Privilege in Perpetuity
Exploding a Pākehā Myth

Peter Meihana

The idea of Māori privilege continues to be deployed in order to constrain Māori aspirations and maintain the power imbalance that colonisation achieved in the nineteenth century.

The ‘idea of Māori privilege’, as Peter Meihana describes it, is deeply embedded in New Zealand culture. Many New Zealanders hold firm to the belief that Māori have been treated better than other indigenous peoples, and that they receive benefits that other New Zealanders do not. Some argue that the supposed privileges that Māori receive are a direct attack on the foundations of the nation.

Privilege in Perpetuity charts the eighteenth-century origins of this idea, tracing its development over time, and assesses what impact this notion of privilege has had on Māori communities. Central to this history is the paradox, explored by Meihana, of how Māori were rendered landless and politically marginalised, yet at the same time were somehow still considered privileged. The idea of privilege is revealed as central to colonisation in New Zealand and to the dispossession and marginalisation of Māori – and as a stubbornly persistent prejudice that remains in place today.

Peter Meihana is from Te Tauihou o Te Waka-a-Māui, and is of Ngāti Kuia, Rangitāne, Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō and Ngāi Tahu descent. He is a trustee on Te Rūnanga a Rangitāne o Wairau, a former trustee of Te Rūnanga o Ngāti Kuia, and sits on committees for Ngāti Apa ki te Rā Tō. Peter completed his PhD in 2015 with a thesis that examined the notion of Māori privilege and its role in the colonisation of New Zealand. He has published articles and chapters on Māori ‘privilege’ and the histories and traditions of Te Tauihou o te Waka-a-Māui. He is a senior lecturer in Māori History at Massey University’s Manawatū campus.

KEY POINTS

• A striking new perspective on the past and colonisation from a Māori historian
• Confronts contemporary manifestations of the ‘idea of privilege’, including anti-Treaty movements
• Raises important questions on the gap between rhetoric and reality for policy-making and indigenous peoples