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# **Portrayals of the Moriori People**

**Historical, Ethnographical, Anthropological and Popular sources, c. 1791-  
1989**

**By**

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## Abstract

Michael King's 1989 book, *Moriori: A People Rediscovered*, still stands as the definitive work on the Moriori, the Native people of the Chatham Islands. King wrote, 'Nobody in New Zealand – and few elsewhere in the world- has been subjected to group slander as intense and as damaging as that heaped upon the Moriori.' Since its publication, historians have denigrated earlier works dealing with the Moriori, arguing that the way in which they portrayed Moriori was almost entirely unfavourable.

This thesis tests this conclusion. It explores the perspectives of European visitors to the Chatham Islands from 1791 to 1989, when King published *Moriori*. It does this through an examination of newspapers, Native Land Court minutes, and the writings of missionaries, settlers, and ethnographers. The thesis asks whether or not historians have been selective in their approach to the sources, or if, perhaps, they have ignored the intricacies that may have informed the views of early observers.

The thesis argues that during the nineteenth century both Maori and European perspectives influenced the way in which Moriori were portrayed in European narrative. Moriori, in accordance with the prevailing theories of race were deemed to be inferior to Maori, and therefore Europeans. However, the thesis argues that despite this there does exist a literature that holds Moriori in a more favourable light and that a shift in perspective was occurring sometime before 1989.

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