IN 1996 THE CENSUS gave a total of 3,681,546 New Zealanders, of whom 524,031 were self-described as Maori or of Maori descent — thus, around 14%. The 1896 census gave 743,214 New Zealanders, and of that figure only 39,854 were described by the enumerators as Maori — around 5%. The closest thing to the category ‘of Maori descent’ in that census was the 5,762 ‘half-castes’ described either as living as Pakeha or Maori. The New Zealand population in 1769 has been estimated as perhaps 100,000, and was 100% Maori.

These figures expose vast changes in the Maori population in size and compilation, from 100% of the population to a nadir of 5%, and back to an increasingly significant percentage of the overall New Zealand population at the close of the twentieth century. But the figures alone tell a small part of the revival of a supposedly ‘dying race’. This article explores the ideology of the censuses and the enumerators who contributed to them. At the core of this investigation is a belief that the prevalence of intermarriage between Maori and Pakeha directly affected popular views of whether or not the Maori population would survive the experiment of contact.

In 1896, with the Maori population at around 5% of the total population (and thought to be dropping), many did not believe that Maori would survive. That

1 This article is based on part of my master’s thesis ‘A “Marriage of the Races”? Aspects of Intermarriage, Ideology and Reproduction on the New Zealand Frontier’, Victoria University of Wellington, 1996. My thesis focused first on case studies of intermarriage, and second on the physical and metaphorical production of ‘half-castes’. I gratefully acknowledge Ewan Morris, Ben White and Brent Hudson for their time and advice, and the New Zealand Journal of History readers for their comments.


3 Appendices to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR), 1896, H-13A, p.3; H-13B, p.12; See also Riddell, pp.91, 130. The 1896 figure is given as either 39,854 or 39,805 in later censuses, however the higher figure is more common.

4 Riddell, p.130.

believe, however, flew directly in the face of much contemporary evidence to the contrary. Perhaps in one aspect, however, it was not so very wrong. Even some of the most ardent ‘fatal impact’ protagonists allowed that intermarriage with Pakeha would slow the extinction of the Maori. Others, perhaps best characterized as ‘assimilationists’, promoted intermarriage as the tool to save the Maori from themselves. To such people, the ‘half-caste’ product of intermarriage would improve the Maori ‘race’, both in terms of their statistical significance and as a people — rather like European husbandry would improve the land.

‘Half-caste’ is a problematic term. In New Zealand it has been used to describe both cultural and physical forms of the fruits of intermarriage. But it has almost never been used in a strictly biological sense. Once contact between Maori and Pakeha became widespread, ‘half-caste’ was never either a legal definition or a precise term for measuring blood-mixture. This is in direct contrast with strict legal and biological definitions in other New World colonies. In the censuses, the term came to be closely linked with the idea of ‘improving’ the Maori, like the land, by degrees. Intermarriage and the production of half-castes became synonymous with clearing away the native and planting the introduced.

An awareness that ideology informed the census results does not change the fact that the Maori population did decline significantly. This decline was directly a result of the trauma of contact with Europeans. However, around 1891 (if not earlier) this decline began to reverse. The Maori population began to increase both in absolute terms and relative to the number of Pakeha. But the census of 1896 failed to note this increase, and the Maori population was significantly under-enumerated in that census.  

6 The term ‘half-caste’, though not ideal, will be used throughout this discussion. It was the term used most consistently in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century material on which this article draws. It was never replaced with a more precise term in New Zealand historical or legal discourses.

7 Atholl Anderson defines the use of the term ‘half-caste’ in New Zealand as ‘a person of almost any mixture of Maori and Pakeha ancestry ... [however] precisely ... it is an arithmetic measure of descent in which the caste or offspring is always the average of that of the parents. A full-blooded Maori parent and an entirely non-Maori parent produce half-caste offspring, as do a three-quarter caste and a quarter-caste Maori and so on’, Anderson, Race Against Time: The Early Maori-Pakeha Families and the Development of the Mixed-Race Population in Southern New Zealand, Dunedin, 1991, p.2.


9 See results of the Maori census, AJHR, 1896, H-13B. The under-enumeration was acknowledged in the 1901 census (AJHR, 1901, H-26B, p.1), and regularly acknowledged in later censuses (eg.
The average nineteenth-century observer was deeply imbued with a sense of racial destiny. It was widely assumed that Europeans were both physically and culturally stronger than other ‘races’, and that, as a result, Europeans would dominate those other races. What else would explain the fact that the ‘native’ — human, flora and fauna — shrank before the advance of Europeans across the land? A fashionable view around Europe and the New World, shared by many Victorian New Zealanders, was that laws of natural selection were at work, that the destiny of other ‘races’ was to be subsumed and disappear. This theory is generally known as the ‘fatal impact’ school of thought. It seemed obvious that Europeans would judge themselves as the fittest — their families flourished, the land was cleared and ‘improved’ by European toil, and the native was supplanted by the introduced.

Perhaps the nineteenth-century Pakeha obsession with proving themselves to be the fittest was justification for their very presence, and functioned to rationalize the negative impact the arrival of the Pakeha had on the indigenous. If natural law was responsible, then Pakeha were not. As Pool has observed: ‘Darwinism permitted Victorians to attribute the causes to the victims themselves . . . . Perhaps empirical observations risked confounding theories which reinforced their own feelings of superiority.’

Although assimilationists allowed that Maori might survive in a physically diluted form after having ‘Pakeha-ness’ grafted onto them, they did not allow that Maori as a separate cultural entity would survive contact. To assimilationists, it was only through amalgamating most fully by intermarrying, that the Maori race would be saved. (The terms intermarriage, amalgamation and assimilation were often used interchangeably.) It was believed that in the guise of intermarriage, assimilation would simultaneously prove the superiority of Europeans and their inevitable survival as the fittest, and also be the saviour of Maori. Maori were to be saved, literally, through the birth of ‘half-castes’ and metaphorically through the birth of a ‘race’ intermediate between ‘civilized’ Pakeha and ‘native’ Maori. It was assumed more than hoped that this new race

AJHR, 1911, H-14A, p.1). See also R.J. Lowe, *Te Puawaitanga o Ngā Iwi 1874-1951/ Iwi in Demographic Change 1874–1951*, Department of Maori Affairs, Wellington, 1989, p.18. Lowe explains that the 1896 census under-enumerated Maori because it was less comprehensive than the 1891 or 1901 censuses.


12 Pool, *Te Iwi Maori*, pp.81–82; see also Belich, *The New Zealand Wars*, p.327: ‘Racial ideas are not just images of others, but of one’s self and one’s own society . . . . To question the one is to question the other, and thereby cast doubt on an individual and collective self-image. Victorians, like other people, were not eager to ask such questions’.

13 As with fatal impact, this idea was not unique to New Zealand. Despite our geographical isolation, New Zealand did not exist in a philosophical vacuum in the nineteenth century. As Howe has demonstrated, p.145, philosophical discussion and debate surrounding the fate of the ‘savage’ was a popular pastime for ‘armchair theorists’ in New Zealand, as in Europe and elsewhere.
would then grow up to be more like its Pakeha father than its Maori mother. Neither could other possibilities be entertained without questioning deeply held beliefs in the destiny of the fittest.  

But what was this new fitter ‘race’ to be? Patently it was not to be ‘Maori’ as Maori knew themselves. Nineteenth-century racial science — that separate peoples were physically definable by their appearance and physiology — was heavily influenced by Darwinism. Degrees of blood determined how much an individual belonged to one people or to another, while the degree of ‘civilization’ of that group would determine how well it compared and competed with other groups. A hierarchy of the races was the outcome, and Europeans placed themselves firmly at the top of this hierarchy.

However, in New Zealand assimilationists hoped to lever Maori further up the hierarchy by replacing Maori culture with their own ‘proven’ one. Trying to reinvent Maori as darker Europeans without Maori culture — the brown-skinned yeoman citizen — would ultimately have the same effect as trying to supplant Maori altogether. As the culmination of their theories, assimilationists and fatal impacters saw the same end: a society in which there were no separate, definably Maori New Zealanders in terms of culture and perhaps, eventually, even physical appearance. In this way, both ideas represent a spectrum. At the more extreme end of the spectrum, the fatal impact prognosis suggested that the production of half-castes would, at most, slow the inevitable decay of the Maori race. The presence of half-castes initially supported fatal impact theory, for if Maori did not die as quickly as the ‘expectation of victory’ promised, this was only because they were part-Pakeha themselves. However, in the latter part of the period under study, the ideological use of half-castes moved to a more purely

14 Riddell, pp.7–10, 95; see also Alan Ward, A Show of Justice: racial amalgamation in nineteenth century New Zealand, Auckland, 1973, ch.22.

15 Just as Darwin saw the genesis of his ideas in society around him. As Kenan Malik says in The Meaning of Race, History and Culture in Western Society, New York, 1996, Darwinism came after the view of the ‘survival of the fittest’ was made fashionable by Herbert Spencer: ‘Darwin’s theory emerged, however, in an intellectual and political milieu that... was already open to biological ideas of society and to the concept of social evolution’, p.90. Indeed scientific Darwinism and social Darwinism contradicted each other on some levels. Ideas labelled ‘Darwinistic’ were not always of Darwin’s own theories: ‘Victorian society simply adapted Darwin’s theory to suit its preformed conceptions’.

16 Such a hierarchy was again not unique to New Zealand. In fact New Zealand was following a worldwide ‘scientific’ trend. This was especially the case for the ‘New World’ where caste segregation took on some quite extreme levels of division. For example, the Latin American terms mestizo, mulatto, indio, or criollo reflected the growth in caste distinction there. In Fire and Blood: A History of Mexico, New York, 1995, T.R. Fehrenbach lists some of the at least 22 caste distinctions that arose in the ‘New Spain’ of Mexico. Mexico developed an elaborate system for caste recognition, distinguished along lines of racial intermixture, ranging between four main categories — ‘indian’, ‘negro’, ‘white’ and ‘corrupted’, pp.238–9. Fehrenbach described this as ‘a socio-racial structure of marvellous complexity’, p.238. Though not always as structured as the Mexican example, in a global phenomenon of new ‘scientific’ racialism, other areas of contact — from Africa to the Caribbean, North America and Southeast Asia — developed their own levels of an intermixed racial hierarchy through the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.


18 Belich, The New Zealand Wars, p.312.
assimilationist position, as that end of the spectrum began to dominate in the prevailing ideology.

The first full national Maori census took place in 1874. The cut-off point for this study is taken as 1921 as from that date Maori were enumerated on the same night as the general population. The 1921 census was also the last to include the category of 'Maori wives of European men'. From 1926, an important departure was made in the way that half-castes were enumerated. They were now automatically included in the Maori population; numbers of other 'castes' were also recorded for the first time. Until 1921, however, half-castes were determined by the enumerators as belonging either to the Maori or to the Pakeha populations, with 'no direct indication... provided of how to distinguish the two ways of living'. Although the 1920s may seem too far into the twentieth century to be included in any discussion of nineteenth-century ideology, the themes within the censuses up until that time are consistent with those of the nineteenth century.

Enumerations of the Maori population were not covered by the 1877 Census Act, as enumerations of the general population were. As a result, the enumerations of Maori were far less structured and rigorous than for the general population. The Maori census was, instead, based on the Statistician-General's rather brief and loose instructions to enumerators. The instructions changed very little over the censuses to 1921, requesting general comments on the state and health of the Maori population, age of the population and information on numbers-and any increase or decrease, and the state of 'half-castes' living as Maori or Pakeha. Enumerators tended to be local officials, such as resident and stipendiary magistrates, who already had contact with Maori. These enumerators then picked their own sub-enumerators, usually one or two per

19 Maori censuses were taken in various forms for specific areas before 1874 (for example, H. Tacy Kemp's census of Maori in the Wellington Province, Great Britain, Parliamentary Papers, vol.7, 'Further Papers Relative to the Affairs of New Zealand', 1851 [1420], pp.231-45). F.D. Fenton attempted a national Maori census from September 1857 to September 1858, published as Observations on the State of the Aboriginal Inhabitants of New Zealand, Auckland, 1859, but that census omitted several areas, including Nelson. It was only from 1874 that a national Maori census was undertaken by the government. Some results in all the Maori censuses to 1881 were approximate only. For detail on how the Maori censuses were taken from 1874, see Department of Statistics, An Introduction to the Census, Census 96, Wellington, 1997; New Zealand Census 1926, 'Maori and Half-Caste Population', vol. xiv, Wellington, 1929; Department of Statistics, Statistical Publications 1840-1960, Wellington, 1961, and Lowe, Te Puawaitanga.


21 Lowe, p.11.

22 David Thorns and Charles Sedgwick, Understanding Aotearoa/New Zealand Historical Statistics, Palmerston North, 1997, p.28. The 1877 Census Act, s.25 stated that the 'Act shall not apply to any Maori' unless at the discretion of the governor. 'Maori' was defined at s.3. It was not thought to be possible to take the census in the same manner as the general census, AJHR, 1886, G-12, 'Papers Relating to the Census of the Maori Population', p.1.

23 AJHR, 1886, G-12, 'Papers Relating to the Census of the Maori Population', p.1. Similar instructions are contained in the relevant AJHR papers for each census year. See, for example, AJHR, 1874, G-7; AJHR, 1881, G-3, p.26; AJHR, 1886, G-12, p.1; AJHR, 1891, G-2, p.1; AJHR, 1911, H-14A, p.2; 1911 census report, p.139; and 1916 census report (1920 separate edition), p.173. These are summarized in Riddell, p.97.

county. Enumerators were supplied with books containing blank forms, which they distributed to their sub-enumerators. These forms were supposed to be adhered to closely, but enumerators sometimes reported that they had to alter them to obtain meaningful results. The instructions stated that: ‘It will be your duty as enumerator to make up from the sub-enumerators’ books, a summary for your whole district, according to the printed form entitled “Enumerator’s Summary,” copies of which are herewith enclosed’. Though attempts were occasionally made to enumerate individual Maori, it was not until 1926 that each Maori household filled out their own forms. Otherwise, it seems that sub-enumerators, either Maori or Pakeha, recorded information after interviewing selected Maori informants, and then passed this information on to their enumerators. Considering that Maori births and deaths were not required to be registered until March 1913, it is hardly surprising that the interpretation of the instructions could depend on the vagaries of the enumerators.

The Maori censuses to 1921 will be explored through three related myths. The myths are not easily separated, but each has some distinctive features. The first is an ambiguous one: the idea that Maori were better off either in close contact with or in isolation from Europeans. This myth expressed the belief that Maori were dying whether in close contact with Europeans or not, but that some factors could temporarily ameliorate or limit the effects of that contact. The second myth was that Maori were not worthy possessors of their own land. If they did not use it as Pakeha believed land was ordained to be used, then Maori would lose it. In this view, ‘improving’ the land and ‘improving’ the Maori went hand in hand. The third myth was that ‘half-castes’, the physical product of Maori and Pakeha intermarriage, were the only possible future for Maori (if Maori were to have a future at all). This explanation will be followed by a discussion of how the myths remained intact, despite the numerical evidence of the censuses to the contrary, and despite Maori opposition to the ideology of assimilation through intermarriage.

26 See, for example, the 1886 census comments of G.J. Wilkinson, native agent at Waikato. More than half of Wilkinson’s sub-enumerators were Maori or half-caste, but in order to employ these sub-enumerators usefully, he had had to dispense with ‘the ordinary printed book, as it was, through being printed in English, and for other reasons, too complicated and confusing. I therefore substituted in its place paper ruled by myself, with the headings of columns written in Maori, which, when filled up, contained all the information required, but in a less confusing form than the printed books (in English) would have been to the half-caste and Maori Sub-enumerators, who were not adepts [sic] at reading English, and who do not understand our way of locating on paper the different kinds of information required’, AJHR, 1886, G-12, p.5.
27 AJHR, 1896, H-13B, p.1. None of these printed forms have been located.
28 New Zealand Census 1926, pp.1-2. This form was called ‘the Maori Schedule’: ‘For the first time North Island Maori — or, in other words, the great bulk of the population — were enumerated by means of schedules, for the due filling-up of which the Maori householders were responsible. The system operated with a very considerable measure of success’. South Island Maori had been enumerated with the general population since 1916.
29 Lowe, p.8. Personal communication with the Department of Statistics suggests that no completed forms have survived. Neither do sample forms exist for the period before 1921.
30 Bloomfield, p.38, states that registration of Maori deaths and births only became compulsory from 1 March 1913, but that even so registration lagged behind reality for some considerable time. See also Lowe, p.18, and Pool, The Maori Population, p.61.
Myth 1: Maori declined more rapidly in relation to their proximity to ‘civilization’

The 1878 census found that there was only one area in which the Maori population had escaped a decrease. This area was Opotiki, in the eastern Bay of Plenty.\(^{31}\) The next census, 1881, found that Maori at Marton were setting an example for all Maori with their newly acquired ‘habits of industry’.\(^{32}\) But in the same census, Registrar-General W.R.E. Brown noted that the enumerators for the Urewera and for Gisborne had found the opposite — that Maori were healthiest where there were no Pakeha neighbours to emulate. As the native officer at Gisborne reported: ‘There is one very remarkable circumstance worthy of note; that in hapus further removed from civilisation and European influences the proportion of children is much greater than when brought into contact with such influences’.\(^{33}\)

There is a contradiction in these statements — a dissonance that continued throughout the censuses to 1921. How could both isolation and contact be good for Maori? The answer lies in an understanding of immunity and demographics. Ian Pool has shown the link: ‘the greater the number of Pakeha, the higher the mortality of Maori, until some critical threshold is passed, after which continued exposure increased protection’.\(^{34}\) In other words, Maori were healthiest before extensive contact with Pakeha, least healthy once contact became significant, and were healthier again once an immunity transition point had been passed. This moving frontier of relative healthiness was linked to land loss and to the time when that loss occurred. By 1881 areas such as Marton were extensively settled, but isolated areas such as the Urewera were not to be settled for another 20 years. Areas subjected to confiscation suffered high mortality rates in the years immediately after confiscation; areas not subjected to confiscation seem to have been healthier until significant land alienation occurred, then they too followed the same pattern.\(^{35}\)

However, once a degree of immunity was acquired, other factors became prominent in sustaining a continuing high Maori mortality rate: ‘increasing immunity is not seen as the only factor but merely part of a complex in which socio-cultural and socio-economic variables also play a significant role’.\(^{36}\) Some areas which had had early contact with Pakeha, such as the south of the South Island and the Bay of Islands, had been through the disease transition earliest, and recuperated earlier.\(^{37}\) But in these communities, socio-economic factors such as poverty and landlessness replaced lack of immunity as the key factor affecting

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31 1878 Report on the Results of a Census of the Population of the Dominion of New Zealand, Wellington, 1880 (1878 census), p.21; AJHR, 1878, G-2, p.5. The Bay of Plenty remained the area with the greatest proportion of Maori until the end of the century, Pool, Te Iwi Maori, pp.97, 125.
33 ibid., p.19.
34 Pool, Te Iwi Maori, p.89.
36 Pool, Te Iwi Maori, pp.89-90. See also Lange, p.30.
Improving' the Maori

Maori health and population growth. Once this transition from immunity to socio-economic factors occurred, Maori in close contact with Europeans at least had limited access to education and to some medical care; then contact probably had some ameliorating effect.

The isolation and contact dichotomy had come a full circle by the start of the twentieth century. By the 1901 census, enumerators claimed that the most isolated people were the worst off. The 1906 census reported similarly that Maori closest to Pakeha had quite 'luxurious' lifestyles, in comparison with their isolated kin. By 1916, Maori who had managed to make something of an economic switch were 'progressing' the most efficiently, for 'as a general rule Maori progress synchronises with the progress of European settlement'. It was now taken as axiomatic that those in closest contact with Europeans had an advantage over those in isolation from them. In turn, contact with Europeans opened Maori up for further 'improvement', and made intermarriage more likely. It was thus presumed to further encourage assimilation.

Any Maori view of the benefits of contact is difficult to gauge, but there are some indicators. Maori chose to incorporate introduced elements into their own society from an early stage. These were, most noticeably, muskets, potatoes and European men. But this 'partial assimilation', by which Maori chose what elements of Pakeha technology, and perhaps society, were useful to them, did not fit with perceived notions of the necessity of Maori abandoning their 'Maoriness' to survive. Threateningly, it indicated instead a significant degree of Maori control over the contact process. Fear of partial assimilation, controlled by Maori, was expressed explicitly in the 1886 census. In that census, partial assimilation was termed a disaster for Maori. In fact, no assimilation was preferable to Maori picking and choosing: 'they can have no hope of permanency unless, having cast aside their old habits and modes of life, they adopt those of their European neighbours in their entirety'. An 1896 article from the Otago

38 See Pool, Te Iwi Maori, p.87; also Anderson, The Welcome of Strangers, p.206.
39 Lange, 'The Revival of a Dying Race', and Derek Dow, 'Specially Suitable Men?' Subsidized Medical Services for Maori, 1840–1940', NZJH, 32, 2 (1998), pp.163–88 both discuss the development of state subsidies for medical services to Maori, how and when these services became available, and how effective they were. Lange suggests that it was, in fact, advancements in sanitation and lifestyle that most improved the general health of the Maori. See also M.P.K. Sorrenson, 'Buck, Peter Henry' (Te Rangi Hiroa) and Graham Butterworth, 'Pomare, Maui Wiremu Piti Naera', in The Dictionary of New Zealand Biography (DNZB), Vol. Three, 1901–1920, Wellington, 1996, pp.73, 405.
40 AJHR, 1901, H-26B, p.15, where, for example, the enumerator for Wairarapa stated that the only decline in Maori in his whole province was among the most isolated on the coast, where they were in a 'miserable' state.
42 1917 memorandum to the Native Minister from the Under-Secretary of Native Affairs, appendix A to the 1916 census, published as a separate volume, July 1917, Wellington, pp.x–xi (due to the First World War, the 1916 census was published by topics over succeeding years. In 1920, the 1916 census was also published in two complete volumes, and again as separate editions).
44 Spencer von Sturmer, Resident Magistrate at Hokiang, AJHR, 1886, G-12, p.3.
Daily Times asserted that the partial adaptation of European ways was the major cause of Maori decline. The high mortality of Maori, it claimed, ‘is almost entirely due to methods of treatment which are bad copies of those in use among Europeans’. In a letter to the Maori newspaper, Te Wananga, in 1878, Timoti Ropatini summed up the prevailing feeling: ‘the Maori is not able to do all that the customs of the Europeans proscribe in regard to European food, hence the food so used by the Maori turns on the Maori and kills him’.

It is evident that Maori were aware themselves of the struggle their people faced. Apirana Ngata helped to found the Te Aute College Student’s Association (TACSA), a precursor of the Young Maori party. Both Ngata and the association shared a focus on improving the health and sanitation of Maori. By 1900, this approach had brought about considerable improvements in Maori health: a positive result because of positive Maori action. The men of TACSA never ceased to warn Maori that unless they reformed their own way of life they would die out. As Ngata proclaimed, ‘No-one else could learn for him the laws of healthy living. The future of the Maori lay within himself!’ While aware that intermarriage was considerable, Ngata hoped that it would not spell out the end of a separate Maori identity. In a paper to the 1897 TACSA annual conference, entitled ‘A Plea for the Unity of the Maori Race’, he asked his audience to envisage ‘a vigorous and independent community, a unified and proud Maori people, fully part of New Zealand political and social life, but “conscious in all its parts of a distinct and separate existence”’. Hopes that Maori could retain their own identity while borrowing useful Pakeha ideas and people flew against the prevailing assimilationist wind. This parallel discourse of a separate Maori vision for their future was largely ignored in the censuses of the time.

By the late nineteenth century, an unknown number of enumerators were Maori themselves, and were able to provide another perspective on the state of the Maori population. This adds another, still unexplored, dimension to measuring the ideology of the measurers. In particular, Maori enumerators picked up levels of opposition to the censuses unnoticed by their Pakeha colleagues (opposition to the censuses is discussed below). But the Maori enumerators, or those Pakeha enumerators with close ties to Maori communities, were not necessarily any more sympathetic to the struggle facing Maori. Perhaps they shared a belief in the necessity of ‘civilizing’ to save the ‘race’.

The comments of Charles Ferris, whose wife and children were Maori, provide an example of one who had close contact with Maori but whose attitudes showed a lack of sympathy for traditional ways. Ferris was sub-enumerator for Cook County (East Coast) in 1906. He stated that he believed that ‘the majority of

47 Ngata, quoted by Lange, p.150; see also Lange pp.119–49 for an explanation of the importance of TACSA, and the people who made up its membership.
48 Ngata, TACSA Papers, 1897, cit. Lange, p.154.
49 They are unknown because only their names remain in the censuses and AJHR reports to give any indication of who they were and whether or not they were Maori.
Maori mothers are absolutely unfit to rear and look after their children, being ignorant of the laws of health'. He continued that had he not been educated, and had he and his wife listened to their 'old people and tohungas', then his own five children would not have survived. He concluded that: 'I have often remarked to Native women that a common household fowl or hen could rear and look after her chicks better than a Native woman'.

Maori commentators often expressed a better understanding of the issues facing their people and of the mixed blessing of assimilation. Nurse Akenehi Hei, one of the very first Maori nurses, firmly believed that there was still much of worth in traditional Maori customs: 'It is a much-debated question in every kainga or village, whether or not the European civilisation has fulfilled its expectations. The old people say it has not. To prove their words they bring forward the decline of our race, closely following the forsaking of the ancestral customs'. To Nurse Hei and the older generation Maori, the decline of the population and the abandonment of Maori culture went hand-in-hand. Conversely, men like Charles Ferris blamed the incomplete abandonment of what they saw as the worst of the culture. Nurse Hei, however, continued, that 'even in the most Europeanised families there lurks a secret attachment for those dear old customs, which are the result of so many centuries of experience, and no doubt contain many things worth keeping. Such customs, having kept the Maori race in vigorous health for many generations, deserve consideration'.

In general, New Zealanders, including some Maori, did not understand the context (land loss, disease transmission, and general socio-economic conditions) of fluctuation in the Maori population. They saw the effects without recognizing their causes. There appeared to be plenty of proof that Maori were dying. In a case of the weak falling before the strong, it seemed that there was a 'natural' Maori tendency towards death once contact occurred. In this view, the only hope for Maori was that they could be strengthened by becoming like Pakeha, or, better still, eventually becoming Pakeha through intermarriage. To do this, Maori had to be 'improved' — like the land.

Myth 2: Improving the land, improving the Maori

Nineteenth-century New Zealanders held strong ideas about land and its uses. Land and morality were closely linked. To nineteenth-century Pakeha, no one had a moral right to land unless they used it productively. In this view, New Zealand was a land waiting for a worthy people to clear and plant it, to transform...
it from the native to the introduced. Turning Maori communally owned ‘waste’ land into freehold ‘useful’ land, owned and farmed by worthy citizens was a priority. Freehold tenure ‘was the best means of realizing the pervasive “familial idea” whereby settled families would tame and domesticate the major enemies of civilization and progress: Maori, the bush, land monopolists, animal pests, noxious weeds, the land itself, Chinese, fallen women, and wandering, atomized single men’. This was not just a hope for the land but for a new ‘improved’ society. Maori either had to get out of the way, or join in at the back. But they could only join in once they too had been improved, so that they could resettle the land as worthy settlers.

The censuses are replete with references to improving Maori and improving the land. The Hokianga enumerator in 1886, the resident magistrate, S. von Sturmer, suggested that Maori were indolent on the land, but by 1896 it was apparent to Colonel Roberts, enumerator for Tauranga, that Maori were increasingly requiring land to work, even leasing land from Europeans for cropping. However, George Hutton, an 1896 sub-enumerator for Wairarapa, thought Maori had given up bothering to cultivate, since they bought so much European food. The irony of Maori leasing back their former land, because they did not have enough of their own, seems to have largely been lost on the enumerators. Instead, some enumerators praised the acquisition of a work ethic among Maori. According to F. Waldegrave, Under-Secretary of the Native Department, while the 1901 pessimist saw ‘a remnant of beggars wandering over the land their ancestors once possessed . . . the optimist looks forward to a complete fusion of the two races’. E.C. Blomfield, enumerator for Russell and surrounding counties in 1901, praised Maori for becoming ‘naturalised as Englishmen’. By 1906, his replacement, G.W.P. Seon, thought the amalgamation of Maori with Pakeha was proving ‘to be a great factor in gradually preparing the way to the ultimate elevation of the Maori — viz. their fusion with the white race’. Meanwhile, a 1906 sub-enumerator for Wanganui suggested that Maori should be encouraged to work their own land: ‘if such faculties were given them I am sure that the Maori in the near future would be a worthy settler’.

In 1911, praise was heaped on the work of ‘deserving Maori youths’ and ‘intelligent young fellows’ (perhaps referring to TACSA people) for following and encouraging the ‘diffusion of knowledge’ and for improvements in sanitation. Maori now worked in closer proximity to (and for) their supposed Pakeha role models, as ‘Every year the spread of settlement brings them into closer touch with their Pakeha neighbours, and subjects them to the influence
of European example’.\textsuperscript{64} Maori were becoming more like the ideal ‘yeoman citizen’.\textsuperscript{65} For W. Dinnie, enumerator for the Tokerau district, it was ‘gratifying to observe that the Natives are gradually but surely endeavouring to emulate the pakeha in every respect’.\textsuperscript{66} Sub-enumerator Pepa Kirkwood (for Raglan County) stated that, despite the problems of the past, ‘in a few years a good third of the population in my district will be worthy citizens’.\textsuperscript{67} Maori were being encouraged to develop something approximating a Pakeha work ethic. W.H. Bowler, Kirkwood’s supervising enumerator, stated that recent land legislation (presumably the Native Land Act, 1909) had ‘opened the door for free trade in native land, [and] resulted in large areas being sold to Europeans’. Consequently many Maori in the Waikato were quite wealthy at the time of enumeration.\textsuperscript{68}

The 1921 census gave the highest number of Maori since Maori censuses had begun. Assimilationist Pakeha congratulated themselves on the ‘improvement’ in Maori, through amalgamation with Pakeha, which they believed had enabled this recovery to occur. But not all Maori were so sure that amalgamation was either their inevitable or preferred future. Ten years earlier, Native Minister James Carroll had suggested that, in fact, Maori were not yet convinced of the benefits of being ‘improved’ by amalgamation with Pakeha: ‘I am yet sceptical on that point as to whether the Maori will be greatly improved by becoming a pakeha. But I do say that I believe in many instances the pakeha could become very much improved if we Maori-ized him’.\textsuperscript{69} This was a timely reminder that the ideology of the censuses was just that — a reflection of common nineteenth-century (mostly Pakeha) ideology, rather than an expression of how Maori viewed themselves. Carroll’s comment must have seemed very ungrateful to assimilationists and those who could not allow for the possibility that Maori were capable of turning around their own decline, or could choose to reject some of the forms of ‘improvement’ on offer.

**Myth 3: As the most ‘improved’ Maori, ‘half-castes’ offered the only hope for a Maori future**

The production of ‘half-castes’ was close to the heart of those who promoted assimilation. As ‘part-Pakeha’ (whether or not this was a self-definition), half-castes fulfilled nineteenth-century beliefs that the only healthy Maori were those who were also European. Measuring the (preferably increasing) numbers of half-castes measured the success of assimilation. Increasingly, the census reports focused on information about half-castes.

Around the 1890s, the commonly expressed view of half-castes as the most non-degenerative aspect of Maori society became most fully developed. In 1896,
KATE RIDDELL

Blenheim enumerator and stipendiary magistrate J. C. Allen noted that children with 'mixed blood' were particularly healthy and increasing in numbers when compared with those without Pakeha blood.\(^70\) Wellington enumerator George H. Davies stated in 1901 that half-castes, 'being of a more forceful character than the Maori', offered natural advantages to Maoridom, and would lead their Maori parents out of the past.\(^71\) For assimilationists, then, half-castes could be potential propagandists of assimilation themselves.

Exactly what a 'half-caste' was, though, remained problematic. Some enumerators expressed a sense of frustration over the absence of any clear definition of 'blood mixing', complaining that a true picture of the success of assimilation could not be gauged unless degrees of mixing could be accurately defined and enumerated. Colonel Roberts, enumerator for the Bay of Plenty in 1901, remarked that 'three-quarter castes' were generally being counted as Maori. Aylmer Kenny, a 1901 Marlborough sub-enumerator, noted, 'that the present census form is somewhat misleading in regard to the numbers of pure-blooded Maoris [sic], as in cases where one parent is pure Maori, and the other half-caste, the offspring is described as Maoris [sic]; and where one parent is pakeha and the other half-caste, the offspring is said to be half-caste'.\(^72\) Thus, the 'half-caste' figures in the censuses did not give a realistic picture of the extent of intermarriage. More importantly, they gave no idea of the cultural allegiance of those being enumerated.

Te Rangi Hiroa (Peter Buck) noted a similar amount of hidden intermixture in the Maori Pioneer Battalion members and school children whom he studied in 1919. This study formed part of his 1924 presentation to the New Zealand Institute, 'The Passing of the Maori'. He stated: 'But this [half-caste numbers in the census] is not the full measure of intermixture, for the children of half-castes with Maori and other combinations are counted as Maori in the census. It would be interesting to know what percentage of the 52,751 in the last [1921] census had white blood'. From his investigations, he gave 50% of those he studied as 'Maori with white blood', and 49.9% as 'Full Maori'. But only a small percentage of that 50% with Pakeha blood had identified themselves to him as half-caste or of mixed blood.\(^73\) The conclusion is that the remainder considered themselves Maori — culture was the important defining characteristic for them, not blood ratios. The censuses did not pick up on this Maori cultural definition. At any rate it would not have fitted assimilation theories for Maori to be part-Pakeha and yet consider themselves as Maori.

Half-castes could, and did, jump census categories. Herbert Brabant, enumerator for Wanganui in 1896, noted an increase in the Maori population in his district. This was due, he thought, to a number of half-castes having been previously listed as European, but now reclassified by their own choice under the 'half-castes as Maori' category.\(^74\) Other enumerators feared that more half-

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\(^{71}\) AJHR, 1901, H-26B, p.18.

\(^{72}\) ibid., pp.12, 19.


\(^{74}\) AJHR, 1896, H-13B, pp.6-8. The 1911 census also included comments that some Maori wished to change from the category in which they had been placed, 1911, AJHR, H-14A, p.10.
IMPROVING THE MAORI
castes would 'go back' to living like Maori if intervention were not forthcoming. For example, the government schoolmaster for the Chatham Islands wrote to the Native Minister in 1886 with a request for land to be found for the half-caste family of Abner Clough, who 'conducted himself very steadily' and had an industrious family of sons and daughters. This was so the minister could 'prevent such a fine family from going back to Maoris as undoubtedly they will if nothing be done to help them ... you would be doing a truly benevolent kindness to a deserving family by rescuing them from inevitable barbarism. I need not tell you how quickly neat and clean tidy girls are transformed into dirty unkempt repulsive things.' Fears such as this led H.F. Edger, Under-Secretary of the Native Department, to note in 1906 that it was still the ideal, rather than the reality, that 'the ultimate fate of the Maori race is to become absorbed in the European'.

The censuses were attempting to measure the rate of Maori intermarriage and assimilation by counting and emphasizing the role of half-castes. But throughout, half-castes were actually more likely to identify with Maori than with Pakeha — a trend that has continued in this century. In the words of Apirana Ngata, regardless of the fact that he himself wore a top-hat and stiff collar, he was still very much Maori. He believed that was also true for the South Island half-caste population, supposedly the most thoroughly 'assimilated':

The [South Island Maori] are still their [Maori] descendants, quite as good in their own way... as were their grandfathers ... in the South Island the Europeanizing process has been carried on a little more rapidly than in the North. That would appear to be so as far as the physical type is concerned. Though a large proportion are half-caste, and midway between half-caste and full European, still, in their outlook and spirit and physical characteristics they are very much Maori. Those of us who are interested in the Maori race would deplore less the loss of the physical type than the loss of what may be called the Maori spirit.

An examination of the overall statistics for the censuses to 1921 reveals that both fatal impact and assimilation beliefs were wrong. Although the Maori population did suffer terrible traumas in the nineteenth century, closely linked to disease and land loss, it was far more resilient than it has generally been given credit for. For each census return between 1874 and the first accepted increase in 1891, the Maori census totals differed by around 4500 at most. Given the plethora of comments about the 'declining' Maori population throughout the period, the fact that the actual results were relatively static is

75 Andrew Russell to Ballance, 7 March 1886, Maori Affairs (MA), 13/13 folder 3, National Archives, Wellington; see also Elsie Locke, 'Clough, Abner', in DNZB, Vol. One, p.86.
77 NZPD, 1929, 21, p.488; see also NZPD, 1931, 230, p.571.
78 The range between highest and lowest figures for the period 1874 to 1921 is 10,782. (Ignoring the obvious under-enumeration of 1896, the lowest figure was in 1886, at 41,969, while the 1921 figure was 52,751.) Averaging the results of the censuses for the period 1874 to 1921 gives the figure of 45,475, which is close to the median figure for the same period of 44,097. This suggests that the range of total figures throughout the period was in fact rather limited. See Riddell, p.91, Table 1 'General and Maori Population Totals, 1858–1921'.

93
striking. The Maori population does not actually appear to have been decreasing in this period.

Moreover, if the census results are compared for an overall increase or decrease, it is evident that more censuses gave an increase than a decrease. The results for 1896 and 1916 were acknowledged as being under-enumerations (defence staff serving overseas were not enumerated in 1916), thus only the 1878 and the 1886 results gave an actual decrease in figures. In addition, every total census result showing a decrease in the Maori population was followed by one showing an increase.

Table 1: Reported amounts of decrease or increase in the Maori population 1874 to 1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Decrease</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>45,470</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>43,595</td>
<td>502</td>
<td>1875</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>44,097</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>41,969</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>2139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>41,993</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>39,854</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>43,143</td>
<td>3289</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>47,731</td>
<td>4588</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>49,844</td>
<td>2113</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>49,776</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>52,751</td>
<td>2975</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The ideology of the dying Maori, or the urgent necessity for the Europeanizing one, outstripped all facts. The Maori population probably halved from its pre-contact population, but most of that decline occurred in the period 1840–1874, before enumerators started to record their observations. Moreover, there was always the probability that Maori would survive once an epidemiological transitional point had been reached.

If one considers the list of reasons given repeatedly for the poor health of Maori, it becomes clear that the force behind the censuses was not so much science as ideology. Registrar-General W.R.E. Brown’s list in 1878 is typical: ‘Love of drink, bad food, bad clothing, and bad houses, neglect of infants, prostitution of women when very young, dirt, and generally low social habits.’

To this was added in other years, sterility or high mortality in women, and sterility in men. It seems Maori could win on no front.

So sure were many enumerators that Maori could not be saved without being transformed, that they failed to see the contradictory evidence within their own

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79 Taken from the census results by year (see Riddell, Table 3, p.115). Until 1881, results are approximate. See also Bloomfield, *Handbook*, Table 11.21; and Pool, *The Maori Population*, p.237 for intercensal changes.

80 See Pool, *Te Iwi Maori*, pp.5–7 for a discussion of this transition, and pp.58, 60: ‘The decline leading to the predicted “Passing of the Maori” had been most rapid from 1840 to 1874’.

81 1878 census, report of the Registrar-General, p.21.
Neither could they see that Maori had to be experiencing high fertility in order for their population to remain static, given the high levels of mortality it was experiencing. The 1886 Handbook suggested that the increase in the proportion of Maori children that year was due to high adult mortality rather than high fertility, because: ‘It is hardly conceivable that the women of these tribes should have been so exceedingly prolific’. It is true, as Pool has noted, that adult mortality was high, but so too were fertility levels: ‘over all the years until the 1960s, Maori fertility seems to have been relatively high’, a fact that ‘Victorian observers failed to take ... into account’. In 1891, W. Rennell, enumerator for Taranaki, suggested that ‘not more than one of three Maori children live to maturity’. If this was accurate, then it would suggest a very high birth rate, given that the Maori population was increasing at this time.

There was, nevertheless, a large amount of truth in claims that previous enumerations had been inaccurate. Throughout the period, census figures were less than reliable. Inaccuracies were the result of standard census problems such as boundary and classification changes and category jumping. Most importantly, however, significant miscounting occurred in the Maori censuses, due to the considerable amount of Maori opposition to census-taking. Enumerators expressed frustration at opposition, from Francis Fenton’s 1858 observations through to the 1921 census. In fact, the only census which did not specifically note opposition was the 1874 census, and this was probably because it did not give detailed enumerator reports, and was largely an estimate. Levels of opposition were higher in some areas than others (especially in the areas of land confiscation), but opposition was still encountered in areas that had long been considered friendly. The true extent of the problem was only revealed in the later censuses of this period.

A Kawhia Maori sub-enumerator in the 1901 census remarked that: ‘Had I not known them my census would have been 15 per cent. less.’ Fifteen percent is not a reliable measure of overall inaccuracy in the censuses to 1921, especially as by 1901 there were more Maori enumerators, with presumably more opportunity for noticing and correcting inaccuracies. But if any figure near to 15% was applicable, then it would more than account for any drop in the total Maori population between the 1874 and the 1891 censuses. Whatever the scale or the cause, opposition affected the reliability of results. Fenton noted opposition in 1858. While Maori in Northland in 1886 were suspicious of enumeration...
(due to fear of a poll tax); Kingitanga, East Coast and Taupo Maori regularly refused to co-operate with enumerators. In 1896, some Maori in Marlborough wanted to be paid for their information. There was opposition throughout the period to 1921 in Waikato and Taranaki. Parihaka Maori were not willing participants in 1901, and some claimed never to have been counted before. Some said that they did not like being counted at the same time as their pigs, others feared that the census was intended for conscription for the Boer war, or for extermination, or for deportation once it was known who had survived contact with Pakeha. In 1911, sub-enumerator R. Davies reported that Parewanui Maori ran away into the bush to avoid answering census questions, 'saying the Government had taken all of the Native lands, that the Maori mana had gone, their rangatiras had all died, and now the Government was curious to know how many survived this great battle between white and brown'. Similarly in 1911, at Kaiwhaiki in Taranaki, sub-enumerator W. Roach recorded: 'they gave me irregular information — they gave me names of trees and lands as substitutes for themselves — and it was afterwards, through Hori Pukehika, that I found the information was erroneous'. In 1916, the census reported widespread opposition to conscription and the census, especially in the Waikato and Urewera. Even in 1921 opposition was encountered, predictably in the historically troubled areas of Waikato and Taranaki but also in the Rangitikei.

As well as confounding the accuracy of census results, the extent of this opposition reveals that, like Ngata with his health reforms, Maori had their own parallel discourse throughout the period. This discourse focused on resistance to an ideology which dictated that Maori would die out as a separate identity once the full power of assimilation and intermarriage had been realized. The opposition shows that many Maori, even those who were the product of intermarriage themselves, did not chose to co-operate with the prevailing ideology of intermarriage in the censuses, and wished to retain a separate Maori identity.

After the First World War, discussion of Maori issues began to take up less space in the censuses. The topic now held less fascination for the Pakeha observer. As early as 1891, the New Zealand Yearbook stated: 'The native question now has lost much of the importance it once possessed. The days of Maori disturbances are happily past, and the whistle of the railway-engine may now be heard in places where the Maoris fought with us in time of war. Flocks

90 Fenton, Observations; AJHR, 1886, G-12, pp.2, 5, 8, 9.
91 AJHR, 1896, H-13B, p.11.
92 There are, however, some census figures for Parihaka in 1878 and 1881. Perhaps the lack of recollection of these previous enumerations reflected the heavy migration of Maori in and out of Parihaka. See AJHR, 1874, G-7, pp.15-16 and AJHR, 1881, G-3, pp.8, 16.
93 AJHR, 1901, H-26B, p.10.
94 AJHR, 1911, H-14A, p.17.
95 ibid., p.18.
96 1916 census report, Appendix A, pp.xi, xii.
97 Opposition at Rangitikei, however, was overcome with the help of Mr Ratana (that is, possibly, but not specifically identified, Tahupotiki Ratana). AJHR, 1921-22, H-39A, p.3.
98 This Pakeha observer was also changing. See Pool, Te Iwi Maori, pp.86–87, 100, 105 for a summary of the changing dynamics of the New Zealand Pakeha population and general census results.

96
of sheep belonging to Natives may now be seen passing along roads in neighbourhoods once the hotbed of disaffection'.

But this was celebrating the triumph of assimilation too early in the experiment. The very same Maori tending quiet flocks of sheep may still have rejected assimilation or opposed enumeration. The ‘Native question’ is still at issue. Maori have rejected total assimilation with Pakeha of the nineteenth century, and their successors. Any amalgamation of the ‘races’, in fact, has worked to strengthen Maori numbers. Maori were aware of this possibility from an early period. According to a settler, W.D. Hay, commenting from 1860, Arama Karaka of Otamatea was:

... thoroughly aware of the gradual extinction which is coming for his race. He sees and knows that the Maori is dying out before the Pakeha, and his great idea is how the former might be perpetuated. Says he ... 'What shall be for the Maori? Where are they now since the coming of the Pakeha? ... God has called to the Maori people, and they go. The souls of our dead crowd the path that leads to the Reinga ... Lo! the Pakeha men are very many. It is good that they should see our maidens, and it is good that they should marry them. Then there will be children that shall live, and a new race of Maori blood. So there shall be some to say in the time to come, 'This is the land of our mothers. This was the land of the Maori before the Pakeha came out of the sea' ... Oh, friend! send your young men to Tanoa, that they may see our maidens, and may know that they are good for wives.'

Some Maori, although pessimistic for their immediate future, were aware of the future potential for their ‘race’ — that intermarriage could strengthen the Maori and provide a stronger, but still Maori, race.' The long-term results of intermarriage did not fulfill nineteenth-century Pakeha ideals. Rather, in choosing Maori identity regardless of ‘blood equations’, Maori who are the result of intermarriage have given strength to Maori numbers and helped enable Maori to secure their own future. In contrast to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century predictions, intermarriage has added directly to the numbers of those people who choose to define themselves as Maori and of Maori descent.

At the end of the twentieth century, the tradition of intermarriage continues strongly. The 1996 census results confirm that the percentage of those who are the results of this intermarriage but choose to identify as Maori and of Maori descent is continuing to grow, and so defy the most confident of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century predictions and ideology.

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99 1892 Yearbook, p.275; see also Belich, ‘Myth, Race and Identity’, p.16.
101 While on the 1863 Maori tour of England, Horomona Te Atua made a similar plea to English women to marry Maori men, cit. Brian Mackrell, Hariru Wikitoria! An Illustrated History of the Maori Tour of England, 1863, Oxford, 1985, p.72. Maui Pomare also believed that ‘a new population with European ancestry was emerging and he considered that they would have the best characteristics of both races’, Butterworth, ‘Pomare’, p.405. Half a century later, Maharaia Winiata made similar comments in observing that many of the Young Maori party were the products of mixed marriages, Maharaia Winiata, The Changing Role of the Leader in Maori Society: A Study in Social Change and Race Relations, Auckland, 1967, p.150. See also Lange, p.154.