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The Penguin History Of New Zealand



THE PENGUIN HISTORY OF NEW ZEALAND

MICHAEL KING



Synopsis

New Zealand was the last country in the world to be discovered and settled by humankind. It was also the first to introduce full democracy. Between those events, and in the century that followed the franchise, the movements and the conflicts of human history have been played out more intensively and more rapidly in New Zealand than anywhere else on Earth. The Penguin History of New Zealand, a new book for a new century, tells that story in all its colour and drama. The narrative that emerges is an inclusive one about men and women, Maori and Pakeha. It shows that British motives in colonising New Zealand were essentially humane; and that Maori, far from being passive victims of a 'fatal impact', coped heroically with colonisation and survived by selectively accepting and adapting what Western technology and culture had to offer. This book, a triumphant fruit of careful research, wide reading and judicious assessment, was an unprecedented best-seller from the time of its first publication in 2003.

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Customer Reviews

I should explain that I am an Australian (now also a NZ Citizen) who has lived in NZ for 36 years. Like most Australians, I was almost totally ignorant of NZ before coming here, but have tried to read what has become available over the years in order to gain a better understanding of my adopted country. That reading included the short Penguin history of New Zealand by Sir Keith Sinclair. That history was written with an emphasis on the Pakeha ('European') perspective characteristic of the times. Michael King's book redresses the balance and greatly emphasises the Maori perspective, and Maori/Pakeha relations. I found this fascinating and instructive, and not irrelevant to gaining a better understanding some current social issues. The book is strikingly coherent, and is an easy

read because it flows so well. The book is an example of excellent writing. I am left, however, with a strange feeling of unease. Although the book is a long one, there is a feeling that it often just skims the surface. The big picture, as the author saw it, appears to have obscured or even obliterated other material. For example, one is none, or only a little, wiser about how New Zealanders, both Maori and Pakeha, lived at home during World War II and the Great Depression. The author's admiration for NZ soldiers comes through strongly, but is not balanced by an adequate treatment of the appalling, unjust, and well-documented, abuse of conscientious objectors, particularly during World War I. He embraces the scientist Maurice Wilkins as a New Zealander who went abroad to pursue his career: in fact, Maurice Wilkins was born in New Zealand, but taken back to Britain by his parents as a small boy, and never returned.

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