

A History of Colonization in Aotearoa/New Zealand

During the 17th century, the first known settler colonist, a Dutch seaman named Abel Tasman, reached the shores of Aotearoa/New Zealand in 1642. His brief stay ended in death for 4 of his crew members. Christian missionaries would use this tragedy amongst others to justify their lack of proselytization for a couple of centuries in these islands. It would take another 127 years for Europeans to initiate contact again when James Cook's 1769 expedition arrived in the west of Aotearoa/New Zealand. Over the next 100 years, violent conflicts between European settler colonizers and Māori, most notably the Musket Wars, resulted in the destruction of approximately 1/5 of the indigenous population.¹

The persistence of the European colonial project resulted in the push for a British governorship in Aotearoa/New Zealand during the 19th century. Christian missionaries, particularly from the Anglican Church, were integral in establishing former British Royal Navy officer William Hobson as the first colonial governor. The Anglican Church Missionary Society father-and-son duo Henry and Edward Williams wrote the Treaty of Waitangi that formalized colonial governorship and secured complete British control of land in exchange for ensuring peace and granting the Māori the same rights as citizens of England. However, the agreement reached in the Treaty of Waitangi is not without controversy. The Williams duo was tasked with drafting, debating, and translating the Treaty under a time crunch of up to one day.² The expedited agreement is thought to have been rushed for the sake of instituting colonial authority. To this day, language in the Treaty is contested, with the British maintaining that the Māori submitted to the settler colonists, while the Māori state that their agreement was misrepresented.³

During the 1860s, the colonial authorities passed the Suppression of Rebellion Act. This act dispossessed Māori dissenters of the British occupation. The government seized millions of acres of land that was dispossessed from the Māori. Eventually, by the turn of the 20th century, the Māori became a minority in Aotearoa/New Zealand.⁴ The targeted erasure of Māori communities contributed to colonial dominance of an entire people. Eventually, contests for authority amongst colonial leaders and white New Zealanders (Pakeha) led the country of Aotearoa/New Zealand to ratify their independence from Britain ending formal colonization in 1947.

The ensuing decades ushered in a mix of liberal and conservative governance with the Māori maintaining disadvantaged status despite changing political policies. During the 20th century, the Māori social, economic, and political divide in comparison to their white counterparts deepened. By 1975, the Māori only owned 5% of the land amongst a territory they used to predominantly inhabit.⁵ To address the divide, the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act instituted the Waitangi Tribunal

¹ New Zealand History | *Nga korero a ipurangi o Aotearoa*, "A History of New Zealand 1769-1914," *Manatū Taonga — Ministry for Culture and Heritage*, updated 2-Nov-2023 <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/history-of-new-zealand-1769-1914>.

² New Zealand History "A History of New Zealand 1769-1914," *Manatū Taonga*, updated 2-Nov-2023 <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/culture/history-of-new-zealand-1769-1914>.

³ New Zealand History | *Nga korero a ipurangi o Aotearoa*, "Differences Between the Texts," *Manatū Taonga — Ministry for Culture and Heritage*, updated 5-Oct-2021, <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/treaty/read-the-treaty/differences-between-the-texts>.

⁴ Anika Bajpai, "New World Atonement: Colonization in New Zealand," *The Cornell Diplomat*. <https://journals.library.cornell.edu/index.php/tcd/article/view/600/560>.

⁵ Bourassa, Steven C, and Ann Louise Strong. 2002. "Restitution of Land to New Zealand Maori: The Role of Social Structure." *Pacific Affairs* 75 (2): 227–60. <https://doi.org/10.2307/4127184>.

with the purpose of exploring Māori land claims and disputes. The Waitangi Act's legacy has catalyzed advocacy for Māori affairs in pursuit of more equitable social, economic, and political policies for Indigenous communities in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Today, the Indigenous communities are still feeling the effects of colonization. Including the loss of life, land, and an equal livelihood on par with their white counterparts, Indigenous communities, Māori in particular, are suffering from the loss of their language and culture. However, a few initiatives have been undertaken to address these injustices. Recently, the inclusion of curriculum for grade school children in the country "focused on four main ideas: Māori history as the foundational history of New Zealand, colonization, the use of power, and relationships and connections between people."⁶ The inclusion of complex histories of Aotearoa/New Zealand in school curriculum is a step in the right direction for the country and its population to reckon with their colonial histories and legacies.

⁶ John Gerritsen, "New History Curriculum: Schools Face Difficulties in First Year, Despite Enjoyment," *Radio New Zealand*, April 4th, 2024, <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/513364/new-history-curriculum-schools-face-difficulties-in-first-year-despite-enjoyment>.