that were believed and practiced dealt with the interpretation of weather omens, planting crops, dreams, healing and death. Superstitions derived from ancient and primitive religious and cultural phenomena included: traditional life patterns, interaction with the earth, natural occurrences, seasons, landscapes, animals, plants and man. These superstitions were evidently an attempt to grapple with the mysteries, to understand, interpret, answer, control, solve or come to terms with problems, obstacles, questions and dilemmas in order to survive.¹⁸⁴

Poor White Superstitions in South Africa

Although the Afrikaners, and thus the poor whites, were mostly very religious, they also believed in a number of superstitions.¹⁸⁵ Many in which they believed in came from the countries their ancestors had originated from. Moreover, these poor whites who inhabited isolated rural areas also interacted with the Bantu-speakers and through this interaction their superstitions were also affected¹⁸⁶ along with their own religion, which would also be indicated in their superstitions.¹⁸⁷ This is illustrated in *Die Plaasverdeling*. When Antonie is described as very superstitious, but has never told his wife his feelings and beliefs. *Hy glo aan spoke en*

¹⁸⁰ J. Solomon & O. Solomon, *Ghosts and Goosebumps: Ghost Stories, Tall Tales and Superstitions from Alabama*. Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1981, p. 95.

¹⁸¹ A. Coetzee, *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*. Kaapstad: A.A. Balkema, 1960, p. 35.; J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 68.

¹⁸² D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) IV*, pp. 605-606. Culture is a complex concept, but for the purposes of this study can be defined as a spiritual and material product of the human spirit, labour or interaction with the environment.

¹⁸³ J. Solomon & O. Solomon, *Ghosts and Goosebumps: Ghost Stories, Tall Tales and Superstitions from Alabama*, p. 96.

¹⁸⁴ J. Solomon & O. Solomon, *Ghosts and Goosebumps: Ghost Stories, Tall Tales and Superstitions from Alabama*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁸⁵ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*. Kaapstad: Tafelberg, 1977.; A. Coetzee, *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*. Kaapstad: A.A. Balkema, 1960.

¹⁸⁶ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) X*, p. 355; D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) V*, p. 192.

¹⁸⁷ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 92 & 100.

boweaardse dinge wat in die lug rondwaal, aan verskynsels en aan geeste (He believes in ghosts and supernatural things that wonder in the air, in phenomena and in spirits).¹⁸⁸ Their superstitions also entailed a wide selection of pre-natural beliefs. Some of their popular beliefs included: spirits (some of which were elemental such as fire, water, earth or air) and their manifestations; omens and predictions; ghosts; transformations; sorcerers, witches and the devil; phantoms and bogey-men; as well as phenomena related to animals and plants.¹⁸⁹

Most poor whites lived a simple life in the rural areas close to nature.¹⁹⁰ It was these people who lived close to nature who had the greatest respect for the weather due to their dependency on it and many of their beliefs and superstitions stemmed from it.¹⁹¹ Many saw the shift between drought and rain as the will of God. Meteorology could be used by God to give grace or to punish. Many of these superstitious weather beliefs stemmed from observations that were continuously tested and often coincided with scientific findings.¹⁹² Signs of rain dominated these rural farming people's lives. Poor white farmers lived in remote, often drought stricken areas and thus, weather predictions helped them navigate their planting and harvesting routines.¹⁹³ Signs of certain meteorological features included wind, brewing storms and cloud formations. Due to rain playing an important role in their lives, they seldom tried to change it. Although many of their beliefs were also influenced by the indigenous peoples, they seldom sought indigenous rainmaking practices, as this went against their religion.¹⁹⁴ Furthermore, they placed their faith in good seasons rather than science.¹⁹⁵ Meteorological signs in the sky in the form of stars and clouds, however, were also believed to predict the future.¹⁹⁶

This belief in meteorological signs is evident in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. Ampie goes outside during the night and looks up to the sky. He believes the sky and especially clouds bring a message and predict death. "*Die groot los wolke moet vir hom 'n boodskap bring.*"¹⁹⁷ ("The big loose clouds must bring him a message"). "... *die mense sal dit nie glo nie, maar die wolke het vir my die boodskap gebring!*"¹⁹⁸ ("The people will not believe it, but the clouds brought me the message!")

¹⁸⁸ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁹ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 3-101.

¹⁹⁰ C.C. Nepgen, *Die Sosiale Gewete van die Afrikaanssprekendes*, pp. 43-44 & 151-162.

¹⁹¹ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) V*, p. 191.

¹⁹² P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 105-111.

¹⁹³ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) X*, p. 355.

¹⁹⁴ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, p. 113.

¹⁹⁵ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 184.

¹⁹⁶ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 37-39.

¹⁹⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 133.

¹⁹⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 136.

*Wanneer die lug geheel oorgetrek en vliaserig is, dan weet hy moet 'n Bantoe sterwe. En as die digte banke aankom, is dit 'n witman wat sal doodgaan. Vannag is dit 'n vroumens! Ja, altoos as die lug so vol van daardie groot los wolke is, veral in die nag, dan sterf 'n wit vrou. – Hy weet dit! En dis nou seker dat sy ouma dood is.*¹⁹⁹

(When the sky is completely covered and membranous, he knows a Bantu will die. And when the dense banks of clouds arrive, it is a white man that will die. Tonight it is a woman! Yes, if the sky is full of those big loose clouds, especially at night, then a white woman will die. – He knows it! And now he is certain it is his grandmother who is dead.)

Ampie decides to take the news to his uncle and aunt, as well as Annekie. On his way he becomes scared. By the afternoon the sky is full of clouds that predict the deaths of many.²⁰⁰

*Die lug lewer nou al die soorte wolke en Ampie, vol van bygeloof en voorgevoel, beredeneer die lug met alle erns. – Los wolke oral in die vliaserige lug, die banke aan die westerkant soos swart plate. Dit sal nie maklik gaan vannag nie! Laasnag is my ouma reeds dood, en wie sal vanaand of hierdie nag sterwe? Die wolke sê vir my dat witmens, swartmens, vrou en mansmens dit sal geware.*²⁰¹

(The sky now produces all kinds of clouds and Ampie, full of superstition and premonition, reasons regarding the sky with all seriousness. – Loose clouds everywhere in the membranous sky, the banks on the west-side like black plates. It will not be easy tonight! Last night my grandmother died and who will it be tonight or this night? The clouds tell me that white people, black people, women and men are in danger.)

Ampie believes these messages and that death is God's way to show humanity how easy it is for Him to reach a sinner.²⁰²

However, it is again the more middle class and more educated whites that soothes Ampie's superstition. Uncle Booyen's wife asks Ampie:

*“My liewe Ampie, vir wat prent jy jou daardie dinge in? Dis naturellebygelowe waar g'n mens hom aan moet steur nie. Niks in God se werk gebeur onverwags of deur 'n toeval nie... En as die lug vol wolke is, dan het die Here daardie wolke geformeer... vir ons lande reën te bring. Die lewe van ons almal het die Here in Sy hand, Ampie! En wolke... het niks met ons menslike lewe hier op die aarde te doen nie...”*²⁰³

¹⁹⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 133.

²⁰⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, pp. 134-135.

²⁰¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 135.

²⁰² J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 135.

²⁰³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 136.

("My dear Ampie, why do you imagine those things? These are native superstitions that no one should bother with. Nothing in God's work happens unexpectedly or by chance... And if the sky is full of clouds, then the Lord formed those clouds... to bring rain to our lands. Our lives are in the Lord's hands, Ampie! And clouds... have nothing to do with our human lives here on earth...")

As indicated, it was Ampie's donkey that was struck by lightning and that died that added to his superstitious beliefs, which are entwined with his religious beliefs.

Many of the poor whites believed death was an unknown and uncontrollable aspect and that it was essential to assist the soul to move on.²⁰⁴ Thus, a number of superstitions surrounded death, which enabled the poor whites to make sense of it. Predicting death also became an important aspect of their lives. Owls are still often associated with witches and creatures of the night. Afrikaners and poor whites believe the screaming or screeching of an owl is a premonition or prediction of death. This superstition has continued into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.²⁰⁵ This belief in the screeching of an owl manifests itself in *Bywoners*. Sitman and his wife stay the night at de Klerk's home as he goes to town and does not want his wife and children to be alone. Nearby a group of black people are having a party and de Klerk's wife gets scared they will come and molest them.²⁰⁶ Suddenly, an owl shrieks on the roof. Sitman's wife states: "*Dis 'n baie slegte voorteken!*" ("It is a very bad sign!").²⁰⁷ Sitman follows through with: "*Die oumense het almelewe gesê dat daar een in die huis gaan sterwe, as 'n uil bo-op die dak skreeu.*" ("The old people always said that someone in the house will die if an owl calls on the house's roof.").²⁰⁸ Hendrina (de Klerk's wife) becomes scared and faints. The Sitmans feel justified in their prediction, as they think she is dead. However, they soon become nervous and Sitman's wife sends him to call Willemse's wife to assist her.²⁰⁹ Soon de Klerk's wife is revived and Willemse's wife scolds her: "*En dis mos 'n groot kwaad in die Here se oë om voëlgeskrei ag te gee... En waar was dan jou geloof? Is jou lewe dan nie in die Here se hand nie?*" ("Is it not blasphemy to give the screeching of a bird such power... And where was your faith? Is your life not then in the Lord's hands?").²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, p. 33.

²⁰⁵ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 160-161.

²⁰⁶ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 48-49.

²⁰⁷ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 49.

²⁰⁸ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 49.

²⁰⁹ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 50-53.

²¹⁰ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 53-54.

The belief in this superstition is so strong that it appears again in *Ampie: Die Trilogie*. The belief that the hooting of an owl is linked to death is apparent in the following statement:

*Die bang geluide gaan soos die swaar, drukkende gehoë van baie uile wat 'n doodberig bevestig.*²¹¹

(The scary sounds, sound like the pressing howls of many owls confirming a death report.)

Many of the poor whites also believed in ghosts, spirits and the supernatural.²¹² In *Droogte*, Datie kills his brother Sagrys in a fit of rage after years of abuse. However, he soon calms down and becomes very scared. His fear causes his imagination to run wild.²¹³

*Opeens word hy doodsbleek, want langsaam trek 'n skaduwee oor hom verby; hy kyk, maar daar is geen lewende wese naby hom te bespeur nie; weer kom die skaduwee, donker en swaar, en skuiwe traag oor hom heen. Hy krul inmekaar, vol bygeloofsvrees, nou heeltemal die prooi van sy verskriklike verbeelding.*²¹⁴

(Suddenly he turns deathly pale because a shadow slowly passes over him, he looks, but there is no living thing to be detected; the shadow comes again, dark and heavy, and it moves slowly over him. He curls up, full of superstitious fear now completely the prey of his terrible imagination.)

He looks up to see a bird soaring above him and he sees it as a supernatural figure coming from the blue depth to attack him.²¹⁵ Datie knows what he did was wrong and fears God's punishment in the form of a supernatural element. As mentioned, the superstitions and religions of poor whites were closely entwined.²¹⁶

The poor whites also believed in wandering spirits. A wandering spirit is a spirit that could not rest or find peace due to the wrongs the person had committed in life or wrongs that had been done to the person. A murdered person's spirit would also wander. It was believed that a spirit would wander until someone spoke to it and helped it to bring about an expiation. It was further believed that agreements with ghosts were sealed with a handshake, but the living person receiving the handshake needed to cover their hand with a handkerchief otherwise, they would

²¹¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 138.

²¹² P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 43-48. D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA) VII*, pp. 111-112.

²¹³ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 165-167.

²¹⁴ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 167.

²¹⁵ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 168.

²¹⁶ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, p. 100.

be scorched.²¹⁷ These superstitious beliefs are apparent in *Droogte*. After Sagry's death, the brother Stoffel tells Luikes that he has heard it said that at night, a black thing walks from the ridge to Datie's former outside room and stops there a while and then disappears and then the process starts again. Luikes tells him they should not believe in it and further states:

Die spookstorie maak swart bygeloofsangs in hom wakker en ernstig sê hy: "Spoke is daar! Jy weet oorlee Pa het ons nog vertel van die afkoplens wat saans hier op Bontdam in die voetpaadjie geloop het. Ek word bang vir ou Rooiwater,²¹⁸ ek sê jou reguit. Mens kan een aand gaan kyk. Maar wie sal met die gees praat as hy dalk 'n boodskap het, sal jy?"²¹⁹

(The ghost story awakens a black superstitious fear in him and he says seriously: "There are ghosts! You know our deceased father told us about the headless man who walked the footpath here at Bontdam at night. I will tell you straight, I am scared of Rooiwater. One can go watch one night. But who will speak to the spirit if it might have a message, would you?")

Both agree that they would not. Luikes tells him of a man in the town who spoke to a spirit. He claimed he greeted the spirit with a handkerchief, but it was burnt where the spirit touched it. He further claimed that the spirit spoke in an *onderaardse stem* (unworldly voice). The man then became very ill, he apparently needed to "fix" an injustice that a step-mother had done with an estate.²²⁰ The wrong doing of step-children or orphans would cause the souls who committed the wrong doing to be unable to rest.²²¹ Stoffel exclaims that "...*vir spook se kind is ek bang...*" ("I am afraid of ghosts.")²²²

Superstition also played an important role in the healing and medicine of the poor-white culture, as most were either isolated or could not afford a doctor. Furthermore, there were not many trained doctors in South Africa.²²³ This practice was derived from man's preservation and desire to live. Like other superstitions, most of the poor whites' medicine or medical practices were derived from their predecessors, lessons learned, traditions, interaction with the indigenous peoples and superstitions.²²⁴ Most medical superstitions were harmless and involved plants, vegetables and herbs, however, there were a few that were real dangers to

²¹⁷ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) V, p. 191.; P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 45-48.

²¹⁸ The name of the farm where the brothers each had a piece of land.

²¹⁹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 188.

²²⁰ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 188-189.

²²¹ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) V, p. 191.

²²² C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, pp. 188-189.

²²³ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) VII, p. 302.

²²⁴ P.W. Grobbelaar (red.), *Die Afrikaner en Sy Kultuur: Boerewysheid II*, pp. 117 & 121.; A. Coetzee, *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*, p. 105.

health and life, such as poisons.²²⁵ Mostly “magic”, charms, talismans, herb lore, animal related products and items found around the house were employed.²²⁶ Most poor whites had medicinal chests that contained a number of “medicines, ointments and plasters”.²²⁷ The treatment of ailments is clear in *Bywoners*. After Hendrina faints from fright, Bettie (Sitman’s wife) tries to revive her. However, Bettie states:

*“Dis nou wat ek sê 'n verblitsing! Hulle is mos anderster as ons en hulle hou mos nie medisyne aan soos ons boermense nie!”*²²⁸

(“Now that is what I call a strike! They are different from us and they do not keep medicines like us farming people!”)

She searches the kitchen ingredients and the medicine chest, but does not find what she is searching for. She rambles to herself all the ingredients and in what cures they are used for.²²⁹ She finally remembers:

*“My oorlede ousus het mos ook kort-kort so weggeraak en dan vat my oorlede moeder ou lappe, wat sy brand en dan druk sy dit onder oorlede ousus se neus... maar ek kan mos nie gebrande lappe onder nig Driena se neus gaan druk nie! Hulle is mos heeltemal anderster as ons, hulle natuur is anderster, hulle lewe is anderster...”*²³⁰

(“My late sister also fainted from time to time and then my late mother would take old rags, which she would burn and then push them under her nose... but I cannot push burnt rags under cousin Driena’s nose! They are completely different from us, their nature is different and their lives are different...”).

She does, however, decide to try the method and the burning rags help to revive Hendriena.²³¹

Superstitions can be found in a number of different facets of the lives of South African poor whites, as they tried to make sense of their poverty and lack of control within the world around them.

Poor White Superstitions in the American South

Not unlike the poor whites in South Africa, the poor whites in the American South were also subject to superstition. Due to their lack of control and helplessness they found solace in the

²²⁵ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) X, p. 355.

²²⁶ A. Coetzee, *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*, 1960, p. 105.; D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) VII, pp. 294-295.

²²⁷ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa* (SESA) VII, p. 302.

²²⁸ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 51.

²²⁹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 52.

²³⁰ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 52.

²³¹ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 53.

fatalism of their religion, whilst others shielded themselves with superstition and folk magic.²³² Poverty and isolation enabled the poor whites to retain their culture and thus their superstitions.²³³ It gave meaning to their grim realities.²³⁴ Due to their lack of education a combination of evangelical Christianity, superstition and folk beliefs combined into a strange concoction.²³⁵

A combination of religion and superstition is evident in the *Snopes* Trilogy. As mentioned, the minister is described as a superstitious man.²³⁶ He is called in with regards to the issue around Isaac Snopes and bestiality. The minister mentions he “knows” of a case where the following “cure” worked and explains:

“You take and beef the critter the fellow has done formed the habit with, and cook a piece of it and let him eat it. It’s got to be a authentic piece of the same cow or sheep or whatever it is, and the fellow has got to know that’s what he is eating; he can’t be tricked nor forced to eating it, and a substitute won’t work. Then he’ll be all right again and won’t want to chase nothing but human women...”²³⁷

He admits that he only knew of one case where the “cure” was performed, but swears that it worked. He adds that it has to be the meat/flesh: “I taken the whole cure to mean that not only the boy’s mind but his insides too, the seat of passion and sin, can have the proof that the partner of his sin is dead.”²³⁸

Ghosts, witches and haints²³⁹ inhabited the same world as angels and saints and enabled them to make sense of their lives and the world around them. Many were survivors of ancient Celtic religion, which were transmitted orally.²⁴⁰ These served as signs and warnings and were widespread amongst the poor whites.²⁴¹ Evangelical religion competed with superstition for poor whites’ spiritual loyalties. Many believed strongly in the supernatural, magic and witchcraft with signs, potions, spells and fortunes all holding real meaning for them.²⁴² The poor were extremely superstitious and firm believers in hobgoblins and witches, as well as

²³² J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 132.

²³³ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 20-21.

²³⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, p. 57.

²³⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 57-58.

²³⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 196.

²³⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 197.

²³⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 197.

²³⁹ A ghost or evil spirit which originated in the beliefs of the Gullah Geechee people who were descendants of enslaved Africans

²⁴⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*, pp. 57-58.

²⁴¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 223.

²⁴² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 68.

old-time spiritualists and fortune-telling. This included palm reading revelations in coffee grounds left in the bottom of the cup and card cutting.²⁴³ In South Carolina, the illiterate poor whites were described as superstitious and ignorant by agents of northern missionary associations who also stated that many did not attend any organised church.²⁴⁴ The poor whites of the North Carolina pine barrens (plantations) were described by a reporter as “captives of mental hallucinations”.²⁴⁵ Many believed in witchcraft and attributed everything to the agency of people whom they believed possessed evil spirits.²⁴⁶ Poor white parents would threaten their children to behave for fear of witches or the “Big Nig”.²⁴⁷

According to Forret, superstition has always existed in some form, especially among illiterate people, regardless of colour.²⁴⁸ Helper described the poor whites as “superstitious and ignorant” for believing in supernatural signs, ghosts and witches. He further added that their superstitions appeared similar to those reported in enslaved people’s narratives.²⁴⁹ A Maryland minister affirmed this by stating that poor whites shared “all the superstitions of the negroes.”²⁵⁰ Poor whites borrowed from black culture with regards to their superstitions.²⁵¹ However, a former enslaved person stressed that poor whites were more superstitious than the enslaved.²⁵²

A shared superstition or belief between poor whites and blacks is apparent in *God’s Little Acre*. Ty Ty Walden has been searching for gold on his land for many years. His friend Pluto advises him: “What you folks need is an albino to help you out... They tell me that a man ain't got as much of a chance as a snowball in hell without an albino to help.”²⁵³ Ty Ty decides he will give it a try, however, he is adamant:

“I always said I'd never go in for none of this superstition and conjur stuff, Pluto, but I've been thinking all the time that one of those albinos is what we need. You understand,

²⁴³ D. R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, p. 266.

²⁴⁴ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 69.

²⁴⁵ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 69.

²⁴⁶ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 69.

²⁴⁷ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 69.

²⁴⁸ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, pp. 68-69.

²⁴⁹ H.R. Helper, *Compendium of the Impending Crisis of the South*, p. 206.

²⁵⁰ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 68.

²⁵¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama’s Poor Whites*, p. 212.

²⁵² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 70.

²⁵³ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, p. 5.

though, I'm scientific all the way through. I wouldn't have anything to do with conjur. That's one thing in the world I ain't going to fool with..."²⁵⁴

Pluto tells Ty Ty that there is a person with albinism in the area and Ty Ty and his sons decide to capture him.²⁵⁵ Pluto encourages him by claiming that they would not have to work as hard after they catch the person with albinism, as he will be able to locate the gold.²⁵⁶ The black sharecroppers working on Ty Ty's land are not happy about the idea of having someone with albinism come to the farm. The following extract illustrates that they are scared of him:

"I'm going off to rope an all-white man tonight, and I've got to give all my thoughts to that. This all-white man is going to help me locate the lode."
"You ain't speaking of a conjurman, is you, Mr. Ty Ty?" Black Sam asked fearfully. "Mr. Ty Ty, please, sir, white folks, don't bring no conjurman here, Mr. Ty Ty, please, sir, boss, I can't stand to see a conjurman."... The colored man backed away. He forgot for the time being about his hunger. The thought of seeing an albino on the place made him breathless.²⁵⁷

Poor white and blacks in the South not only had much in common, but also shared experiences that developed an understanding and forged interracial relationships, some of which were based on shared religion and superstitions. There were cases whereby free blacks and the enslaved fooled poor whites because of their superstitions and whereby "gipsies" preyed on both the blacks and poor whites.²⁵⁸ Conjurors mesmerised poor whites who placed their belief and faith in charms and spells.²⁵⁹

Like South Africa, many poor whites in the American South were superstitious and many were too isolated or impoverished to seek medical attention and thus had to heal and cure with what they had. Remedies and herb lore were handed down from generation to generation. Some were borrowed from the Native Americans and African Americans and others were discovered by themselves. Some remedies worked, while others were mere superstition without basis in fact. According to Flynt, the superstition helped fill the void and allowed them to do something to ease the helplessness and made them feel more in control.²⁶⁰ One such superstition was

²⁵⁴ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 5.

²⁵⁵ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, pp. 5-6, 11-13

²⁵⁶ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 13.

²⁵⁷ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 19.

²⁵⁸ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside* p. 70

²⁵⁹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, pp. 69-70.

²⁶⁰ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 181-182.; J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* tes, p. 41.

aligned to clay eating, which, as indicated in chapter seven, was associated with vitamin deficiencies. However, there were poor whites who believed it helped to increase sexual prowess and some females claimed it helped pregnant women to have easier deliveries.²⁶¹

The mishmash of medicine and superstition is illustrated in *As I Lay Dying*. As mentioned, the apothecary's assistant convinces Dewey Dell that he will help her to get rid of the baby she is carrying. He provides her fake medicine (turpentine and talc) and tells her she will need an "operation": "It wont hurt you. You've had the same operation before. Ever hear about the hair of the dog?"²⁶² She drinks the "medicine" and returns for the "operation", however, after she leaves the apothecary she exclaims: "It aint going to work... That son of a Bitch... I just know it wont... I just know it."²⁶³ However, she hopes and believes it will, enough so, to go through with it.

As pointed out in the definition of superstition, weather and planting played a major theme in their superstition because so much of farming was governed by a whim, God or fate against which they were helpless. Thus, a number of superstitions to control the weather emerged.²⁶⁴ Many croppers planted by the "signs" such as a full moon or first moon or performing certain "rituals" to ensure the growth of the crop.²⁶⁵ Due to their isolation and closeness to rural-nature a number of weather and nature related superstitions emerged which helped them deal with the unknown and make sense of their surroundings and events.²⁶⁶

For example, poor whites believed that underground water could be discovered by "water witching" using a forked stick from a fruit or willow tree.²⁶⁷ In *God's Little Acre*, Ty Ty compares water divining/witching and divining for gold. He explains:

"I reckon it is, if I know what I'm doing. Some folks say a well-diviner ain't a scientific man, but I maintain he is. And I stick up the same way for a gold-diviner."²⁶⁸

However, Will who lives in a mill town and is less superstitious states:

"There's nothing scientific about breaking off a willow branch and walking over the ground with it looking for a stream of water underground. It's hit or miss."²⁶⁹

²⁶¹ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 40.

²⁶² W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Dewey Dell 184. The operation he refers to is having sex with her.

²⁶³ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, pp. Dewey Dell 186-187.

²⁶⁴ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 58.

²⁶⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 81.

²⁶⁶ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, pp. 218-219.

²⁶⁷ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*, p. 58.

²⁶⁸ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 45.

²⁶⁹ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 45.

Water witching was similar to the divining that occurred in the *Snopes* Trilogy. Here there is a piece of land called the “Old Frenchman’s Place”. A long time before the Civil War, the land used to belong to a foreigner, no one truly knew if he had been French, but he was “strange, foreign and dressed differently” and was thus, dubbed a Frenchman by the local people in the area.²⁷⁰ For a long time, the people in the area believed that the Frenchman had buried treasure on his property. Others believed there was Confederate money buried on the property.²⁷¹ Some of the locals decided to look for the “treasure” after the new owner started digging around the property.²⁷² They commission a conjurer man, Uncle Dick Bolivar, known throughout the country who they believe can help them divine where the treasure is buried.²⁷³ He is described as:

He had no kin, no ties, and he antedated everyone; nobody knew how old he was—a tall thin man in a filthy frock coat and no shirt beneath it and a long, perfectly white beard reaching below his waist, who lived in a mud-daubed hut in the river bottom five or six miles from any road. He made and sold nostrums and charms, and it was said of him that he ate not only frogs and snakes but bugs as well—anything that he could catch. There was nothing in his hut but his pallet bed, a few cooking vessels, a tremendous Bible and a faded daguerreotype of a young man in a Confederate uniform which was believed by those who had seen it to be his son.²⁷⁴

Uncle Dick uses a forked peach branch from which dangled an empty tobacco sack containing a gold-filled human tooth, tied on a piece of string.²⁷⁵ This is an example of the conjurers and their charms and spells mentioned earlier who enthralled the poor whites and in whom they believed. Uncle Dick helps them find sacks of buried money, however, it turns out later that it was buried on purpose to goad these locals into buying the land.²⁷⁶

Although there is no mention of water divining in the selected South African novels it was also practiced in South Africa. Water was one the greatest needs, especially in the rural farming areas.²⁷⁷ Water divining appears to have been a belief that came with the colonisers from countries such as the Netherlands and Germany.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 23.

²⁷¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 316 & 320

²⁷² W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 316-320.

²⁷³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 322.

²⁷⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 323.

²⁷⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 323.

²⁷⁶ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 336-338.

²⁷⁷ A. Coetzee, *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*, p. 111.

²⁷⁸ D.J. Potgieter (ed.), *Standard Encyclopaedia of Southern Africa (SESA)* XI, p. 345.

Both South African and American South poor whites believed in a number of superstitions, these helped them to make sense of aspects of their lives over which they had no control or understanding.

Perceptions

As indicated in other chapters, the poor whites were not on an island on their own, but interacted and came into contact with various “other”²⁷⁹ groups. This interaction led to the formation of perceptions, stereotypes and judgements of people who they regarded as different from their own group. However, these perceptions were not only made by the poor whites. Thus, in both cases the poor whites themselves were stereotyped and in some instances, the poor whites stereotyped other groups and certain notions were formed. The poor whites were perceived, judged, stereotyped and pitied by those who did not form part of their “group” or class. As is the case with people from different classes, cultures, religions and races, there always exists an “us” vs “them” situation. B. Anderson defines this “us” mentality as being “socially constructed”, creating a community, in this case poor whites, imagined by the “them” who perceive themselves as part of that group.²⁸⁰ Members of different groups used “others” to construct their own identities and order in the social universe.²⁸¹ K.L. Harris explains that stereotypes of a group are created and spread to a mass audience in the form of print media, and in the context of this study in the novels as a popular form of literature.²⁸² This is illustrated in the novels, which may also be used as a means of confirming certain views. This view will be used to demonstrate the perceptions others had of the poor whites, as well as the poor whites’ perceptions of those they considered different to them. While there exists a plethora of sources written on poor whites, virtually nothing exists of poor white writing about themselves. Therefore, the attitudes and views on the poor whites are well known, but the views and perceptions of poor whites regarding “others” are limited thus, the novels aim to fill this gap.

In this section, the perceptions between the poor whites and the “upper” white class, different religions and different races is examined. Although both the poor whites in South Africa and those in the American South interacted with the indigenous, first peoples (the San and Khoi and the Native Americans), it was their interactions with the larger black groups (the Bantu-speakers and the African Americans, previously the enslaved people of the USA) that has

²⁷⁹ Others include people from different classes, races and religions.

²⁸⁰ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 1991, pp. 6–7, 49.

²⁸¹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 17.

²⁸² K. L. Harris, “Untangling Centuries of South African Chinese Diasporas: Molluscs/Abalone, Ungulates/Rhinos and Equidae/Donkeys”, *South African Historical Journal*, 71 (2), 2019, p. 264.

received some limited attention in the academic literature and this is also the case in the novels. Throughout the novels, these people are referred to in derogatory and racist terms. However, it is not evident if this was solely the poor whites' outlook, the novelists' views or if it formed part of the socio-cultural time period in which the novels were written. These terms were fairly common and used in the novels and period sources thus, it is more likely that they formed part of everyday speech. However, they do reflect on the disposition of the poor whites in the respective regions.

Poor White Perceptions in South Africa

As mentioned, the poor whites interacted with a number of different groups and had specific perceptions if not stereotypes. In the South African case, they had much more interaction with the “upper” class or land-owning whites, who were usually the employers of poor whites. The poor whites usually worked for them as *bywoners* or labourers.²⁸³ This is illustrated in the following extracts from the novels:

*Al die bywoners op sy plase moes hierdie kerk bywoon.*²⁸⁴

(All the *bywoners* on his farms must attend this church.)

*Van more af is Kasper Booyen sy baas...*²⁸⁵

(From tomorrow Kasper Booyen will be his boss.)

*...baie verarmde boere was maar te begerig om 'n sitplekkie te kry as bywoner...*²⁸⁶

(Many impoverished farmers were only too eager to get a space as a *bywoner*.)

*Daar is baie verskeidenheid in die bywonermaatskappy op Andries Vry se plaas.*²⁸⁷

(There is a variety of *bywoners* on Andries Vry's farm.)

The “upper” or landowning whites had a different range of perceptions of poor whites, which ranged from seeing them as inferior to seeing them as part of the Afrikaner *volk* – worth saving, pitiful and finally paternalistic. Although the poor whites were firstly white, they were separated from the “upper” class and land-owning whites in an economic sense.²⁸⁸ Prior to 1850, there was a mutual feeling of equality between the two classes²⁸⁹ and some whites still considered the poor white equal and part of the *volk*.

²⁸³ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp. 192-193.

²⁸⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 85.

²⁸⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 59.

²⁸⁶ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 23.

²⁸⁷ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 28.

²⁸⁸ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

²⁸⁹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp. 184-186.; L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 49

“... daar loop honderde Ampies wat die adel van die Voortrekker se bloed nog in hulle are het...”²⁹⁰

(“... there are hundreds of Ampies who still have the noble Voortrekker blood in their veins...”)

Although Carnegie Commission member Malherbe claimed that the poor white was not a class apart in the caste,²⁹¹ Money and Van Zyl-Herman disagree, stating that such ideas formed part of the propaganda and myths propagated by the white minority.²⁹² B. Freud argued that white society consisted of deeply differentiated, sometimes antagonistic classes that had a fragile unity based on race and politics.²⁹³ De Kiewiet further adds that at the turn of the twentieth century it became clear that white society had developed within itself disturbing inequalities which separated them in terms of class.²⁹⁴

However, with land becoming scarcer, the closing of borders and the discovery of minerals, South Africa was starting to develop and industrialise and the economic position of an individual became an important factor.²⁹⁵ In the *Huisgenoot*, the differences in white class and status are further highlighted in the problems experienced when employing poor whites. Employers complained that poor whites regarded themselves as equals due to the colour of their skin. Advice was given regarding the employment of poor whites in this regard:

Make such a domestic understand for her own sake that although she is not of the same class as the coloured servant, she also does not belong to the class of the employer...²⁹⁶

According to L. Pretorius, with the acknowledgement of a growing poor white class, the “upper” class or land-owners and the poor-white *bywoner* or labourer no longer stood on equal footing. Not only did the poor white man go to work, but so did his wife.²⁹⁷ This is illustrated in *Bywoners: the Sitmans go to work for the De Klerks*. This included Bettie working as a maid in the De Klerk house.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 77.

²⁹¹ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Education and the Poor White III*, p. 6.

²⁹² D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 2.

²⁹³ B. Freund, “The Poor Whites; a Social Force and Social Problem in South Africa” in R. Morrell (ed.), *White but Poor: Essays on the History of Poor Whites in Southern Africa, 1880-1940*, p. xiii.

²⁹⁴ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

²⁹⁵ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp 186-187.; D. Money & D. van Zyl-Herman (eds.), *Rethinking White Societies in Southern Africa: 1930s-1990s*, p. 2.

²⁹⁶ J. van Wyk, “Social Concerns in Afrikaans Drama: 1930-1940”, *Alternation*, 2(1), 1995, p. 56.

²⁹⁷ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD thesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 52.

²⁹⁸ J. van Bruggen, “Bywoners” in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 40, 44 & 47.

The view of a number of “upper” class whites who perceived the poor whites as inferior is illustrated in the following extracts from a range of the selected novels:

*“Jy is astant, nè, jou niksgewend! Dis mos jou werk... nie myne nie!... Die hele nasie moet mos ongehoorde belastings betaal om julle joppies aan die gang te hou en nou wil jy my inspan om jou werk te doen? Ek sien die hele boksendais van julle liewers uitmekaar uit spat, voordat ek 'n pikaniën stuur om jou te help...”*²⁹⁹

(“You are insolent, aren’t you, you good-for-nothing! It is your job... not mine!... The whole nation has to pay unheard of taxes to keep you people going and now you want to use me to do your work? I would rather see your entire lot fall to pieces before I send you a small black to help you...”)

*Armblankeplaag! Arm aan alles, behalwe aan ergernis vir hulself en vir gegoede mense!*³⁰⁰

(Poor white plague! Poor in everything except an annoyance to themselves and wealthy people.)

*“'n Slegte witman is slegter as 'n slegte kaffer!”*³⁰¹

(“A lazy/bad white man is worse than a lazy/bad black!”)

There were still some who pitied the poor whites and were paternalistic towards them. The idea of helping to save the *volk* was a strong belief.³⁰² The selected South African novels provide the following evidence for these views:

*Booyesen het vanmore, toe hy so offisieel te werk gegaan het met die opstel van die kontrak, 'n roeping gevoel om die Afrikanerkind te red van algehele ontaarding, om 'n wilde wese vol vasgeroeste gewoontes en anti-beskawingsneiginge op te voed tot 'n bruikbare mens.*³⁰³

(Yesterday, when he officially set about drawing up the contract, Booyesen felt a calling to save the Afrikaner child from complete degeneration, to educate a wild creature full of entrenched habits and anti-civilisation tendencies into a useful human being.)

*“Kyk, daar kom Ampie oor die werf! Daar lê vir ons 'n plig, Kasper!”*³⁰⁴

(“Look, there comes Ampie across the yard! There lies a duty for us, Kasper!”)

²⁹⁹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 100.

³⁰⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 161.

³⁰¹ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 76.

³⁰² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 327, 338, 348.

³⁰³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 76.

³⁰⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 78.

*Stadig reik Nicolas hom die hand. Hy voel half jammer vir hierdie oompie wat daar so verwaarloos en verreneweerd uitsien.*³⁰⁵

(Slowly Nicolas offers him his hand. He feels sorry for this little old man who looks so neglected and weathered.)

*Andries Vry en sy vrou jammer voel vir sy kindertjies.*³⁰⁶

(Andries Vry and his wife feel sorry for his children.)

Their interaction with those of other religions was usually in the form of a Jewish shopkeeper or a Jew who either lent them money or purchased their debt. The novels represent this in the following statements:

*En gister het hy 'n kwaai aanskrywing van die Jood ontvang oor dieselfde skuld...*³⁰⁷

(And yesterday he received an angry letter from the Jew about the same debt...)

*Nog net twee dae het die Jood hom kans gegee. Dan moet die skuld betaal wees...*³⁰⁸

(The Jew gave him a grace period of two days. Then the debt must be paid.)

*...Jood daar was om hulle ou grondjie te vat...*³⁰⁹

(The Jew was there to take their piece of land.)

The Afrikaner nation was tightly knit and race was an important factor. The division was also exasperated by international ideas and philosophies that were formed between the World Wars.³¹⁰ Many people from the other religions and in this case again the Jews, regarded the poor whites as inferior due to their economic position in society, as seen in the following quote:

*...die Jood kyk na die prokureur en sê... "Poor devils, but what can do!"*³¹¹

(The Jew looked to his lawyer and said... "Poor devils, but what can do!")

With regards to other races, there have always been interactions between the whites and those of other races since the whites landed on the shores of what would become South Africa. Over the years, this interaction has seen conflict in the form of wars, trade and work. This interaction has also led to the mixing of peoples and the exchange of culture and ideas. People of colour accompanied whites during the Great Trek and some fought with them against the British in the Anglo Boer War.³¹² In the period of this study, the poor whites either had people

³⁰⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 159.

³⁰⁶ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, p. 28.

³⁰⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 74.

³⁰⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 91.

³⁰⁹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 186.

³¹⁰ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 417.

³¹¹ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 192.

³¹² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 191-192.; D. Harrison, *The White Tribe of Africa: South Africa in Perspective*, pp. 69-70.

of colour, usually blacks, working for them or worked alongside them,³¹³ as is evident in the novels:

*Maar hy sal darem maar die ou skaapwagter moet waarsku om sy oë oop te hou. 'n Mens moet hulle mos gereeld sê wat om te doen.*³¹⁴

(He would have to warn the shepherd to keep his eyes open. You need to regularly tell them what to do.)

*Kaapse – volk, Kaffers en arm witmense werk daar langs mekaar...*³¹⁵

(Cape folk,³¹⁶ blacks and poor whites work there next to each other.)

*Oom Kasper voel ook maar vadsig om vir Ampie en die kaffers aan te spoor.*³¹⁷

(Uncle Kasper feels weary to encourage Ampie and the blacks.)

After the discovery of precious minerals, both the blacks and poor whites moved to the urban areas to work and find an escape from the poverty in the rural areas. They lived and worked in close proximity to each other.³¹⁸ Here again they worked side-by-side one another and later the whites became the supervisors.³¹⁹

Other races also regarded the poor whites as inferior and not worth the respect they would grant to the “upper” or landowning class. As mentioned earlier, the close work and interaction caused the blacks to view the poor whites as their economic equals.³²⁰ They were regarded as similar due to their landlessness and lack of industrial skill.³²¹ Furthermore, some of the views the “upper” class and land-owning whites exhibited towards the poor whites were the same as how they viewed and treated the black and the blacks soon realised that not all whites were equal. Thus, they lost their respect for poor whites.³²² The novels also provide a few examples:

³¹³ L. Callinicos, *A People's History of South Africa I: Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, pp. 24-25.; H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, pp. 296-298

³¹⁴ A.H. Jonker, *Die Plaasverdeling*, p. 11.

³¹⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 182.

³¹⁶ Coloureds.

³¹⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 135.

³¹⁸ L. *A People's History of South Africa II. Working Life: Factories, Townships, and Popular Culture on the Rand, 1886-1940*. Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1987.; C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 194.

³¹⁹ H. Giliomee, “Wretched Folk, Ready for any Mischief: The South African State's Battle to Incorporate Poor Whites and Militant Workers, 1890-1939”, *Historia*, 47(2), 2002, p. 621.

³²⁰ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, pp. 179 & 193.; R.A. Lewis, “A Study of Some Aspects of the Poor White Problem in South Africa”, M.A. thesis, Rhodes University, 1973, p. 22.

³²¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 197.

³²² L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek 'n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, pp. 53-54.

*En die ou Kaffer kyk sy baas so half uitdagend aan... "Gee stop, baas Tonie", sê hy taamlik astring. ...hy het gou-gou ingesien dat die baas eenvoudig nie sonder hom kan klaarkom nie.*³²³

(And the old black looks at his boss half defiantly... "Stop, boss Tonie", he says rather cheekily. ...he soon realised that the boss simply could not do without him.)

It was, however, not only the blacks that viewed the poor whites as inferior, but also those of other races such as the Indians. In the following extract from *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, the Indian shop keeper ignores Ampie and then is quite rude to him until he realises he has money to spend.

*... langbaard-dikbuikkoelie wat nou sy uitstalling buite bring sonder om van Ampie notisie te neem... "Ja? En wat wil jy dan hê?"... "Kom kyk maar binnekant, Meneer!"*³²⁴
(... long-bearded, pot-bellied Indian who now brings his exhibition outside without taking notice of Ampie... "Yes? And what do you want then?"... "Come take a look inside, Sir!")

The interaction the poor whites had with people they deemed different to themselves led to a number of different general perceptions about these people and groups. As indicated there exists very little information on the poor whites' perceptions of "other" groups other than the novels. The poor whites usually viewed the landowning class or "upper" class whites with respect and something to aspire to. They saw themselves as part of the Afrikaner nation and thus felt unified by this, however, there were a number of times their differences became apparent and they felt inferior.

*... en Antonie voel asof hy voor hul oë 'n bietjie korter en skraler word, 'n bietjie laer op die grond sak.*³²⁵

(... and Antonie felt as though he was getting a little shorter and thinner before their eyes, sinking slightly lower into the ground.)

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the poor whites realised they were different from landowning or "upper" class whites in the two quotes from the novel *Bywoners*, where Bettie Sitman exclaims that they (the De Klerk family) are different from us (the Sitman family).³²⁶ Ampie also realises that there were differences between his family and the family of the farmer he goes to work for.

³²³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 31.

³²⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 23.

³²⁵ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 160.

³²⁶ J. van Bruggen, "Bywoners" in A.P. Grové & S. Strydom, *Drie Prosastukke van Jochem van Bruggen*, pp. 51-52.

*Dis anders as in die murasies by sy pa-hulle.*³²⁷

(It was different to life in the ruins with his family.)

*Hy het die feesvreugde as 'n buitestaander aanskou en in sy hart het die bitterheid baie groot geword. Vir die eerste keer in sy lewe kon sy oë toe opmerk die verwaarlosing en verslegting van sy familie...*³²⁸

(He witnessed the festive joy as an outsider and in his heart the bitterness became very great. For the first time in his life, his eyes could notice the neglect and deterioration of his family.)

Regardless, in many cases the poor whites still viewed themselves as equal to the “upper” class and land-owners. As discussed in chapter eight, many had been land owners themselves, but had fallen on hard times due to a number of factors.³²⁹ Therefore, they still regarded themselves as foremost white and still in a position that demanded respect from their fellow whites. This is evident in the following extracts from the novels:

*Hy het ook 'n stille aanklag teen die ewemens wat hom en sy werk, begaaf soos hy is, nie waardeer nie, sy persoonlikheid krenk en sy arbeid swak betaal.*³³⁰

(He also made a silent curse against the same people who did not value him and his work, gifted as he was, insulted him personally and paid him poorly for his labour.)

*Hy moet darem weet dat hy, Antonie, nog nooit kneg was by 'n ander boer nie...*³³¹

(He must at least know that he, Antonie, has never been a servant to another farmer...)

The poor whites usually regarded the Jews as money grabbing and greedy, outsmarting everyone and profiting at their expense.³³² Ampie uses this view when describing Bart's greediness *...hy is 'n Jood so uit die kas* (... he is a Jew right off of the shelf/he is exactly like a Jew.)³³³ Other extracts from the selected novels provide a similar view:

*“Jy moet baie eerlik met die Jode wees wat vir jou die drank lewer. Hulle maak die meeste geld, en dis baie selde dat hulle in die moeilikheid kom. – Dis seker omdat hulle eenmaal die uitverkore volk was en nou beskerm die duiwel hulle! Daar is nie so 'n ding as arm Jode in ons land nie. Arm Afrikaners, ja, by duisende...”*³³⁴

³²⁷ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 80.

³²⁸ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 129.

³²⁹ L. Pretorius, “Suid-Afrikaanse Kommissies van Ondersoek ‘n Sociologise Studie”, PhD tesis, Stellenbosch Universiteit, 1985, p. 49.

³³⁰ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 12.

³³¹ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 74.

³³² H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners: Biography of a People*, p. 418.

³³³ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 65.

³³⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 37.

(“You must be very honest with the Jews who deliver you the alcohol. They make the most money, and it is very rare that they get into trouble. – It is probably because they were once the chosen people and now the devil protects them! There is no such thing as poor Jews in our country. Poor Afrikaners, yes, by the thousands...”)

*Met sy stukwerk kry hy meestal by Fisher 'n kans, maar die Jood beknibbel dit soos 'n stuk beskuit.*³³⁵

(He gets most of his piece work from Fisher, but the Jew skimps on it/chews it over like a piece of rusk.)

*... neem 'n brief uit sy sak en lees daarin dat die Jood nou alles reggekry het en aan hom, oom Sagrys, later kaart en transport van oom Soois se lappie grond sal besorg...*³³⁶

(... take a letter from his pocket and reads that the Jew has succeeded in everything and will later give him Sagrys, deed and transport to Soois' land.)

Although there are many instances whereby the poor whites lived and worked in harmony with people of other races, they always saw themselves as superior to and stereotyped them in turn,³³⁷ although they were economic equals.³³⁸ This aligns with Anderson's connection of the creation of a group identity from both within and without.³³⁹ Poor whites worked and lived in close proximity to people of colour³⁴⁰ and there were times when the poor whites even employed blacks, especially after the collapse of the tribal system.³⁴¹ The poor whites believed themselves superior due to their white skin, religion and belonging to the *volk*.³⁴² Their sense of superiority is apparent in the following statements about others – in this case people of colour – a black and an Indian:

*Daar volg 'n vinnige skeldtoneel, waarby Antonie feitlik alleen die woord voer en al die skeldwoorde waarmee hy... hier op die delwery reeds bevriend geraak het, ten toon sprei “Wat skop jy die esels so, vuilgoed!” vloek Antonie, en geniepsig laat hy 'n borsriem deur die lug fluit. Ou Daïel koes, maar die riem plak hom skuins oor die rugstring...*³⁴³

(A quick scolding scene soon follows, during which it is a monologue for Antonie and all the swear words he... befriended on the diggings are recited “What are you kicking the

³³⁵ J. van Bruggen, *Die Sprinkaanbeampte van Sluis*, p. 20.

³³⁶ C.M. Van den Heever, *Droogte*, p. 145.

³³⁷ *Cape of Good Hope. Report of the Select Committee on the Poor White Question*. Cape Town, Cape Times, 1906.; Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: Rural Impoverishment and Rural Exodus I*, pp. 159-165.

³³⁸ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 193.

³³⁹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, pp. 6-7 & 49.

³⁴⁰ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*. Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2001.

³⁴¹ C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 180.

³⁴² C.W. de Kiewiet, *A History of South Africa: Social and Economic*, p. 181.

³⁴³ A.H. Jonker, *Die Trekboer*, p. 105.

donkeys like that for, you filth!” cursed Antonie, and with a sneer he let a whip whistle through the air. Old Dael tries to duck, but the whip strikes diagonally across his spine...)
*Ou-Moosa is 'n vuilgoed van 'n koelie. – Ek het die maat so suiwer geneem...*³⁴⁴
(Old-Moosa is a scum of an Indian. – I took him at his word...)

These interactions and perceptions regarding poor whites were not limited to South Africa. Similar and different circumstances existed in the American South, but also reflected on the stereotypical perceptions of the other.

Poor White Perceptions in the American South

In both the novels and in the academic literature, the interaction between the poor whites and those from “other” groups is more numerous and more apparent than those in the South African case. There was a sharp division of whites in the South. The division was measured socially and economically and usually depended on property.³⁴⁵ Land, property and class were closely connected and remained the measure of social mobility.³⁴⁶ Poor whites were a class in themselves but were never depicted as a class for themselves.³⁴⁷ Poor whites usually either worked for or became squatters, tenant farmers or sharecroppers on the land of the white land-owners.³⁴⁸ For political reasons, they were tolerated and at times helped.³⁴⁹ This is illustrated in the following passages:

“My name is Snopes. I heard you got a farm to rent.”³⁵⁰

“Picking peaches... Piece work. Give five cents a box.”³⁵¹

Cotton Pickers Wanted—placards on the road, handbills out...³⁵²

“I got twenty acres of cotton... Thought I’d go down and try to get some pickers.”³⁵³

Colonel Sutpen had allowed him to squat in a crazy shack on a slough...³⁵⁴

In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the “upper” land-owning class looks down on the poor whites moving westwards in search of work. They regard them as slightly better than animals:

³⁴⁴ J. van Bruggen, *Ampie: Die Trilogie*, p. 69.

³⁴⁵ A.B. Hart, *The Southern South*, p. 30.

³⁴⁶ N. Isenberg, *White Trash. The 400-year Untold History of Class in America*, p. xvii.

³⁴⁷ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, p. 181.

³⁴⁸ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 93.

³⁴⁹ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 71.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 94.

³⁵⁰ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 27.

³⁵¹ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 26.

³⁵² J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 27.

³⁵³ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 28.

³⁵⁴ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

“Well, Okie use’ ta mean you was from Oklahoma. Now it means you’re a dirty son-of-a-bitch. Okie means you’re scum. Don’t mean nothing itself, it’s the way they say it ...”...
“Well, you ain’t in your country now. You’re in California, an’ we don’t want you goddamn Okies settlin’ down.”... “Them goddamn Okies got no sense and no feeling. They ain’t human. A human being wouldn’t live like they do. A human being couldn’t stand it to be so dirty and miserable. They ain’t a hell of a lot better than gorillas.”³⁵⁵

In the *Collected stories of William Faulkner*, as well as in *Absalom, Absalom!* Wash Jones is treated very differently than other whites by Thomas Sutpen, the land-owner. In the following extracts, Sutpen places himself in the most comfortable position while the two drink together, while Jones is left to either squat (with no stool made available to him) or later find an alternative seat.

... the demon lying in the hammock while Jones squatted against a post, rising from time to time to pour for the demon from the demijohn...³⁵⁶

They both sat now, though Sutpen had the single chair while Wash used whatever box or keg was handy...³⁵⁷

Later in the novel and short story, Sutpen, a man in his 60s, gets Jones’ fifteen-year-old granddaughter pregnant. In the following statement his disregard for the poor white girl and her grandfather is apparent: “You said if she was a mare, you could give her a good stall in the stable.” “Well?” Sutpen said.³⁵⁸

In the following quote from *Tobacco Road*, Captain John Harmon’s thoughts of educating or training poor whites is apparent and not worth his time.

Rather than attempt to show his tenants how to conform to the newer and more economical methods of modern agriculture, which he thought would have been an impossible task from the start....³⁵⁹

In both of the selected novels by Caldwell, *Tobacco Road* and *God’s Little Acre*, the sons of the poor whites leave home and pull themselves out of their poverty and enter the “upper” white class. In both instances, neither son wants to return or help his poor white family.

³⁵⁵ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 18.

³⁵⁶ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 142.

³⁵⁷ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 237.

³⁵⁸ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 239.

³⁵⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

“Something got into Jim Leslie at an early age. He wouldn't have much to do with the rest of us, and still won't. Right now, he takes on like he don't know who I am.”³⁶⁰

“Jim Leslie didn't use to be that way... When he was a boy at home, he was just like all the rest of us. He married a society girl on The Hill, though, when he made a lot of money, and now he won't have anything to do with us.”³⁶¹

“Tom didn't send no money. He don't appear to be aiming to help you none...”... “Tom said he wasn't never coming over here again... he was going to stay where he was at.”
... “Tom says for you and Ada to go to the county poor-farm and stay.”³⁶²

Although there were a number of different types of religion in the South, there is very little evidence of the interaction between poor whites and those from other religious groups, although they must have existed. In the *Snopes* Trilogy there is brief mention made of a Jew living in the setting where the novels take place.³⁶³ However, there is no mention of their thoughts or actions towards the poor whites or vice versa.

Due to poor whites living on the fringes of society, in the back country and in the isolated, unproductive and poor patches of land, there existed more interaction between the poor whites and people of different racial groups.³⁶⁴ As mentioned, poor whites and blacks interacted and attended church together, as well as worked side-by-side. Records show that poor whites interacted with blacks in a number of ways, including fraternising, socialising, drinking, gambling, fighting and trading. Poor whites also worked as “slave catches”, overseers and patrollers, however, others aided fugitive enslaved people and helped them rebel.³⁶⁵ Cecil-Fronsman states, “poor whites and blacks drank, whored and plotted crimes together.”³⁶⁶ In some cases, blacks also worked for poor whites. There existed a love hate, equality and inequality complex relationship mix.³⁶⁷ Examples are evident in the following quotes:

... the white people on the bench making way for the Negro woman to sit down beside the young white woman and put her arm around her...³⁶⁸

³⁶⁰ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 8.

³⁶¹ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 41.

³⁶² E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 17.

³⁶³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 584.

³⁶⁴ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 13.

³⁶⁵ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 8, 14 & 16.; C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 44.

³⁶⁶ B. Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in the Antebellum North Carolina*, p. 90.

³⁶⁷ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 15.

³⁶⁸ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 869.

... in the new ground Black Sam and Uncle Felix were plowing the cotton.³⁶⁹

Shaw and Buck and Black Sam were digging into the clay.³⁷⁰

Similarly, to the South African example, the interaction between poor whites and those they deemed different to them led to the formation of perceptions, judgements and stereotypes. The same “them vs us” formula will be used to exemplify the perceptions others had of the poor whites and the perception the poor whites had of the others, very much in the Anderson perception.

As previously mentioned in chapter seven, the poor whites in the American South were stereotyped, they were regarded as lazy and ignorant, especially by the majority of the “upper” white class or landowning whites and some blacks, including enslaved peoples who looked upon them with contempt and bias.³⁷¹ Their experiences, views and daily lives were never truly dealt with in academic literature, instead they were regarded as an undifferentiated mass. Therefore, the novels become an important and revealing source.³⁷²

Similarly, to the “upper” class, land-owning whites, the blacks looked down on the poor whites. As mentioned in chapter seven, referred to them as “po white trash” or “po’ buckra”. Thus, the revealed how they viewed the poor whites in relation to themselves.³⁷³ As was the case in South Africa, blacks realised that the power the land-owners had to compel labour could also be extended to poor whites further caused them to lose respect for them.³⁷⁴ Similarly, poor white women also worked for the land-owners side-by-side with blacks.³⁷⁵

In the following extracts from the selected novels, their disdain by blacks for the poor whites is highlighted:

They laughed. It was not the first time they had laughed at him, calling him white trash behind his back.³⁷⁶

³⁶⁹ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, p. 9.

³⁷⁰ E. Caldwell, *God’s Little Acre*, p. 43.

³⁷¹ D.R. Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States*, “Poor White Trash”.; P. Huber, “A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity”, *Southern Cultures*, 1(2), 1995, pp. 151-152, 155 & 161. A.N.J. den Hollander, “The Tradition of ‘Poor Whites’” in W.T. Couch, *Culture in the South*.

³⁷² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 3.

³⁷³ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 17.; K.L. Thomas, “Black Sheep: Representations of Poor Whites in American Literature and Culture”, D. Phil. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1998, p. 13.

³⁷⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 105.

³⁷⁵ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 41.

³⁷⁶ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

“Stop right dar, white man. Stop right whar you is. You ain't never crossed dese steps whilst Gunnel here, and you ain't gwy' do hit now.”³⁷⁷

Negroes passing the house were in the habit of looking at the Lesters... Among themselves they talked about the Lesters, and laughed about them...³⁷⁸

The negroes were laughing so hard they could not stand up straight... it was the action of the Lesters that appeared so funny to them.³⁷⁹

However, in a number of cases the poor whites and blacks had good relationships. According to Forret, the relationships between blacks and poor whites were shaped by common misconceptions.³⁸⁰ Many poor whites shared similar thoughts and emotions in their interactions with blacks.³⁸¹ Furthermore, the marginal economic status of poor whites, combined with their sometime close relations with blacks, resulted in situations in which the blacks viewed poor whites as equals.³⁸² This is evident in *Tobacco Road*: “The colored men did not come any closer. They would have liked to help

Lov, because they were friends of his...”³⁸³

The poor whites also had their own views and stereotypes of others. As was the case with Bettie Sitman in the South African case study, poor whites in the American South also regarded themselves as different from the “upper” class and land-owning whites. The term “our people” is used throughout *The Grapes of Wrath*, indicating that they regarded themselves as a different group of whites.

Our people are good people; our people are kind people. Pray God some day kind people won't all be poor.³⁸⁴

I been thinkin' a hell of a lot, thinkin' about our people livin' like pigs, an' the good rich lan' layin' fallow, or maybe one fella with a million acres, while a hunderd thousan' good farmers is starvin'.³⁸⁵

Similarly, the Bundrens in *As I Lay Dying* would not sleep in the homes of the “upper” classes they passed.

³⁷⁷ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

³⁷⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 3.

³⁷⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

³⁸⁰ J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 4.

³⁸¹ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 9.

³⁸² C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 51.

³⁸³ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

³⁸⁴ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 19.

³⁸⁵ J. Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Chapter 28.

...and that supper was about ready. Only they didn't want to come in. "I thank you", Bundren says. "We wouldn't discommode you. We got a little something in the basket. We can make out."³⁸⁶

In many cases, the poor whites looked up to and aspired to be like the "upper" class and land-owning whites. The following quotes shed light on this:

... thought of himself as being so on the fine figure of the black stallion, galloping about the plantation. For that moment his heart would be quiet and proud.³⁸⁷

that same fine figure of a man that Wash Jones called him³⁸⁸

He did not blame Captain John... Captain John had always treated him fairly, and had done more for him than any other man.³⁸⁹

"Why aint I a town boy, pa?"... God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country...³⁹⁰

In the *Snopes* Trilogy, mention is made of Jews living in the same area and how they were perceived by the community in general.

... two Jews, brothers with their families, who ran two clothing stores. But one of them had been trained in Russia to be a rabbi... he was absolved... the other Jewish brother and his family... were members of, the Methodist church and so they didn't count either... in our eyes merely non-white people...³⁹¹

The poor whites regarded themselves as superior to blacks firstly because they were not enslaved and in order to elevate themselves, in their own minds, they often invoked their skin colour to reinforce their feelings of superiority.³⁹² The poorest and most ignorant poor white felt they had someone to look down on.³⁹³ Their views and perceptions of blacks were that they were replaceable, less than, cursed and their feelings and needs of no consequence. This is evident in the following extracts:

"But I ain't going to give no black nigger the chance to tell me I can't go nowhere..."³⁹⁴

³⁸⁶ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Samson 86.

³⁸⁷ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

³⁸⁸ W. Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!*, p. 208.

³⁸⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 7.

³⁹⁰ W. Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, p. Vardaman 53.

³⁹¹ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 584.

³⁹² J. Forret, *Race Relations at the Margins: Slaves and Poor Whites in the Antebellum Southern Countryside*, p. 17.

³⁹³ M.W. Brewer, "Poor Whites and Negroes in the South Since the Civil War", *The Journal of Negro History*, 15(1), 1930, p. 29.

³⁹⁴ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 236.

It would seem to him that that world in which Negroes, whom the Bible told him had been created and cursed by God to be brute and vassal to all men of white skin...³⁹⁵

“Now, son, you know good and well I ain't got the time to be worrying about darkies eating...”³⁹⁶

“What in the pluperfect hell do you mean by coming to the house and bothering me, Black Sam?... I sent you word that I'd get you some food when I get around to it. You can't come here to the house and bother me like this...”³⁹⁷

“... He looked like he was dead.” “Niggers will get killed. Looks like there ain't no way to stop it.”³⁹⁸

“Niggers has got more sense than trying to interfere with white folks' business. They don't dare come.”³⁹⁹

They considered themselves superior, but also realised that the blacks were regarded as more valuable than themselves to the “upper” class and land-owning whites. Enslaved people were protected from severe hunger and starvation as it was in the slave owners' best economic interests to keep their property fed and healthy⁴⁰⁰ whereas to them poor whites were mostly expendable.⁴⁰¹

... better found and housed and even clothed than he and his; that world in which he sensed always about him mocking echoes of black laughter...⁴⁰²

... the hired Negro who wore warmer... cursing the Negro for his black skin inside the warmer garments than his, a white man's...⁴⁰³

Are they going to feed them niggers before they do a white man?⁴⁰⁴

However, there were those who would put aside their views and feelings. Mink in the *Snopes* Trilogy goes to work for a black sharecropper to help him bring in his cotton and to earn some money. He works for the black, eats his food and receives shelter from him: “Hidy”, Mink said. “Looks like you could use another hand in here.”... “You want to pick?” the Negro said.⁴⁰⁵

³⁹⁵ W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, pp. 236-237.

³⁹⁶ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 6.

³⁹⁷ E. Caldwell, *God's Little Acre*, p. 19.

³⁹⁸ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 14.

³⁹⁹ E. Caldwell, *Tobacco Road*, Chapter 4.

⁴⁰⁰ K.L. Merritt, *Masterless Men: Poor Whites and Slavery in the Antebellum South*, p. 116.

⁴⁰¹ J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*, p. 31.

⁴⁰² W. Faulkner, *Collected Stories of William Faulkner*, p. 237.

⁴⁰³ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 649.

⁴⁰⁴ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 247.

⁴⁰⁵ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, pp. 965-966.

According to Bolton, this was not unusual and there are records of poor whites working for blacks.⁴⁰⁶

It was not only blacks that the poor whites looked down on, but other racial groups as well. In the *Snopes* Trilogy, the community's general view of the Chinese comes to light in the following extract.

... the Chinese all attended, were members of, the Methodist church and so they didn't count either, being in our eyes merely non-white people, not actually colored. And although the Chinese was definitely a colored man even if not a Negro, he was only he, single peculiar and barren; not just kinless but even landless, half the world or anyway half the continent (we all knew about San Francisco's Chinatown) sundered from his like and therefore as threatless as a mule.⁴⁰⁷

Interactions led to stereotypes and judgements being made. As mentioned, very little exists on the poor whites' perceptions of those of other races. An "us" vs "them" situation was created with unique ideas, views and outlooks which permeate some of the novels.

Reflecting on Poor White Religions, Superstitions and Perceptions

There are a number of similarities and differences between the poor whites' beliefs, both religious and superstitious, in South Africa and the American South as well as their perceptions of other groups.

With regards to their religion, the majority of both the poor whites in South Africa and those in the American South tended to be Protestant. The poor whites in South Africa were Calvinists, had a Calvinistic outlook on life and belonged to the DRC. Whereas the poor whites in the American South tended to be either Baptists or Methodists and belonged to these respective churches. In both countries, the poor whites had a dominant group to which other poor whites gravitated. In the South African case, the majority of poor whites were Afrikaners, however, a number of English poor whites adopted their culture, language and religion or outlooks. In the case of the American South, most poor whites were Protestant Baptists or Methodists and a number of Irish Catholics converted to belong or have a sense of community. The poor whites in both countries had a fatalistic outlook as a result of their religion. Both regarded everyone as equal before God and that God would either punish their actions or save them. The South African poor whites distinctly regarded themselves as Afrikaners and thus God's "chosen

⁴⁰⁶ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. 9.

⁴⁰⁷ W. Faulkner, *Snopes: The Hamlet, The Town, The Mansion*, p. 584.

people". Although there is no mention of this in the academic text regarding the poor whites of the American South, the idea and theme is strongly emphasised in the selected American novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Religion and especially the Bible played a very important role in the lives of the South African poor whites. Nearly all had a Bible and it became an important instrument for life (to become confirmed) and education (learning to read and write). However, not all the poor whites in the American South were religious or held a special regard for religion. There were poor whites who were illiterate and could not afford a Bible. There were some who had never heard of Christianity or heard a sermon and there were some who simply were not interested and did not care for religion, as it prohibited some of their favourite activities.

Both the poor whites in South Africa and the American South were superstitious and believed in a number of supernatural and paranormal elements. Superstitions helped them make sense of the unknown, which was a constant variable in their lives. It also impacted all facets of their lives, especially medicine, farming and death. There were a number of different superstitions, however, from the selected novels it appears as though the Afrikaner poor whites' superstitions were very much entwined in their religion, more so than the poor whites of the American South.

It can, however, be concluded that religion and superstitions played an important role in the culture of both sets of poor whites. To a degree, it gave them a sense of understanding, rationale and reason. Although the beliefs differ, the circumstances and conditions in both countries created a people who felt the need to believe in something beyond their dismal situations, allowing them to have an explanation for their daily lives and dire realities.

The poor whites in both countries inherited traits of their religion and superstitions from their ancestors and their respective mother countries. In their new land, these changed and developed due to their environment, circumstances and the influences of and interactions with other people. As explained in chapters three and four, the poor whites were an isolated people who mostly resided and etched a living on the fringes in the rural farming areas. This resulted in a number of their beliefs being linked to nature. They had little control over their lives and circumstances. Due to their poverty and isolation, their beliefs and superstitions gave meaning to their lives and helped them to make sense of it. Often, this belief resulted in a mixture of religion and superstition. This is more evident in the selected South African novels.

Stereotypes and judgements were made about the poor whites and by the poor whites in both countries. In South Africa, the poor whites formed part of the Afrikaner *volk* and were mostly

regarded as a united people. However, class did play a role and some of the “upper” whites scorned the poor whites. The poor whites themselves mostly saw themselves as equal to the “upper” whites as they too had a white skin, shared the same history and ancestors and were part of the *volk*. Nevertheless, there were still poor whites who regarded themselves as different and had a sense of inferiority. Whites from both classes had a larger interaction than those in the American South. These interactions were social, cultural, religious and political, very seldom economic, unless the poor whites worked, rented or sold goods to the “upper” class.

With regards to their interactions with people from different religions and races, it is evident that they perceived them as different, which created some form of stereotyping. The Jew was a “thief” and “money hungry” and the black or person of colour was “inferior” and “subservient”, while the Chinese was “kinless” and “landless”. Although, some of them did get along with these people and might even have formed friendships and other relationships, interactions did take place and one can go as far as to state that these interactions were social, cultural and economic, but never political.

The American South case study has a number of similarities and differences. Poor whites, although belonging to the white race, were never regarded nor saw themselves as equals with the “upper” classes. They were white and had the vote, which made them a difficult component in relation to the “upper” white class who needed to emphasise white superiority, but who also scorned and at times pitied the poor whites. Interactions did occur, but they were socially, culturally and economically different from each other. It was mostly economic interaction that happened in the same regard to the poor whites in South Africa and like the whites in South Africa, they too were more united on a political front.

The poor whites in the American South had much more interaction with people of other races, especially blacks. This is due to the fact that they shared a similar economic level. Unlike the poor whites in South Africa, poor whites in the American South had much more interaction and often formed relationships. These included social, religious, economic and to an extent cultural, but similar to South Africa, never political integration. Although these relationships were formed, they still considered themselves superior and clung to that “notion”.
















It was their interaction and contact with other groups of different classes, races and religions that created the poor whites into a separate and unique group, with their own religions, superstitions (See Table Six) and perceptions (See Table Seven).

Table Six: Comparing Beliefs (Religion and Superstition)

	South Africa	The American South
Religion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Calvinism (DRC) • Protestant • Influenced all aspects of life • Identity • Isolation: religion static • Conservative • Individualism • Freedom and Independence • Superiority • God's chosen people • God's will – predestination • Salvation • Fatalism • Practiced living faith • Equal before God • Bible important supreme authority • Old Testament focused • Influenced decision making • Religion ensured literacy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist • Protestant • Sects • Evangelism fervour • Methodical • Emotional • Included blacks and women (saw as equal) • Sense of community • Ministers: mostly no education or training • Female preachers • Supported slavery • Recreation sinful • Believed they were more religious than upper class • Minister/preachers moved around • Retold bible stories with explanations • Disciplinary action: All involved and participated • Bible was a treasure: truths • Illiterate: lacked religion and education • Indifferent/hostile • Not dogmatic • Isolation • Social segregation • Focused on New Testament • Equal before God • Face reality
Superstitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of control • Nature based • Biblical: Devil • Ghosts • Supernatural • Phenomena 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of control • Religion mixed with superstition • Ghosts • Witches • Haints • Supernatural

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spirits• Signs and observations• Omens and predictions: animals, nature, weather, plants, sky• Phantoms• Bogey-men• Transformations• Manifestations• Witches and sorcerers• Divination• Tried and tested• Birth, life, death phases• Medicinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Magic, spells, potions, witchcraft• Signs• Hobgoblins• Hallucinations• Possession• Big Nig• Divination• Medicinal• Nature based• Omens and predictions: animals, nature, weather, plants, sky
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Table Seven: Comparing Perceptions

Perceptions of poor whites			
Group	Interaction	South Africa	The American South
Upper class whites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employed by upper class (labourer)  Bywoner/Sharecropper/Tenant  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equality Inferior Paternalistic Pity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inferior Pity
Other religions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shop keeper  Money lender  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inferior Pity	
Other races	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Co-worker  Employed by poor white (labourer)  Shop keeper  Religion  Friendship  Gambled  Whored/fraternised  Traded  Rebel  Crime  Socialising  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inferior Equal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equal Inferior
Perceptions by poor whites			
Group	Interaction	South Africa: Perception by poor whites	The American South: Perception by poor whites

<p>Upper class whites</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employed by upper class (labourer)  • Bywoner/Sharecropper/Tenant  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different • Inferior to upper class • Equal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different • Aspiration • Inferior
<p>Other religions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shop keeper  • Money lender  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thieves • Greedy • Inferior (but still respect) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indifferent • Superior to other religions
<p>Other races</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-worker  • Employed by poor white (labourer)  • Shop keeper  • Religion  • Friendship  • Gambled  • Whored/fraternised  • Traded  • Rebel  • Crime  • Socialising  	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior to other races 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Superior to other races • Equal

CHAPTER TEN

Conclusion

As this study has shown, the phenomenon of poor whites was a transnational condition and was not restricted to a single country.¹ Across the world, a number of different countries have tried to come to terms with this phenomenon and continue to do so. South Africa and the United States of America, particularly the American South, were two such countries that had what was to become known as a “poor-white problem”. Poor whiteness has critically featured in the histories of both South Africa and America and its legacy continues to perpetuate both class and racial divides, which can still be seen today. Through the use of an alternative archive, using novels as social cultural historical sources, a comparison was undertaken to contribute to an understanding of this phenomenon.

In the Introduction, it was pointed out that comparative histories was a popular trend and that comparing the histories of South Africa and the USA was not new. It also indicated that there have been a number of different types of studies undertaken on the poor whites in each country.² Furthermore, although secondary sources including monographs and other published sources, as well as primary sources in the forms of reports and commissions, were critical for this study to take place, it went one step further by including contemporary literary works of fiction (novels) about the poor whites, thus adding an additional key to understanding the phenomenon. Again, the use of novels is not a new trend and their use in augmenting the existing historical record is evident for over a century.³

Although the poor-white problem had been identified earlier in both countries and examples could be seen in both the rural and urban areas of South Africa and the American South, it was the 1930s when the poor-white issue reached a significant climax and impacted all facets of life in the respective countries.⁴ An increasing number of academic studies on the poor whites appeared during and after the 1930s, primarily as a result of the impact this issue had on broader society. The poor whites were apparent in people’s cultural and social lifestyles,

¹ E.J. Bottomley, “Transnational Governmentality and the ‘Poor White’ in the Early Twentieth Century South Africa”, *Journal of Historical Geography*, 54, 2016, p. 76.

² P. de Klerk, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis in Vergelykende Perspektief – ‘n Metodologiese Ondersoek”, *Historia*, 44(2), 1999, pp. 88-103.

³ A. Mac Donald Taylor, “The Historical Novel: As a Source in History”, *The Sewanee Review*, 46(4), 1938, p. 465. Quoting G. Murray, *The Rise of the Greek Epic: Being a Course of Lectures Delivered at Harvard University*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907.

⁴ D. Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story*, p. 328.; R. Coetzee, “Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, p. 238.; Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’, <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; S.J. Cook, “The Literary Treatment of the Southern Poor White in the 1930s”, PhD dissertation, University of Michigan, 1973, pp. 13 & 23.

as well as in the media. It became an important economic and political question and a matter which featured in leisure and entertainment (novels and plays). These novels reached more people of all ages through popular subscriptions, prescribed school reading and reading pleasure.⁵ Therefore, it became important to feature the novels along with the academic sources in order to gain an all-encompassing view of the poor whites in both countries for a comparative perspective, so the similarities and differences could be identified. This was especially necessary due to the fact that there exists very little information that the poor whites produced about themselves and their lives. The novels provided a more tangible and human view of the world of a poor white giving the voiceless a voice.

The Introduction also presented the aims of the study and examined the focal points. It further looked at the important definitions and concepts which would enable an understanding in the context of this study. The methodology was also explored and it was made evident that there is no real working methodology for comparative histories. Thus, a number of comparative history writings were examined to reveal the different formats that comparative history could take.⁶ The importance and depth of comparative historical writing was explored and revealed the deeper nature of such studies by illuminating the special features or particularities of the societies being examined. Comparative history is more than narrating the “saga of world history”,⁷ the two societies being compared needed to share some common topic and in this case it was “poor whites”. Their similarities and differences would be revealed if the right questions were asked.⁸

The Introduction also looked at the sources that would be needed to conduct the study. These included both primary and secondary sources and were divided into four categories: the novels and primary sources, the general histories, the comparative histories and the literary specialists. The introduction highlighted that analytical criticism would be applied to each source to ensure that the best quality sources were used. A further methodology was also examined, using the novels as an “alternative source” or an “alternative archive” and thus using novels as primary sources. As indicated, this is not a new approach and has been applied and used in a number of different studies. Novels cannot replace historical sources,

⁵ R. Coetzee, “Die Armblanke in Afrikaans Letterkunde”, M.A. tesis, Universiteit van Suid-Afrika, 1937, pp. 18-30 & 239.; P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaanse Beweging*, p. 33.; J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 19.

⁶ P. de Klerk, “Die Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis in Vergelykende Perspektief – ‘n Metodologiese Ondersoek”, *Historia*, 44(2), 1999, pp. 88-103.

⁷ F. Redlich, “Toward Comparative Historiography: Background and Problems”, *Kyklos: International Review of Social Sciences*, 11(3), 1958, pp. 377 & 384.

⁸ P. Alexander & R. Halpern, “Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30(1), 2004, pp. 5-18.; P. Levine, “Is Comparative History Possible?”, *History and Theory*, 53, 2014, p. 336.

however, novels, especially those from the Realism genre, which was the genre selected for this study, combine both truth and fact.⁹ The novels reach a wider audience and due to their entertainment value and because the reader seeks to escape into another world, they also educate the reader.¹⁰ The novelists of the Realism genre do not intend to “corrupt” or “distort” history or misguide the reader, but rather they encourage an interest in history and after reading the novel leave the reader with a degree of knowledge.¹¹ Therefore, the novels from this genre create a wider and more nuanced understanding of a period or people and can augment existing history by providing an understanding from another perspective of the poor whites in both countries. These novelists write about what is happening around them or what they recollected. In effect, they hold up a mirror to society and reflect it on the pages of the novels.¹²

Another important primary source is that of the Carnegie Commission’s investigation into the poor-white problem in South Africa. The Carnegie Corporation, an American corporation, had links and interests in studying the poor whites in South Africa. The Americans also had a poor-white problem, which by the 1930s they thought had been “solved”. Thus, it is argued that this Commission can be seen as an important link between the poor whites in South Africa and those in the American South – perhaps even an American solution to a South African problem? Or, an American investigation into a similar issue to gain more insight? Finally, the Introduction outlined the content of the chapters.

Chapter two offered a select literature review of the poor whites in both countries and examined a range of different types of sources that have focused on the topic. They were arranged in different categories and included not only sources written by historians, but also sociologists; anthropologists; economists; documentary film makers; travellers; planters and slave owners. Firstly, these included but were not limited to academic books, articles and studies which focused on the poor whites in South Africa and the American South. These secondary sources were examined through the lens of different historiographical schools in which the poor whites first appeared and then with the changing of the approaches of historical writing.¹³ Therefore, in South Africa, sources written by the Nationalists were first examined,

⁹ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015.

¹⁰ S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, p. 176.

¹¹ J.C. Simmons, *The Novelist as Historian*, p. 25.

¹² S.E. Pretorius, “Non-Fiction in Fiction: Poor Whites in Selected South African Literary Texts, 1900–1950”, M.A. dissertation, University of Pretoria, 2015, pp. 10, 13, 29, 59, 175.

¹³ W. Visser, “Trends in South African Historiography and the Present State of Historical Research”, Paper presented at the Nordic Africa Institute. Uppsala. 2004.; D.H. Davis, “God and the Pursuit of America’s Self-Understanding: Toward a Synthesis of American Historiography”, *Journal of Church and State*, 46(3), 2004, pp. 461-478.

followed by the Liberal Historians, the 1970s Social Historians and finally by the Cultural Historians. Similarly, in the USA, numerous attempts were made to record the histories of the poor whites. The first to do so were the Old South scholars, followed by the Romantic School and Evolutionary School. From the twentieth century, there was a change in how history was written in the USA, and poor whites were examined by the Progressive School, followed by the Revisionist School, which contributed to the bulk of the sources. The order of the literature review was structured to show the changes in academic writing regarding the poor whites over time.

Poor whites rank as one of the most written about topics in South Africa and the USA.¹⁴ There exists a plethora of information on them. In the second section of this chapter, the comparative specialists who have written comparative histories on South Africa and the USA were examined. The information gained from this analysis not only contributed to the methodology of this study, but also highlighted important comparative elements that needed to be taken into consideration. Furthermore, they revealed that comparing the poor whites of South Africa and the American South is not something unusual or new, but rather that these specific people and their daily lives have not been examined comparatively. Finally, in the last section literary specialists, who are the link between the academic sources and the novels were considered. Not only did they provide insight into the novels, but also the novelists.

Chapters three and four provided a brief history of the poor whites in South Africa and the American South, respectively. It not only included their history in the time period of the study, but also examined their history from the time whites first landed on the shores of what would become South Africa and the USA. Therefore, each chapter is divided into the history of the early white poor, what would become a developing problem as poor whites emerged and lastly how the problem was addressed in each country. These chapters illustrate the social, economic and political times the poor whites lived in, as well as some factors that contributed to their poverty and their reactions to it. Through these two chapters the reader is able to not only gain a brief background of the poor-whites' history, but the similarities and differences also become apparent.

As indicated, the Carnegie Corporation's interest, as well as its subsequent funding and involvement in the study of the poor-white problem in South Africa, is an important link between South Africa and the USA.¹⁵ Thus, chapter five examined the background history

¹⁴ C.C. Bolton, *Poor Whites of the Antebellum South: Tenants and Laborers in Central North Carolina and Northeast Mississippi*, p. ix.

¹⁵ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the new Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 157.

before the forging of the Carnegie Commission, the Carnegie Corporation's initial interest in studying the poor whites in South Africa in a larger global context, as well as the South African individuals and organisations such as the DRC and government's call for such a study.¹⁶ The reasons behind this interest and call are also considered so as to provide clarity on why a USA corporation would have any interest in a white South African issue. Thus, as mentioned, how an American solution could be used to try and "fix" a South African problem or how the South African problem could elucidate the American phenomenon?¹⁷ The chapter briefly focused on the agreement between the Carnegie Corporation and the other involved parties and how they planned the undertaking, running, data gathering and research of the Commission, as well as who would be involved and in which role.¹⁸ The results of the Commission and what the Carnegie Commission entailed, including the findings and recommended solutions, as well as further discussions and investigations regarding the problem were considered. It also focused on the establishment of a National Department Social Welfare and the development of sociology as a field of study in South Africa which cemented the future of the HSRC by emphasising the need for social research to be held to certain standards.¹⁹ The importance and reason for using the Carnegie Commission as a source for both countries were examined in this chapter.

Chapter six, entitled "The Novels and Novelists", sets a basis for understanding the novels, the novelists and the period, as well as the literary movements they were written in. This also forms part of the history of poor whites and can be seen as a continuation of chapters two – four. It includes specific attention on the history of writing and its evolution in each country and how and where the poor whites as a theme or topic fit in.

In South Africa, the time period the novels fall into, the Second Afrikaans Language Movement, forms part of the history and its reaction to what was happening in terms of the language and the Afrikaans cultural battle during the first half of the twentieth century.²⁰ It was maintained that literature could speed the quest for Afrikaans to become a recognisable

¹⁶ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 489.; R.R. Vosloo, "The Dutch Reformed Church and the Poor White Problem in the Wake of the First Carnegie Report (1932): Some Church-Historical and Theological Observations", *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, 37(2), 2011, p. 72.

¹⁷ N.J. Ring, *The Problem South: Region, Empire and the New Liberal State, 1880-1930*, p. 156.

¹⁸ M. Bell, "American Philanthropy, the Carnegie Corporation and Poverty in South Africa", *Journal of South African Studies*, 26(3), 2000, p. 490.

¹⁹ M. Golden, "Carnegie Corporation in South Africa: A Difficult Past Leads to a Commitment to Change". *Carnegie Results: Carnegie Corporation*. 2004.; C. Soudien, "Ninety Years of Social Science Research into Poverty: Revisiting the HSRC and the Carnegie Commission", *Review: Publication of the Human Sciences Research Council*, 17(1), 2019, pp. 3-6.

²⁰ J.C. Kannemeyer, *Geskiedenis van Afrikaanse Literatuur I*, p. 83.

language. Novelists were encouraged and urged to help serve and educate the nation.²¹ Thus, the novelists and their novels form part of this movement in the fight for Afrikaans to become a recognised and an official language. Language itself also played a key role in the nationalist inspirational fervour.²² Their topics examined the effects of the Anglo-Boer War, the climate, land, poverty, urban evils, law, and social changes. The majority of the novelists wrote about the reality that surrounded them and everyday life and ordinary people featured prominently in their novels.²³ The *plaasroman* (farm novel) would also become a popular genre.²⁴ The poor whites were a growing concern among the Afrikaner and therefore, it is not surprising that they too featured largely in the novels.²⁵

Similarly, the Southern Renaissance Movement that took place in the USA was also examined in this chapter. The selected American novels fall into this movement and represent what it stood for. This Movement also emerged in the early twentieth century and at the time it was a new and entirely unique form of literature that started appearing in the South.²⁶ The novelists adopted a new critical spirit which they used to review the past and present.²⁷ Thus, the focus of their literature dealt with the region's history and reality, social issues, prejudice, farm and urban problems all peculiar to the South.²⁸ These novelists also became more inclusive as regards their topics and themes, and the poor whites began featuring more prominently as main characters in the novels and not always as the "bad guy" or outcast.²⁹ The novelists explored all dimensions of Southern culture and broke away from the nostalgia for the "Old South" and the "Lost Cause".³⁰ They sought to produce realistic pictures of the poverty and

²¹ L.M. Thompson, *The Unification of South Africa*, p. 20.

²² K.M. Kamwangamalu, "The Language Planning Situation in South Africa" in R.B. Baldauf & R.B. Kaplan (eds.), *Language and Planning Policy in Africa I: Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique and South Africa*, pp. 205-206.

²³ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaans Beweging*, p. 17.; H. Giliomee & M. Mbenga, *New History of South Africa*, p. 291.

²⁴ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaans Beweging*, pp. 33-34.

²⁵ P.C. Schoonees, *Die Prosa van die Tweede Afrikaans Beweging*, pp. 33-34.

²⁶ J.T. Matthews, "The Southern Renaissance and the Faulknerian South", p. 116.; Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.;

²⁷ Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance',

<<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; R.H. King, *A Southern Renaissance: The Critical Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*, p. 7.

²⁸ Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance',

<<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.; J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 19.

²⁹ S.J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representation of Women, Blacks and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature*, pp. 185-196.

³⁰ J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, pp. 16-17.; Study Smarter, 'Southern Renaissance', <<https://www.studysmarter.us/explanations/history/us-history/southern-renaissance/>>, n.d. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

hardships endured by their fellow Americans and revealed a bare honesty in their work.³¹ Thus, their novels became regarded as of Realism.

Chapter six further examined the selected novelists from each country, respectively. A short biography of the life of each author was presented, as well as their works in order to create a better understanding of the time they wrote in, their influences, their motives for writing and the novels themselves. Their own biographies reveal what they either experienced or witnessed the impact it had on them and how they expressed this in their novels.³² Thus, the chapter provides the reader with the necessary context and knowledge to understand the remaining analysis of the thesis.

Chapters seven to nine focused explicitly on the poor whites and their representations in the novels in a comparative setting. Chapter seven, entitled *Poor whites and White poor*, primarily focused on the concept of poor whites and what it meant in each country. A short history from whence the term originated in South Africa and the USA was also presented. This chapter examined how the term was perceived in a number of sources, what feelings and emotions were invoked when the term was used, the role popular consciousness played regarding the term “poor white” and how it differed from what is perceived. In the South African case, a number of sources were examined and each definition and what the term meant in a range of literature was indicated. With regards to the American South poor white, there does not exist a set definition and thus, what the term has meant throughout the period of this study is examined to firstly show the changing nature of the term and secondly to create a working definition. The Carnegie Commission, which is one of the biggest links between the South African and Southern poor white, had its own definition, but also realised that there were differences and that one definition, did not fit all. There were many types of poor whites and different categories were therefore presented.³³ These categories were used along with the poor white characters from the selected novels from each country to illustrate firstly, that there were different types of poor whites, which were also represented in the novels; and secondly, that although these countries were an ocean apart, the characteristics of the different types of poor whites were the same.

³¹ Encyclopedia.com ‘Literature 1929-1941’, <<https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/news-and-education-magazines/literature-1929-1941>>, 2019. Accessed: 13 November 2022.

³² P.J. Nienaber, *Hier is Ons Skrywers: Biografiese Sketse van Afrikaanse Skrywers*, p. 146.; J.M. Bradbury, *Renaissance in the South: A Critical History of the Literature, 1920-1960*, p. 20.; S. Bercovitch (ed.), *The Cambridge History of American Literature*, p. 256.

³³ Carnegie Commission, *The Poor White Problem in South Africa: The Poor White in Society & The Mother and Daughter of the Poor Family V*, pp. 4-18.

Chapter eight focused on the different causes of poor whiteness and revealed that there were a number of similar and different reasons for white poverty in South Africa and the American South. Many causes were the same regardless of being two separate countries, evidence that poor whiteness remained a transnational problem. The causes of the poverty were divided into the “Hand of God” and the “Hand of Man”, which was also the title of the chapter.³⁴ The “Hand of God” included all the causes over which the poor whites had no control, such as disasters and diseases, while the “Hand of Man” included all the causes of white poverty which were caused by man. However, this category was further divided into man-made causes which were outside the control of the poor whites, such as war and depressions and causes which were directly and ultimately their own fault, such as ignorance and laziness. Again, the novels were used to illustrate the types of causes, the extent to which each cause affected the poverty of the poor whites, and their reactions towards the cause. The novels presented a more real and human or humane side of how the causes impacted the people and created dire and desperate situations, some of which were nearly impossible to rise from. Finally, it revealed that the poor whites from similar and different causes of poverty which stemmed from one of the three categories. This chapter integrated the comparison so as to juxtaposition the two situations.

Chapter nine, entitled “Religion, Superstition and Perceptions”, focused on rather novel facets of the poor whites lifestyle. As mentioned, especially in the American case, poor whites have been characterised rather than studied. Although attempts have been made by historians such as Flynt³⁵ to examine the poor whites’ culture, their daily lives remain an enigma. Using a combination of sources including the novels resulted in a clearer and fuller picture of the poor whites. Chapter nine therefore examines the religious and superstitious beliefs of the poor whites in South Africa and the American South and reveals that there were similarities and differences between the two. The use of selected novels again provides an additional insight into their daily lives and the reasons why they believed what they did, as well as what those beliefs were.

Chapter nine also looks at the perceptions, stereotypes and judgements made of the poor whites by those from outside their group, race, religion, culture and class along with the poor whites outlooks, perceptions stereotypes and judgements of these “other” groups. The novels depict how the poor whites were viewed by society, but also how the poor whites perceived others.

³⁴ C. van Onselen, *New Babylon, New Nineveh: Everyday Life on the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*, p. 321.

³⁵ J.W. Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites*. London: Indiana University Press, 1979.; J.W. Flynt, *Poor but Proud: Alabama's Poor Whites*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1989.

This study has juxtapositioned the poor whites from South Africa and those from the American South in the period 1850-1950. Furthermore, the use of both fiction and non-fiction has been co-opted to present a more nuanced understanding of the poor-white situation in both countries. Not only does this study reveal that there are a number of similarities and differences between the lives and situations of the poor whites in both South Africa and the American South, it also points to transnational ideas and trends that took place on an international level at a specific time in history. This also reveals a deeper awareness of what was regarded solely as a national problem to be one that is both shared and pertinently relevant. This was achieved through the use of selected Realist novels from each country, which revealed a greater and deeper insight into the daily lives of the poor whites.

Although a number of sources exist on the poor whites it is far from an exhausted topic and the application of comparative studies broadens the scope. The use of novels as a source is also gaining ground and has offered insights into history that previously remained vague or unknown. This study opens the field to more possible studies which compare the poor whites in South Africa and the American South with other countries that also had poor-white problems. The use of novels may also be expanded to consider other historical topics such as: women, children, music, language and sport that could be examined and compared. Thus, this novel approach to history has much novel potential.

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