



Maori under-performance

I've yet to hear one person suggest compulsory parenting courses at high school. I've yet to hear suggestions of imposing consequences on bad parents. The law of consequence in other words, taking responsibility for our own actions has left the lexicon. Well, where Maori are concerned it has. There's always some professional excuse-monger who leaps up and blames "the system" or "government" or "Child, Youth & Family" or "Western culture" on our every failing.

Yet if the vast numbers of high school soon-mothers-to-be at least had learned good parenting skills at school, we'd reduce quite substantially the abuse and murders of children by their parents and care-givers. And the irresponsible fathers-to-be are not excluded from the courses. Indeed, there would be quite a different emphasis on young males in teaching them how to respect women, mothers, the notion of making sacrifices for your children, the absolute bottom-line ethos that LOVING A CHILD makes for a happy, healthy adult. Reading to a child would also be one of the key messages hammered home.

What commentators and so-called experts have failed to see is the common denominator of poor/appalling parenting skills in every case of child abuse, murder of children such as the Kahui case. I grew up with this lacking and witnessed and lived its invariably awful consequences. I saw children beaten up as if they were male adults, punched repeatedly with full adult blows by a father, uncle and not a few mothers, against children as young as five, slapped with great force if they were younger.

Because I had two extremes of parents, I saw that the middle-class Europeans never used violence to punish, vent or express. My university educated father had nothing but strongest criticism against the notion of revenge, getting even, paying back and hitting

others. Sadly, most of us children opted to take the violent path, perhaps as means to express our anger at having a violent mother whose behaviour shamed us deeply. Perhaps to fit in with our Maori people to whom violence was everyday fare. Certainly it was re-enactment. Many of our women were violent and looking back on it I don't think they, nor the men, knew any better. If you were angry, offended, felt insulted, criticised, it was considered obligatory to react violently. If one didn't then others would say, "Why didn't you smack him/her over? He/she deserved it."

It's an educational issue, the commentators are failing to recognise. Since Maori have not opted in large numbers to get a higher education so do the outlooks and attitudes remain unchanged because enlightenment of self and the collective can only come from educated minds. Maori M.P. Dover Samuels had the courage to state publicly that Maoris accept violence. But not the educated. After all, you don't see Maoris with university degrees beating up anyone.

There is a disturbing anger common to far too many Maori that needs to be deeply investigated, like some permanently infected wound, as to its true cause. Groups of marauding teenage Maori girls attack innocent Pakehas for no reason. Maoris dominate in gang numbers and prison inmate numbers. We have the highest number of assaults, almost exclusively own the child murder statistics.

This attitude, this barbaric outlook on life will continue for the next thousand, ten thousand years if we don't analyse it properly, if we don't hold ourselves, our very societal model up to scrutiny. And where the model serves us, retain. Does not serve us, discard. I'm talking the Maori race here, as well a high percentage of Pacific Islanders, not leaving out a smaller percentage of Europeans and other races. I would not be talking

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Maori if we didn't have such a disproportionate percentage in dire straits socially, mentally, economically, emotionally, educationally. Most of this is due to not developing as individuals, which includes of course taking responsibility as an individual. If the group says no, we're okay, we don't have to change. Then no change occurs.

To continue with the collective, whanau, hapu, iwi societal model is a fatal mistake. A fatal mistake. For in not developing individuality we continue down the declining slope of anonymity in a collective. Of no-one willing to make decisions especially unpopular decisions for fear of standing out from the crowd, going against the collective will. Individuality is as fundamental to a society's development as property rights.

The quality of debate in this country on Maori issues is poor, cowardly, non-analytical, and none of it serves the Maori people well. Like social welfare, which many of us have warned about for years, every government benefit takes another breath of the recipient's self-respect away. Until they choke on self-hatred and maim and kill themselves and others.

You see we're having thrust upon us, rammed down our throats in fact, this "Maori as we were" model (before, it is implied, the Europeans came along and ruined us morally and culturally.) Its advocates are insisting that we think differently yes, we do, but it shouldn't be assumed we can't change, not if the same thinking is holding us back

from advancing we have a different world view, we have greater difficulties adapting to Western culture. So just give us the money and we'll figure out the solutions to our own problems. When demonstrably we can't. Why not? Because our base line is a Stone Age societal model which patently does not work in this modern world. When are we as a nation, starting with government, going to say "enough is enough."?

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Alan Duff has been described as a ,novelist, newspaper columnist, polemicist and cultural phenomenon.. (NZ Book Council.)

His works include: Once Were Warriors, One Night Out Stealing, State Ward, What Becomes of the Broken Hearted?, Out of the Mist and the Steam, Szabad, and Jake's Long Shadow.

As a commentator he has castigated both the traditional leadership and the radical movement for dwelling on the injustices of the past and expecting others to resolve them, instead of encouraging Maori to get on and help themselves. The blame for Maori under-performance he puts squarely back on Maori, for not making the most of the opportunities given them.

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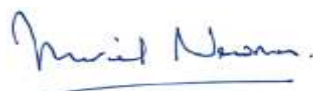
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Muriel Newman
(founder & director of



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