

Te Pouhere Kōrero

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'A FEW VENTUROUS SOULS'

Towards a Comparative History of Māori New Zealand
and Native North America

Danny Keenan

Good afternoon everyone. I am pleased to have this opportunity today to share with you some thoughts on aspects of New Zealand history. Or, at least, to share some of the things that are going on within New Zealand historiography at the moment.¹

Whilst I am speaking about some directions in New Zealand history, what I would also like to do, at the same time, is to tentatively place some of these developments alongside changes that are occurring within North American historiography. Or at least, I will do this to the limited extent that I have been able to, thus far, read and assess material sourced in the USA. And, at the moment, of course, I am still reading and researching “on the hoof”, so to speak. I am learning as I go. So, I would be interested in your questions, comments and corrections, if any, when I have completed this presentation.

My particular focus in all this research is comparing native histories, and comparing the work of native historians, especially Māori with Native Americans. I set out from New Zealand about a month or so ago, most generously supported by the William J Fulbright Foundation. I had a fairly academic project in mind. This project centered on my comparing Native histories, as I have said. But there was rather more to it than this - I wanted to find an appropriate basis especially for native historians to view each other's work, and possibly to write and collaborate together.

This research therefore has thus far involved my looking out for Journals, articles, monographs and books, searching through libraries, photocopying bibliographies by the score - accessing materials that are generally not available in New Zealand libraries. It has certainly been a case of my using what we might normally regard as secondary materials as, in fact, my primary material.

But, I am also interested in looking at more conventional forms of ‘primary materials’, where I can. So, for example, I have also visited other places which hold such materials, like archives and museums. Museums are a particular interest of mine, especially given the recent debates in the USA over the repatriation of native artifacts. This debate has not emerged in New Zealand, quite to the same extent as in America, where whole issues of Journals have been devoted to the ‘rights and wrongs’ of returning ancient artifacts to native peoples.

Plus, along the way, I have also been speaking to many interesting and expert people who I would regard as knowledgeable in matters pertaining to native history, ethnic

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history, and history in general. So, to date, it has been a kind of travelling rag-bag methodology but I do think it has produced some interesting results.

Among other things, I have had to do a fair amount of reading, as you might imagine. Whilst I was in Hawaii, I was very pleased to be granted access to both Libraries at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. Similarly, whilst I was visiting Seattle, I was equally able to make good use of the University of Washington Library where I discovered many shelves of native history materials seldom seen in New Zealand, all on one shelf, if at all. Actually, it is a wonderful thing, to be given the opportunity to just sit in an American University library and to troll through its many resources.

So, here is a useful place to begin. Several weeks ago, in all my searching around, I was interested to come across the book *The American Frontier and Western Issues - A Historiographic Review*. This book was published in the late 1980s, which is admittedly awhile ago now, as scholarly texts go. The book was edited by Roger L. Nichols of the University of Arizona, Tucson.²

Chapter Nine in that book was interesting. It was written by Nichols himself, and it was entitled "Historians and Indians." The chapter was quite long, running on for about 30 pages. The chapter presented a very detailed historiographic survey of Native American history writing, spanning the prior 2-3 generations, to at least the late 1980s.

In the chapter, Nichols argued that there were three primary categories of Native American history writing - or at least, as far as he could see, having regard for both subject focus and methodological approach.

The first category was primarily intellectual and literary - studies of Anglo-American attitudes towards and ideas about the native peoples of North America. A second category, which was by far the biggest, examined the complex histories of Indian-White relations, ranging from the earliest of colonial contacts through to later contexts like Federal Indian policy and resource litigation before the courts. Incidentally, most Māori history would also fall into this category.

Such histories dominated the historical literature, said Nichols. But they were invariably constructed from an Anglo-American perspective. Partly in response to that fact, a third category has developed which is known by various names of course, the most

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popular of which was / is "ethnohistory". According to Nichols, proponents of ethnohistory sought to reach across disciplines in order to "combine the White and Indian sides of the story."³ So, what we have here is these three categories of native American history - intellectual/literary, contact histories, and ethnohistory.

However, there was a fourth category, said Nichols. This fourth category was the domain of "a few venturesome souls." This category was comparative history. Comparative history was the least used approach to the writing of Native American history, said Nichols. Yet "those desiring to understand the present state of historical scholarship pertaining to Native Americans" should consider this approach and the material generated so far.

Some of the historians who have used this approach, like C Vann Woodward and Wilbur F Jacobs, were cited in the chapter by Nichols. However, I was interested to note that Nichols also cited some historians in the comparative category who were not in fact American. One was AG Price, who is an Australian. Another was Robin Fisher, who is a New Zealander. Robin is now a Professor of History at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. We see Robin occasionally down home in New Zealand, presenting lectures on comparative land rights and land claims processes, which is one of his particular areas of research interest.

So, Robin Fisher is in effect the kind of person, I think, who, through his lectures, research and publishing, opens the door for people like me to move out beyond New Zealand. A precedence is provided from which one might gain a sense of the comparative native New Zealand and American historical landscapes. Though I am carrying all of my New Zealand histories and biases with me, I am still ostensibly looking for similarities and differences in our respective native histories. However, in the end, what I am really doing is seeking to establish some basis from which a comparative history of Māori New Zealand and native North America might be written.

So, my particular interest in doing this, in researching and writing such a comparative native history, necessarily involves my examining, and certainly engaging with, native histories and native historians. Equally, it also involves my looking at the processes of writing native history, as they operate at the various different levels in countries beyond New Zealand, like Australia, the Pacific, Canada and, in my present case, the United State.

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As I see it, as a native person myself, the writing of native history is a multi-dimensional process. From where I stand as it were, I see that there are many different possible points of entry into other historical discourses which are all about other native peoples. However, native people, it seems to me, do tend to think fairly carefully before entering and engaging with any other historical discourse involving other native peoples.

It is not just a matter of writing straightforward, narrative comparative history about native peoples - I think there is more to it than this. This is where Robin Fisher and I - or Roger Nichols and I - might begin to part company. In a sense, there is a tension here. At one end, we have the freedom to be an historian, and to generally write about whatever history you choose, having a primary regard for good historical method (whatever that may be). This might be the approach of Nichols, and, perhaps to a lesser extent, Fisher. Robin possibly works to Native Canadian convention, to some extent when he is writing though I must confess I have not really looked at Robin's work closely enough to 'judge'. However, many mainstream New Zealand historians do write 'Māori history' on the basis that, as they argue, histories of Māori are perfectly valid centres of study. Many do not feel constrained by Māori historical conventions, when they write.

At the other end, we have native scholars themselves, desiring to write comparable histories - histories of their own people compared to like peoples abroad - but wishing to respect the broad conventions of other native peoples and scholars. So, as a native historian myself, I have had to do some thinking about, among other things, appropriate points of entry into the histories of Native Americans; and through which channels I should have my entry into the stories of Native Americans mediated.

Where are we to look for guidance in this matter? Until such time as we can organise a conference of native historians, from interested countries - where we can meet and discuss such matters - perhaps the best guide I have is to follow the way things are done back home, in New Zealand. So, how have we Māori historians handled such issues, amongst ourselves? For example, which conventions should apply (or should not apply) when Māori seek to write about each other's tribal histories? The issues here are possibly not too dissimilar from those likely to be encountered by native people who seek to write about each other's native histories?

However, it is not that simple, of course, because in New Zealand, at every turn, we have debate, heated argument, even harsh words, whenever issues pertaining to

'scholarly freedom' versus 'native conventions' arise. In the end, it all comes down to me, as an individual, staking out a position somewhere in the midst of the debate - and this of course is hardly new. It is something we have all done before - we have had to stake out an academic position, based on the best advice our scholarly instincts can provide; and we have had to defend that position.

I think it is a good thing, to be able to state, and defend, 'where you are coming from.' Native historians are especially challenged to do this; and more often than not, by their own people. Native scholars, I think, spend a great deal of time, rendering explicit 'where they are coming from' simply because their people - their discerning primary audience - need to know such details. This is to say nothing of what a native historian's community of scholars, both native and non-native, expects to hear.

So, it is a complex issue. In order to sort out some of the issues here, and to provide some answers for you to think about and respond to, I thought you might be interested if I briefly take you through 'how things are done' in New Zealand - how some of the issues are handled. We have in this room today a mix of people who would come to these issues from very different academic and cultural positions.⁴ So, some background facts as to where I am from.⁵

New Zealand is, in a sense, a multicultural country - it contains a mix of many cultures. But the ethos that drives public policy in New Zealand is the notion that New Zealand is 'bicultural'; or 'bicultural first, multicultural second.' Now, there is some heated debate on this subject - editorials and politicians frequently rail against biculturalism. However, government policy is explicitly predicated on the premise that New Zealand is 'bicultural.' So, for example, New Zealand has two official languages, English and Māori.

The notion that New Zealand is bicultural largely comes from our founding document, the Treaty of Waitangi. The Treaty of Waitangi was signed in 1840 by two parties, Māori people and the British Crown. February 6, the day of signing, is our national day, Waitangi Day. It is a public holiday if it falls outside of a weekend. However, on that day, Waitangi Day, we should note that the Treaty is 'commemorated', which is the word we tend to use. It is not 'celebrated': This is because New Zealand has had a difficult history, over the last one hundred and sixty years.

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Waitangi Day is a day of significant Māori protest. Māori people protest about years of Crown neglect, and non-compliance with the Treaty's believed protections and safeguards, as enunciated in 1840. At the moment, New Zealanders in general are awkwardly working through a difficult debate as to the present status of the Treaty. What is its historic value? Does it have any existing political and social significance? Such questions are especially on the minds of New Zealand's non-Māori peoples.

And further, should the Treaty in fact be regarded as our founding document? Many think not, on the basis that New Zealand has changed, and that the Treaty does not reflect the fact that New Zealand is now a 'multicultural' country. There is even some talk about replacing the Treaty with a written Constitution. Not surprisingly, this is a move strongly opposed by Māori people. When the treaty was signed, Māori people were substantially coastal dwellers; and most lived north of a line from about present day Hamilton to Napier. My own tribal grouping was further south - in Taranaki.

Now, on the face of it, there are many points of comparison between Māori New Zealand and Native North America around which one could build a comparative history.

There are the histories of earliest Polynesian seafaring, discovery, and settlement, throughout the Pacific. Native scholars from Hawaii are currently researching these distant peoples. The desire is to establish common genealogical links between the ancient Pacific seafarers that will span national boundaries. Native scholars from Hawaii then wish to link these ancient people to their descendants in the present, affirming kinship connections that will reach across national boundaries, drawing Polynesian peoples ever-closer towards a sense of being a part of a single family.

There are the histories of first European contacts, commercial settlement, colonisation and later intensive migrant occupation of customary native lands. There are interesting parallels to be drawn from observing this process at work, in New Zealand, and in North America. An essential part of this process was the establishing of a governing apparatus, generally without the consultation and involvement of local native peoples. In fact, local native peoples were often explicitly excluded. Tied into this are multiple histories of multiple treaties - their origins, purposes and impacts. Competition for land between settler and native peoples invariably followed, and intensified. Different legal bases for land acquisition and dispossession were established. There is a significant jurisprudential history to be told, comparatively, of what occurred in both regions.

However, before matters generally got to the courts, the intense competition for land found expression in a more egregious form – conflict and prolonged warfare. This was certainly the case in New Zealand and North America – both experienced years of prolonged warfare.

During these years, both regions produced men and women of great *mana*. *Mana* is a Māori word which brings to mind things like a person's integrity, reputation, prestige, manner and bearing. It also implies a sense of divine sanction for the person and for the person's place in the scheme of things. A comparative history of leading native figures who featured strongly throughout recent centuries would be fascinating – not only for the compared and shared histories of their times and involvements, but also for the equally important positioning of their families, their ancient landscapes and all other genealogical connections which rendered such people important, to native peoples, within native contexts.

In New Zealand's case, we Māori have our great men and women. Tāwhiao was one, crowned in 1860 as the second Māori King, later to lead his Waikato people against the British army in 1863. Tāwhiao survived the wars, and lived until 1892. Throughout that time, he remained a commanding figure, central to a generation of Māori caught up within a turbulent history. New leaders followed, like Te Whiti-o-Rongomai. Often erroneously called a 'prophet', Te Whiti was a young mission-trained Māori who led a passive resistance movement of nearly 3000 followers, until his arrest and imprisonment, for treason, in 1881.

New leaders followed, as the century turned. Now, Māori were becoming educated and were entering the professions. Some were also entering politics, standing for Parliamentary seats and winning elections. Men like James Carroll, Māui Pomare, Peter Buck and Apirana Ngata were emerging as new leaders who would dominate Māori politics for several generations.

Beyond politics lay the courts. In the 1920s, the New Zealand Crown launched its first substantive enquiry into the wrongs committed against Māori the previous century, especially the forceful dispossessing of Māori land. How native groups in both regions dealt with claims for redress would provide a fascinating basis for a comparative study – of the sources of redress, the law as applied to native holdings and redress, the Commissions or courts established to preside over claims, their powers, and a

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consideration of the major claims processed.

Mechanisms for redress differed significantly between New Zealand and North America. A jurisprudence of redress developed in both regions - were they similar or markedly different?

If one even takes only a cursory glance at the recent histories of New Zealand and North America, one sees that there are endless possibilities, an array of seemingly endless openings for the writing of very interesting comparative histories between the respective native groups of North America and New Zealand. And we should not overlook, for example, recent histories of the urbanising of native peoples, and the impacts of this on their communities and identities. There are the earlier histories of missions, histories of native women, accounts of the impacts of literacy and printing, the growth of nationalist movements which sought for a national political self-determination - the possibilities are as exciting as the list is endless.

So, there are many possibilities, seemingly. One could envisage an endless list of points of similarity or difference, any number of points of reference from which one could begin to write comparative histories, perhaps using the kind of categories that Roger Nichols has discerned in the literature of the last few generations, producing the kind of work that Robin Fisher is now producing.

But that is not necessarily what I want to do, if I were approaching the writing of a comparative history. What I would like to do is to take it a little further - perhaps to take it into the arena within which only native scholars can operate.

In a sense, this firstly involves my positioning myself somewhere within the general field of 'Māori history' which is of course, in itself, a problematic and much-contested term. However, I would generally position myself amongst those Māori historians who seek to foreground iwi and hapu over the generic 'Māori'. We therefore seek to construct our histories upon devices like whakapapa, with customary and ancient connections between the people and the land emphasised as critically important. In keeping with this iwi-hapu position, issues like the rightful place of marae convention, within our writing, arise. I would imagine that most iwi-hapu historians will accord a high importance to such conventions. For example, the testimony of elders is accepted as valuable, conveying both narrative and conceptual 'truth'. We are therefore loathe

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to 'corroborate' such testimony through reference to documentary sources, as good historical method requires (arguably), assuming such documentary sources were available.

Marae convention therefore provides some checks and constraints upon the work we do. But we do accept that the Marae functions this way - and so should the writing of iwi and hapū history. One of these constraints requires that we deal with other Māori carefully. We do not just uncritically write their histories nor do we seek to represent their past in any way, though we may well have our own views on that subject. Thus, as it is between Māori, then it should also be between Native people. Māori are therefore not inclined to write the histories of other native people, nor do we seek to represent their past in any way.

Yet, Native historians do wish to work together, telling their own histories and even telling each others histories in a comparative sense - to produce comparative histories of native peoples. But the issue that I would raise here is - what are the 'rules of engagement' between Native historians? What are the conventions that native peoples quite rightfully set, before setting out to engage with other native peoples and their histories?

It is considerations like these - what are the conventions to which Native historians should work - that render the writing of comparative native history, by native historians, as challenging and certainly exciting. Most native scholars can point to local academic controversies where scholars have strayed into native historical writing without proper regard for conventions.⁶ Whole journals have been devoted to this issue in America, as increasingly are new books with this focus.⁷ Therefore, the very fact that native people are now discussing what these conventions should be is immensely empowering to those venturous native people wishing to collaborate in the production of comparative Native history.

Comparative history then is potentially quite challenging. For my part, you need to think about the appropriate points of entry, or how to structure your comparisons. Remember, my interest is native to native. What happens in New Zealand does not of course necessarily have a parallel in other native writings of history. Also, other native groups might object, and may well want to assert control over their own histories - so, conventions will dictate.

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What I have been doing is essentially academic - at least, it was to start with. I need to acknowledge from the outset that within New Zealand, Māori / New Zealand historiography is an increasingly area of debate. I am using these debates as a backdrop to my reading and travels across the Pacific, in order to tentatively place some of these developments alongside changes occurring within Native American historiography.

Whether comparative history is the domain of 'a few venturesome souls' or not, I really would not know. I do not necessarily want to claim an elevated status for comparative history. But I do think that, at the very least, comparative research can become a very good conduit through which native scholars can substantially talk to each other. Perhaps the best outcome might be the production of a comparative literature or comparative historiography which, by addressing issues such as these across national boundaries, can have the effect of understanding better the types of environments within which our fellow native scholars work.

Endnotes

1. This paper was presented to a seminar sponsored by the Department of History and Institute of Ethnic Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, Nebraska. Friday 27 February 1998 at 3pm in Room 638, Oldfather Hall, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, USA. I would like to thank Dr Susan Millar (Seminole) of the Department of History, University of Nebraska, Lincoln for her assistance and support; and for arranging this opportunity for me to present some thoughts on Native history to an American audience.
2. Roger L. Nichols (ed), *The American Frontier and Western Issues - A Historiographic Review*, University of Oklahoma Press (1988). I was pleased to have the chance to meet Professor Nichols at the University of Arizona in Tucson when I visited there in 1994.
3. See Frederick E. Hoxie, 'Ethnohistory for a Tribal World' in *Ethnohistory*, 44:4 (Fall, 1997), pp 595-616.
4. The audience for this presentation included Native American people, Hispanic people and African Americans as well as many white Americans.
5. This section of the presentation has been substantially shortened, for New Zealand readers.
6. For example; Rupert Costo, "Speaking Freely", in *Wassaja. The Indian Historian*, 13:1 (March, 1980), pp 4-9.
7. Recent examples are: Donald L. Fixico (ed), *Rethinking American Indian History*, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico (1997); Colin G. Galloway, *New Directions in American Indian History*, University of Oklahoma Press (1992).