

## CONFRONTING CULTURES – by Anahera Herbert-Graves

One of the most confronting cultural shibboleths that surfaces now and then amongst some Pākehā is that Māori people and our culture are going to die out. This belief builds on earlier ideas of [‘fatal impact theory’](#), whereby ‘inferior’ races were supposed to have melted away as a result of European contact.

As early as the 1830s, Englishman [Edward Markham](#) wrote: *“In New Zealand the same as in Canada or North America, and in Southern Africa the Hottentots are a decreasing people ... my belief is the Almighty intended it should be so or it would not have been allowed. Out of Evil comes Good.”*

He was famously echoed in 1856 by physician and politician [Dr Isaac Featherston](#) who said it was the duty of Europeans to *“smooth down ... [the] dying pillow”* of the Māori race.

Then in 1868 [a Wellington newspaper editor](#) wrote in tones of surprised outrage: *“They are determined to fight, and we, in self-protection, must treat them as a species of savage beasts which must be exterminated to render the colonisation of New Zealand possible.”*

The usefulness of racial theories like fatal impact, [monogenism](#), [polygenism](#) and [social Darwinism](#) was that they upheld the European self-image as the most advanced of all races and eased any doubts about the morality of their attempt to take over the world.

In that regard, usefulness was always more important than accuracy. For example, polygenists once claimed that different races could not interbreed, or at least that mixed-race people would be infertile. Wrong.

And in 1863 the geologist [Ferdinand Von Hochstetter](#) managed the logically impossible feat of being monogenist, polygenist and social Darwinist in a single chapter when he wrote, *“Richly endowed by nature ... the Māori is fully aware of his progress in moral improvement and culture; yet he is not capable of attaining the full height of a Christian civilized life; and it is from this very incompleteness, that his race is doomed to gradual extinction ...”* Wrong again.

Although the belief that Māori and our culture ought to die out lost popularity from about 1914, many continued to believe that we would survive only as a ‘golden tinge’ on the skins of the [Pākehā](#); and the belief itself did not die out. Instead it went underground from whence it re-emerges occasionally in various racist guises.



In 2012, [a rich ACT Party donor](#) confidently and publicly claimed that all white New Zealanders *“don't like the Māoris.”* And just last week, a commenter on a Radio New Zealand story titled [PM defends ‘racist’ TVNZ survey](#) wrote, *“Whatever, the future is clear Māori culture will die away...”*

Confronted with the incurably racist culture of such people, [Whina Cooper’s advice](#) to Māori was that we ought to marry them until they died out, while [McCully Matiu’s advice](#) was that we must give them every chance to do the right thing.

My own thought is that, while we combat their racism using their own laws and ours, we also ought to work with non-racist Pākehā, like those from [Network Waitangi](#), who are very able and willing to confront the culture from which racism came.

