

OREWA AND THE RHETORIC OF ILLUSION

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Abstract: *A commitment to teaching reality, to educating the public about what one believes to be moral truths, is an adaptive leadership strategy to better inform the citizenry about the nature of its choices, both past and future. A leader teaching illusion, however, appeals to darker instincts that cannot improve the overall quality of political discourse. These concepts are examined from a normative perspective. Don Brash's Orewa speech is then analyzed against evaluative criteria developed by presidential scholar Erwin Hargrove. Despite facilitating a liberation of language around Treaty and broader race discourse in New Zealand, the Orewa speech contains distortions, attempts at manipulation, and stereotyping of Maori. Brash's language is both rigid and dogmatic; he makes appeals to abstract creeds rather than offering carefully explained policies. His cultural interpretation is shallow. What emerges from the Orewa speech is a deliberate attempt at agenda control by manipulating race discourse to realign party support. The Orewa speech is revealed more as an example of teaching illusion than reality and a contrast with more adaptive ideas about race relations in New Zealand is made.*

Keywords: *Leadership, race relations, New Zealand, teaching reality, Orewa speech*

Was National Party leader Don Brash's Orewa speech a case of teaching reality or illusion? And what does his attack against the so-called special privileges afforded to Maori say about this man who aspires to lead New Zealand after the next election? What, in fact, is meant by the idea of 'teaching reality'? These are the central questions that this article seeks to address. On one hand, it could be argued that the Orewa speech freed New Zealanders from the forced constraints of a twenty-year liberal consensus about the Treaty of Waitangi and its history imposed while the country adapted to the consequences of the Maori renaissance. Many people finally felt able to express long pent-up resentment about the policy direction of successive governments. On the other hand, the way in which Brash singled Maori out for criticism offended not just Maori but many other New Zealanders also. The consequences of this one speech also dramatically altered the political landscape. Brash's National Party, after its 2002 electoral humiliation, restored a sense of contest and balance to our domestic politics.

Another overarching question is whether the concept of teaching reality is even achievable in contemporary democratic society. Does all effective political rhetoric now so rely

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on crude simplifications and distortions, large or small, that truth-telling by the nation's political leaders has no place in democratic discourse?

These are important yet troubling questions because they tell us something about the forms of leadership we can expect into the future, shaping our expectations about how our political actors should behave and drawing attention to the nation's idea of leadership and of how it values itself. Before analyzing the Orewa speech, however, I will first introduce the concept of 'teaching reality', explain its utility for leadership efforts, and then discuss its antithesis, 'teaching illusion', before examining some of the traps that can impede a leader's attempts at truth-telling.

TEACHING REALITY

Reality is an extremely vexed concept. No two people share the same sense of it. Felipe Fernández-Armesto explained in his history of truth how major explanations of reality were shaped throughout human history by different truth-seeking techniques and how these distinctions themselves changed over time.¹ Reality is, therefore, both protean and transitory. One person's reality may prove to be another's illusion. In the political realm, leaders continually offer their subjective interpretations on the well-being or otherwise of society: in other words, leaders articulate their own visions of reality through the instrument of their rhetoric. The citizenry, with varying degrees of engagement, then assess these claims, applying their own subjective criteria.

Leaders who can articulate widely shared concerns about emerging problems and recommend practical solutions to them will hold an advantage over their rivals. James MacGregor Burns, for one, argued that leadership is linked to collective purposes that express the needs, aspirations and values of followers. Therefore, a leader who commands a compelling cause that meets the expectations or desires of their followers holds an extraordinary potential influence over them.² Howard Gardner believed that stories of identity – where a nation came from, where it stood, and where it was heading – were a particularly powerful tool in leaders' attempts to persuade the 'unschooled minds' of the many.³ For Gardner, leaders' narratives competed in Darwinian fashion for public favour. The narrative that was most congruent with the reality of most people's lives prevailed over competing counterstories.

The elusive contours of reality and the difficulties of assessing the truth-telling quality of leaders' narratives can be illustrated by an example Erwin C. Hargrove offered in *The President as Leader*. He described how few economists thought that President Reagan's supply-side theory of taxation and growth represented valid policies. They pointed to the resulting massive budget blow-out to support their view. According to empirical economists, therefore, Reagan was not teaching reality. Yet Reagan never abandoned the theory and preached to the public that his policies would herald in a rebounding of the national economy, which they did, so wasn't Reagan teaching reality after all? Reagan's supply-side theory was, however, shown to have limitations so when the 1996 Republican presidential candidate Bob Dole advocated similar policies they were rejected by voters, revealing how subjective interpretations are assessed and refined over time.⁴ What might not be grasped today is inevitably better understood tomorrow. However, with George W. Bush returning to supply-side motivated tax cuts, and their associated massive deficit blow-out, it is worth noting that some learning may take longer than others.

¹ Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *Truth: a History and Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bantam, 1996), p. 15.

² James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978; reprint, Harper TorchBooks, 1979), p. 34.

³ Howard Gardner, in collaboration with Emma Laskin, *Leading Minds: an Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), p. 50.

⁴ Erwin C. Hargrove, *The President as Leader: Appealing to the Better Angels of Our Nature* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 1998), p. 43.

The notion that a political leader should seek to teach reality to the public is perhaps idealistic. Students of Machiavelli might well dismiss the proposition out of hand on the basis that leaders will prove more successful by tailoring their rhetoric to the prejudices of the people. To do otherwise is to invite inevitable failure. Rivals who are not similarly disposed will defeat the prince who follows a moral path.⁵ Successful leaders are those who choose to articulate myths that serve to unify and glorify the state; thus demagoguery is not only permitted, but is a necessary guiding principle to achieve one's aims. Besides, for those leaders of a Machiavellian mindset the ruling assumption is that the citizenry so fear reality that it is ultimately self-defeating to offer it.

Aristotle, in contrast, believed that honest engagement between a statesman and their citizenry was the best route to achieving a vibrant relationship between rulers and ruled, one that linked a statesman's prudence with the often greater collective wisdom of the citizenry. Character mediated discernment, so a statesman imbued with moral commitment and able to make a wise judgement of his situation is able to teach the citizenry the 'spirit' of the constitution, the deepest truths about the state and its people that bind all together as they strive to achieve the common good. So, while teaching reality might be idealistic, there is a more urgent contemporary rationale for demanding truth-telling from our leaders.

During the current epoch – marked by a powerful transformation in both the reach and speed of political communications and, unfortunately, by a concomitant 'dumbing-down' of content – honest engagement with the citizenry is all that stands between exacerbating the gap between the knowledgeable few and the increasingly alienated many. It is fundamentally maladaptive⁶ for the future of democratic discourse for this trend to continue unabated. As change grows ever broader and more rapid it will only be by governments striving to provide people with the information they need to make choices about their future that New Zealand can fully harness its human and intellectual capital. There is an adaptive quality to any commitment to improve the substance and integrity of political communications during an era where the shallowness and sheer noise of counterstories is so much greater than in the past.

TEACHING ILLUSION

The dark side to teaching reality is 'teaching illusion'. Here, phantom enemies or out-groups are externalised as impediments to achieving a harmonious or better society. Appeals are made to deep-seated prejudices; scapegoats are identified and held responsible for slow progress. The majority is pitted against minority groups, or perhaps social cleavages are exploited to create a new majority – usually by exploiting a perceived grievance or by making a coded appeal to ignorance, or worse, to prejudice and hatred. We can label this a first-order transgression.

Teaching illusion is also an act consciously taken. By pitting one group against another for political gain there is an implicit recognition and calculation by the political leader that their self-interest will be served. Costs are disregarded and consequences ignored because the driving motivation is invariably one of desperation. Those who succeed such leaders are left to face the consequences. Fortunately, in democratic societies the demagogue must compete with other more compelling or inclusive visions of reality. The potential for exploiting schisms within the populace is thereby reduced.

Teaching illusion may also embody less malicious intent – a second order transgression. A leader might hold the conviction that an unsophisticated public cannot be taken into his or her confidence. The complexity of public policy and the trade-offs involved militate against teaching citizens about alternatives. If the citizenry are told certain unpalatable facts, they will not

⁵ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. N.H. Thompson (New York: Quality Paperback Club, 1992 [1513]), p. 53.

⁶ The term 'adaptive' is used throughout this article to signify an act which improves the quality of choices available to the citizenry. 'Maladaptive' obviously means the reverse. Consistent with this view, leadership is itself seen in positive terms, as an instrument of social adaptation.

willingly make a hard choice, preferring the alternatives that least disrupt their lives. This cycle becomes self-perpetuating. Educating the public about their choices, present and future, becomes only a peripheral consideration in the decision-making of those in power. Self-styled 'leaders of conviction' dominate and use any ruse, whether rhetorical or structural, to achieve their goals. This is also a conscious act. Leaders who hold a pessimistic view of the public's will to change will always gravitate towards Machiavelli's methods; power drives their purpose, but ultimately becomes it, however laudable that purpose may have been initially. Ends and means are inextricably linked in the realm of leadership and politics, so if the means employed deny any educative function then the ends envisaged cannot be achieved in their desired form.

Finally, cultural traps may also prevent a leader from teaching reality. These take many forms and differ from one country to the next. For instance, Hargrove cited Richard Merelman's critique of American liberalism: too weak to cope with real problems, yet too strong in the public consciousness to permit efforts to transcend it.⁷ In New Zealand our longstanding 'negalitarian' traditions represent a very powerful cultural trap.⁸ As a result, charges that a group is receiving some sort of privilege at the expense of other New Zealanders often find a receptive audience.

Several domestic examples illustrate the concept of teaching illusion. In 1975, Robert Muldoon swamped his Labour opponents with a vigorous 18-month campaign underpinned by Muldoon's powerful and compelling narrative of 'restoring New Zealand's shattered economy'. Yet as soon as Muldoon won power he introduced a prohibitively expensive national superannuation scheme, undermining his call for New Zealanders to make a conscious sacrifice in the interests of the nation's future solvency.⁹ Treasury doyen Henry Lang believed Muldoon's reckless promise on superannuation revealed a 'complete loss of integrity'.¹⁰ Muldoon was not teaching reality; in this case he became corrupted by partisan self-interest and failed to act on his own depiction of the parlous state of the national economy.

In 1990 Jim Bolger won office following an emphatic repudiation of the reformist but ultimately dysfunctional Fourth Labour Government. Bolger, discerning the widespread anxiety precipitated by the 'revolution', campaigned under a narrative of 'restoring the decent society'. Soon after the election, however, Bolger's Finance Minister, Ruth Richardson, exploited the potential collapse of the Bank of New Zealand to launch an extension of Douglas's 'revolution' into labour market and social policy realms. After six years of trauma, workers and welfare recipients were required to undergo further large-scale change, all because of Richardson's mantra that 'there is no alternative'. Of course, there were alternatives; Richardson, an ideological purist, simply rejected them.

The two preceding cases are examples of teaching illusion of the second-order variety. A first-order case is Muldoon's 'Dancing Cossacks' advertising campaign in 1975. This campaign, in which the National Party portrayed its opponents in the unions and the Labour Party as communists and evoked images of Polynesians committing crimes, costing New Zealanders jobs, and being 'dole bludgers', is a straightforward case in which stereotypes were used to distort reality and stigmatise minority groups for political gain. Winston Peters, leader of the New Zealand First Party, is another who routinely singles out groups for exclusion from his vision of a

⁷ Hargrove, *The President as Leader*, p. 56.

⁸ Jon Johansson, 'Leadership and the Campaign', in Jonathan Boston, Stephen Church, Stephen Levine, Elizabeth McLeay, and Nigel S. Roberts (eds.), *New Zealand Votes: the General Election of 2002* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2003), p. 67. 'Negalitarian' is my label for the well-established strand of our culture known popularly as the 'tall poppy syndrome'. Leslie Lipson described this as a 'perverted equalitarianism', going on to write: 'In its anxiety to raise minima, the country has deemed it necessary to lower maxima'. Leslie Lipson, *The Politics of Equality: New Zealand's Adventures in Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 491.

⁹ Paul Dalziel and Ralph Lattimore, *The New Zealand Macroeconomy: a Briefing on the Reforms* (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 16.

¹⁰ Henry Lang, notes from interview conducted by Communicado staff for the documentary *The Grim Face of Power*, 1994.

cohesive New Zealand society. He stereotypes Asian drivers, third-world immigrants and 'litigious' Maori and blames them for eroding the fabric of what makes this country unique and strong. In early 1996, in a speech delivered in Howick, Peters railed against increased Asian immigration, exploiting New Zealanders' insecurities so successfully that his party rose more than 20 points in the opinion polls over a three-month period.¹¹ Peters's rise could not be sustained, but his example underscores the potential political benefits that can accrue from dividing the country against itself.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Analysing any leader's subjective interpretation of reality, as expressed through their rhetoric, is certainly not without problems. Hargrove believed that one must retreat to secondary criteria, namely:

- Does the leader contribute to the quality of discourse in the polity?
- Is the leader's rhetoric informative, concrete and does it recognise contingencies and uncertainties?
- Does the leader attempt to manipulate rather than educate? And does a speech use stereotypes and scapegoats?
- Is the leader's rhetoric rigid and dogmatic and does it make appeals to abstract creeds rather than carefully explained policies?¹²

These questions will drive my analysis of Brash's Orewa speech. Another important consideration is to properly contextualise the rhetoric under study. Essentially the question is: what is the political context under which a leader's speech is made? This is a crucial part of any analysis because it goes directly to the motive behind a leader's rhetoric. For instance, if one studies Abraham Lincoln's two inaugural addresses, and the Gettysburg Address delivered between them, one is struck by Lincoln's unshakeable moral commitment as he develops his case against slavery in the direst political context imaginable, a bloody civil war being fought over competing national visions of reality. Lincoln's moral commitment is unimpeachable. His collection of speeches represents the high end of teaching reality.

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE OREWA SPEECH

*If then some grave and pious man appear
They hush their noise and lend a listening ear.*
— Machiavelli, *The Discourses*¹³

The National Party was routed in the 2002 election, receiving only one-fifth of the party vote.¹⁴ The electoral debacle represented an historical low point for a party that had governed New Zealand for 38 of the preceding 53 years. National's defeated leader, Bill English, eventually fell

¹¹ The TV1/Heylen poll showed New Zealand First rise 21 points over three months, from 8% in mid-February to a peak of 29% in May 1996. While the polling spike for NZ First was not as dramatic as the 17-point bounce post-Orewa, National's rise essentially mirrored that of Peters and NZ First. See Michael Laws, *The Demon Profession* (Auckland: HarperCollinsPublishers, 1998), pp. 301-2, for Laws' insider account of Peters' anti-immigration campaign.

¹² Hargrove, *The President as Leader*, pp. 42-6.

¹³ Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Discourses*, trans. Leslie J. Walker (London: Penguin, 1998 [1512]), p. 242.

¹⁴ National received only 20.93 percent of the party vote on election night 2002. This was, by some significant margin, its worst ever electoral showing. For a fuller explanation of the leadership implications of the 2002 campaign see Johansson, 'Leadership and the Campaign', pp. 65-74.

to the former Reserve Bank Governor, and newly-elected list MP, Dr. Don Brash, who forced a secret ballot for the leadership position in late October 2003. Brash secured National's leadership by a wafer-thin margin.¹⁵ His method of challenging National's incumbent signaled that he did not feel bound by the previously strong convention of gathering a majority of caucus signatures indicating their preference for an alternative leader.

Brash had spent less than two years in parliament before challenging Bill English for National's leadership. Sixty-three years old, Brash twice stood unsuccessfully for parliament in East Coast Bays during the 1980s, losing both times to Social Credit's Gary Knapp. Having been Governor of the Reserve Bank for the 14 years preceding his entry into politics, Brash identified strongly with the neo-liberal policy prescriptions favoured by the reformist former Finance Ministers Roger Douglas and Ruth Richardson. Still, Brash was somewhat of an unknown quantity when his colleagues, amidst significant acrimony and desperation, elevated him to the leadership. Without Brash identifying a preferred deputy leader, the election for the position was thrown over to National's caucus. Bill English's numbers man, Dr. Nick Smith, was elected to the position. Immediately after ascending to it, however, Smith went on medical leave as a result of the enormous stress leading up to the secret ballot and its bitter aftermath.

Rumours began to circulate that Ilaam MP Gerry Brownlee was likely to oust Smith, with both the caucus and Brash losing confidence in the Nelson MP. A little over two weeks after Brash took over from English, Smith dutifully resigned and was replaced by Brownlee. This was not an auspicious beginning to Brash's leadership and it was reflected in the complete absence of any poll bounce in the new leader's 'honeymoon' period. In the first One News/Colmar Brunton poll after the leadership change National's level of support rose only three points, with Brash's personal standing as preferred Prime Minister remaining unchanged, but by the January poll National had already dropped two points, settling at 29 percent of the party vote. The TNS Global poll, commissioned by TV3, actually registered a 1-point drop for National after Brash became leader – although his personal level of support as preferred Prime Minister did rise 7 percentage points to 10 percent, still 25 points behind Helen Clark.¹⁶

National therefore began 2004 facing acute political problems on multiple fronts. The second term Labour-led government remained immensely popular. The economy was buoyant, commodity prices high, unemployment historically low, and the crucial mood poll revealed a general and widespread contentment. A rolling poll, averaged across the four major polling companies, showed Labour holding a commanding 20-point lead over National. Internally, National's leadership change exposed how split the caucus was, in terms of both leadership and ideology. Brash's elevation, while popular among those who identified themselves as National Party supporters, had not led to any change in its fortunes.¹⁷ Policy development was moribund, and Brash's early forays in the House exposed his inexperience.

Over the summer National's strategists took the key decision to focus on race relations for Brash's first big speech of the year, to be delivered at former National Party leader Rob Muldoon's old stamping ground, the Orewa Rotary Club, on the 27th of January. The *New Zealand Herald* reported that it understood from National Party insiders that the party's internal polling revealed that the state of race relations was 'a sensitive issue for voters and the one most

¹⁵ There is some debate about the final outcome of the secret ballot. The 14-12 result was widely reported, and not publicly refuted by anyone within National, although it was put to the author that the final result was 15-11.

¹⁶ See the One News/Colmar Brunton polls for November and December 2003 and January 2004, and the 3 News/TNS Global poll conducted from 21-27 November 2003.

¹⁷ The late November 3 News/TNS-Global poll revealed that Brash had a net positive performance rating of plus 38 among National supporters whereas Bill English's last performance as leader showed a net negative rating of minus 12 points. Interestingly, when analyzing specific leadership attributes across the entire sample of voters Brash outscored English significantly on the attributes of being a more capable leader and having sounder judgement and greater experience. However Brash was also regarded more likely than English to talk down to people and, by a massive 32 percentage points, as being less down to earth.

likely to sway their party allegiances'.¹⁸ Evidence of ongoing disquiet about the Treaty of Waitangi could also be found from several other sources. In the 1999 *Massey Study of New Zealand Values*, 33.8 percent of respondents thought the Treaty should be abolished, an increase of 5 percent from a decade earlier. The New Zealand Political Change Project's pre-election survey in 2002 revealed that 63.5 percent of respondents agreed with the proposition that the process of settling Maori claims had gone on for long enough and should now be discontinued.¹⁹

Indeed Brash's predecessor had promised during the 2002 election to wind up the Treaty process. National, under English, launched a billboard campaign under the slogan 'One Standard of Citizenship for All', but it never resonated with voters. Perhaps the idea of 'citizenship' was too complex to persuade voters to switch their support to National. Perhaps, also, negative perceptions of English's leadership were by then too entrenched, so that voters simply tuned out National's chief messenger without regard for his message. English's own equivalent to Brash's Orewa speech, 'The Treaty of Waitangi and New Zealand Citizenship', offered an intellectually rigorous mix of historical Treaty analysis and contemporary diagnosis. English argued that New Zealand could move forward only through the exercise of full citizenship for all of its many peoples, not by dividing citizenship to confer special privilege to one group, namely Maori. Contextually, it represented an enormous contrast to Brash's Orewa speech. For a start, it was delivered (in May 2002) at the New Zealand Centre for Public Law, which provided a very different audience to the Orewa Rotary Club. Also, early in his speech English paid his intellectual respects to former National MP Simon Upton and to one of his advisors, historian Bernard Cadogan. I will come back to this point in my analysis of the Brash speech. English's speech received little media coverage and did not raise his or his party's fortunes.

A final important contextual issue surrounds the flow-on effects from a Court of Appeal decision in late 2003 that provided limited grounds for Maori to test their property rights to areas of the New Zealand foreshore and seabed. Maori would have to demonstrate continuous and uninterrupted customary usage since 1840, a very high threshold. Nevertheless, the court's decision was met with both alarm and intense criticism from the public, interest groups and politicians alike. This was not surprising as New Zealanders considered access to their beaches central to their identity as Kiwis, not to mention their sense of summer well-being. The Prime Minister reacted immediately, declaring that her government would legislate to ensure that the nation's beaches would remain in Crown ownership. The Clark government's reaction was considered by some elements within Maoridom to be a further land confiscation and by others as pandering to the Pakeha-dominated majority. Among the Pakeha community, some considered the court ruling to be yet further evidence of unwarranted judicial activism; others saw the Prime Minister's emerging policy as pandering to Maori. Many were simply fed up with the nebulously perceived 'political correctness' of the Clark government. The government's opponents fueled fears that Maori would hold an effective veto over development projects. Judging by the scope and intensity of much of the commentary, few appeared happy with either the situation or the government's proposed solution.

This backdrop meant that issue saliency was high when Brash approached the podium on 27 January. Expectations were further stimulated by the performance of Brash's advisers in fuelling anticipation for his speech during the long summer hiatus from politics. John Armstrong, in a column entitled 'Brash ready to come out swinging', wrote that the upcoming speech would principally contain a stinging attack on the government's foreshore and seabed policy and was 'tipped to be even more trenchant in his criticism than his predecessor Bill English ever was'.²⁰ The television networks and newspapers all previewed his speech along similar lines. There was expectation created for Brash on the night of the 27th.

¹⁸ Ruth Berry, 'Brash rocket for Te Heuheu', *New Zealand Herald*, 29 January 2004, p. A3.

¹⁹ See Paul Perry and Alan Webster (eds.), *New Zealand Politics at the Turn of the Millennium: Attitudes and Values about Politics and Government* (Auckland: Alpha, 1999), and Johansson, 'Leadership and the Campaign', p. 66.

²⁰ John Armstrong, 'Brash ready to come out swinging', *New Zealand Herald*, 17 January 2004, p. A24.

THE SPEECH'S ANTECEDENTS

Given the furore unleashed by Brash's speech it remains a puzzle why it took another two months before any journalist delved into the actual thinking behind it. In the April edition of *Metro*, a monthly lifestyle magazine targeting the affluent Auckland market, Gilbert Wong, *Metro*'s Arts Editor, examined the speech's intellectual background. Wong achieved what the collective talents of the parliamentary press gallery never quite managed: he comprehensively investigated the antecedents to Brash's speech. Wong discovered that Brash had drawn his material, via his chief policy advisor Peter Keenan, who substantially wrote the first draft, from the ideas of two conservative economists, one eminent historian (with input from another), and one left-wing political commentator.²¹ More revealing was Brash's admission to Wong that he had read neither Claudia Orange's *The Treaty of Waitangi* nor Jamie Belich's various works on New Zealand history (despite Belich being selectively quoted in the Orewa speech).

Brash also disclosed that he had only ever read the English version of the Treaty, which he said he had studied closely. An essay by historian Bill Oliver, which Brash admitted he had also not read before his speech, provided the intellectual underpinning for his claim that the Treaty had been 'wrenched' out of its context. Oliver, when interviewed by Wong, made it clear that he could not see 'any connection between my arguments put forward in that essay and the policies put forward by Don Brash'.²² Oliver's implication is that Brash 'wrenched' his own point about 'presentism' (projecting present day values onto nineteenth century events) beyond the context intended.

Simon Chapple, also cited in the Orewa speech, wrote a controversial paper in late 2000 that argued that intra-Maori differences in employment, income and life expectancy swamped differences that existed between Maori and Pakeha populations. Brash used Chapple's report to underpin his assertion that:

Maori-ness explains very little about how one does in life. Ethnicity does not determine one's destiny. It is the bottom 25% of Maori, most of them on welfare, who are conspicuously poor. They are no different to Pacific Islanders or other non-Maori on welfare; it's just that there is a higher percentage of them in that category.²³

Chapple's report can have any number of interpretations placed on it, Brash's being one. Economist Brian Easton told Wong that he reached the conclusion that before the Orewa speech public rhetoric focused more on poor Maori in need while Chapple's research showed that there were also poor Pakeha. Easton felt that while the actual policies were reasonably robust in helping those in need, the interpretation of that policy had led people to think that Maori were receiving special treatment.²⁴

²¹ Gilbert Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', *Metro*, April 2004, pp. 73-4. Keenan told Wong that works which had informed the speech included W.H. Oliver, 'The Future Behind Us: The Waitangi Tribunal's Retrospective Utopia', in Andrew Sharp and Paul McHugh (eds.), *Histories, Power and Loss: Uses of the Past: A New Zealand Commentary* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2001), pp. 9-30; Kenneth Minogue, *Waitangi, Morality and Reality* (Wellington: New Zealand Business Roundtable, 1998; available online at <http://www.nzbr.org.nz/documents/publications/publications-1998/waitangi-morality-reality.pdf>); the writings of the conservative, anti-affirmative-action American economist Thomas Sowell; and a paper written by then-Department of Labour policy analyst Simon Chapple. Keenan was also influenced by discussions he had with historian and former Labour Cabinet Minister Michael Bassett and former National Cabinet Minister Simon Upton.

²² Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', pp. 77-8.

²³ Don Brash, 'Nationhood: an Address to the Orewa Rotary Club', 27 January 2004, http://www.national.org.nz/files/OrewaRotaryClub_27Jan.pdf (5 January 2005), p. 4.

²⁴ Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', p. 74. Easton's comments were reinforced in a discussion the author had with him in October 2004.

Another interpretation one can make is that with a disproportionately large percentage of Maori on the lowest rungs of the socio-economic ladder, a much smaller Maori middle class exists than in the general population. It is a classic idea that the most successful and stable societies are those containing a large middle class; suffering from neither contempt nor envy, the middle class is secure, and safe, in its moderation. Thus, one way of viewing this phase of the Maori renaissance is to say that they are not yet secure. The risk is inherent, therefore, that at the extremes we will continue to hear wild rhetoric about present conditions and maladaptive ideas about the future. Notwithstanding this, Chris Trotter, another of Brash's influences, cited an optimistic finding that 57 percent of Maori sampled in a Massey University poll had been in agreement with the government's then position on the foreshore and seabed.²⁵ Perhaps a majority of Maori, who through great patience have acquired the form of pragmatism that was imported and then slowly evolved here after 1840, are equally frustrated at the polar extremes that seem to be accentuated whenever race discourse is conducted.

Another aspect to the Orewa speech to be considered is its author's own skill with language. Brash is a self-confessed student of language and grammar. This tendency was deeply ingrained in his childhood, reinforced throughout his career, and refined to an art form by virtue of his previous position as Reserve Bank Governor. Brash is precise about the words he chooses to use. Managing the expectations of the markets required no less. When one considers the Orewa speech, and Brash's comments outside that specific vehicle but in relation to it, one can assume that he chose his language very carefully. Second, the speech was presented as Brash's own. He paid no intellectual respects as his predecessor's equivalent speech did.

Positioning Brash as an honest broker, unsullied by a career as a party politician, had an enormous impact on subsequent perceptions of his speech, even to the point of limiting serious scrutiny of National's motivations behind the attack on so-called Maori special privilege. Brash emphasised early in his speech his frankness and honesty: 'I believe in plain speaking. So let me be blunt'.²⁶ He reinforced this further when concluding his speech: 'I am deeply saddened to have to make a speech on issues of race'.²⁷ At Orewa a self-styled and deliberately positioned 'grave and pious man' did appear and a dissatisfied, questioning, and resentful public lent him their 'listening ear'.

Brash established at Orewa, for the first time, his *authenticity* with large numbers of New Zealanders. The perceived authenticity of a messenger is absolutely crucial to acceptance of the message. The perception of Brash as someone who embodied the twin qualities of honesty and forthrightness by talking plainly about a vexed and complex issue, one that it 'deeply saddened' him to have to discuss, provided an extremely powerful image of integrity – of principle above politics. My remaining analysis, assessing Brash's Orewa speech against Hargrove's secondary criteria, is ultimately a test of that authenticity.

TEACHING REALITY OR TEACHING ILLUSION?

Did Brash contribute to the quality of discourse in the New Zealand polity? In the most general of terms the answer is 'yes', although one might question whether this phenomenon was actually an unintended consequence of his speech. Brash certainly articulated a latent belief held by many New Zealanders: that Maori were receiving special privilege at the expense of others, and that redistribution of the nation's resources to Maori for historical injustices had gone too far for far too long. The initial emotional surge of support for Brash indicated that many of the public agreed with his basic message: 'enough is enough'. Brash opened a vein in New Zealand's

²⁵ Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', p. 78.

²⁶ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 3.

²⁷ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 15.

national discourse and out flowed the full gamut of opinions, for both good and ill. But as one correspondent to the *New Zealand Herald* observed:

Regardless of the merits of his policy, Don Brash has surely fulfilled the most important function of a Leader of the Opposition: his speech has created a long-overdue national debate on the treaty.²⁸

Perhaps the over-riding and enduring value of Brash's Orewa speech has been to alert the government – in a manner that it could neither deny nor obscure²⁹ – that it had run too far ahead of the public on issues associated with race. A reevaluation of its political context was forced upon the government after the dramatic post-Orewa surge in support for the National Party revealed the full extent of its own failure to lead on Treaty issues or to frame its race policies in a fashion that carried the public with it. It was Labour's vacuum that Brash was able to fill.

However, when one turns to the specific rhetoric in Brash's speech it is apparent that some of the language employed could never be judged as improving the public understanding of, let alone the quality of discourse on, race issues. For instance, in a section labeled 'The Myths of Our Past', which is Brash's interpretation of New Zealand's history, he speaks of how:

James Belich shows us that, once guns fell into Maori hands in the early years of the 19th century, ancient tribal rivalries saw Maori kill more of their own than the number of all New Zealanders lost in World War I. Probably 20,000 Maori were killed by Maori in the 1820s and 1830s.³⁰

When explaining Maori poverty in Wong's *Metro* article, Brash described Maori as a 'relatively primitive culture', a phrase he also let slip when pressed by journalist Kim Hill several months later.³¹ The emphasis on Maori genocide, sourced to one of the country's most notable historians, giving it an added cloak of authority, combined with his subsequent references to 'primitive' Maori culture, provide obvious cues – described sometimes as 'dog whistle politics' – to those who hold latent prejudice towards New Zealand's indigenous people. Whether intended or not, the Orewa speech reinforced the ignorant and racist stereotype that Maori were 'savages' before the 'gift' of European civilisation was visited upon them. This paragraph was balanced with an explicit acknowledgment that early Europeans – escaped convicts, whalers and the like – were not 'the cream' of European civilisation either; however, this is where the 'dog whistle' comes in, for the first paragraph feeds an enduring stereotype, but the second does not.

If Brash possessed even a cursory appreciation of Belich or Keith Sinclair or Michael King he would have learned that while the Musket Wars were indeed a continuation of inter-tribal rivalries, the scale of killing was magnified only by the acquisition of new technology and the economic and logistical benefits accruing from a dramatic increase in potato production, which allowed Maori to greatly extend the territorial reach of their ambitions.³² This phenomenon was not unique to Maori, but it did represent one symptom of the great stresses being placed upon their culture after contact. Sinclair offered a more sympathetic treatment of Maori during the 1820s and 1830s when he described the dramatic impact of European contact

²⁸ Tim Bond, letter to the Editor, *New Zealand Herald*, 3 February 2004, p. A10.

²⁹ Compare this, for example, to its continuation of its flagship 'Closing the Gaps' policy despite publicly jettisoning the name.

³⁰ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 4.

³¹ Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', p. 74.

³² See James Belich, *Making Peoples: a History of the New Zealanders from Polynesian Dettlement to the End of the Nineteenth Century* (Auckland: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1996), pp. 156-64; Keith Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, fourth ed. (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 40-3; and Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003), pp. 131-9.

on them: 'Their community began to pass through a moral and technological revolution more comprehensive and more painful than contemporary industrialization in Europe'.³³

Another part of Brash's speech that fuels a common prejudice – a part without educative value – concerns his discussion of the racial impurity of contemporary Maori. With no more full-blooded Maori left, Brash decries the subjective self-definition of those who call themselves Maori but only have mixed blood. Brash certainly understood the sensitivity of his criticism, stating, 'many people feel it is somehow impolite to mention these facts. But by ignoring them we create an oppositional picture of race relations in this country'.³⁴ Perhaps, but on one level one can say that no adaptive, uplifting or educative speech about race, anywhere, at any time, has ever included discussion about blood purity. Indeed, those speeches that do are of a qualitatively different type altogether, remembered for the disastrous consequences that invariably flow from them. Additionally, if subjective self-definition by people of Maori ancestry is thought so injurious, Brash does not suggest alternative criteria; nor does he recognise that self-definition has often moved in the opposite direction. The net effect is to evoke the stereotype of part-Maori leading and benefiting from the 'grievance' industry.

The Musket War example reveals the shallowness of Brash's understanding of New Zealand history, which is hardly surprising given his lack of reading on the subject. Here Belich returns to haunt Brash, for the historian has contended that 'there was not one treaty, or set of treaties, but at least five [versions]'.³⁵ Orange and Sinclair, while not reaching as far as Belich, both reveal a far more ambiguous and complex situation arising out of conflicting interpretations of the Treaty's three articles than Brash's sole reliance on the final English version indicates. Whichever version one analyses, however, alongside the ceding of sovereignty and the citizenship rights conferred by the Treaty is an explicit guarantee to protect certain Maori property rights. This feature is emphasised at the beginning of the Treaty's preamble. Maori grievances, denigrated or exaggerated in the Orewa speech, fundamentally arise out of a just property rights dispute between Maori and the Crown.

This was a point made strongly by economist Paul Dalziel, who wrote that Brash chose to portray a genuine grievance as a race conflict between Maori and other New Zealanders.³⁶ Dalziel concluded that '[t]his is irresponsible language from a senior servant of the Crown. It is false in every important sense'.³⁷ It is also surprising coming from the leader of a party whose philosophy is deeply wedded to the defence of property rights (although it seems Brash is no happier with the concept of group rights than his 19th century forebears).³⁸ The second example shows Brash's willingness to denigrate people's view of their own identity without offering any alternative. These two examples seriously undermine any educative intent in the speech.

Moving to whether Brash's rhetoric was informative, concrete and recognised contingencies and uncertainties, one should perhaps begin by analysing the overall tone of his speech. First, it is predominantly a negative speech. There are, of course, several examples of

³³ Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, p. 40.

³⁴ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 12.

³⁵ Belich, *Making Peoples*, pp. 194-7. Belich argued that the first version of the treaty was the English-language versions of the Waitangi document; the second version was the one written in Maori language; the third version arose out of the ambiguity explicit in the first two and so became, to some, a construction of the 'spirit' or 'intent' of the treaty; the fourth version of the historical treaty represented the oral agreements among the chiefs and between Maori and those speaking for the Governor (which varied from location to location); and, the fifth version sees the treaty as a ritual ceremony marking some kind of deal, evidenced by free concurrence by Maori, acceptance of agents of the state and Maori enthusiasm for settler neighbors and their willingness to sell land to achieve this.

³⁶ Paul Dalziel, 'The Treaty of Waitangi and Dr. Don Brash', *The Press*, 4 February 2004, p. A15.

³⁷ Dalziel, 'The Treaty of Waitangi and Dr. Don Brash'.

³⁸ See Colin James, 'Resolving power issues with Maori beginning of journey', *New Zealand Herald*, 3 February 2004, p. A11. James wrote: '[Brash] views the treaty through ideological eyes, those of a classical liberal... To a classical liberal all citizens are equal – but only in the formal sense of individual equality before the law. Group rights are anathema and so are laws or government actions directed at groups. Tribes are groups.'

unifying and positive rhetoric. For instance, towards the conclusion of the speech Brash expressed his optimism for those Maori not 'trapped in the grievance cycle', those who aspire to achieve:

The spirit evident in the Maori response to the new opportunities that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century is alive and well today. It is displayed in the outstanding performance of Maori in fishing and other primary sectors, and in a range of entrepreneurial business, sporting and cultural activities.³⁹

Likewise, Brash prefaced a diagnosis of our current situation, living under the yolk of 'presentism', by saying that 'the indigenous culture of New Zealand will always have a special place in our emerging culture, and will be cherished for that reason'.⁴⁰ Such rhetoric, however, is not representative of the speech's overall negative complexion. While a proportion of it contains either neutral or descriptive statements, negative attributions directed towards aspects of Maori behaviour outnumber any positive or unifying statements by a 3:1 ratio. Brash uses aggressive language such as 'the dangerous drift towards racial separatism', or 'the threat which the treaty process poses to the future of our country'.⁴¹ He talks, almost absurdly given the disparity between Maori and Pakeha outcomes on any number of social indicators, of a New Zealand where 'the minority has a birthright to the upper hand'.⁴² Brash fosters the fear that Maori 'possess the power to veto many development projects, projects which could provide us all with jobs'.⁴³ Who is responsible for this state of affairs? Citing Chris Trotter, Brash blames Pakeha elites who 'constitute a powerful fifth column in the Maori cause'.⁴⁴

Second, the entire section entitled 'The Myths of Our Past,' as discussed earlier, is at best a selective interpretation of Treaty history. A contemporary Maori leader – who negotiated with the Crown over several decades to achieve justice for his people – told me that what struck him most about the Orewa speech was its lack of intellectual rigor when compared to Bill English's equivalent speech. Brash provides a simplistic and assimilationist view of our history: racial harmony emerged, despite fault on both sides, and it is only now being undone by Maori who have been encouraged by successive governments to adopt a 'grievance mentality'. That is the crux of Brash's historical interpretation and it piggybacks on the old cultural myth about New Zealand's positive race-relations. Successive governments have tried to reveal this myth's flaws through their moral commitment to education about our history, via Waitangi Tribunal hearings, and through their explicit acknowledgement of, and apology for, injustices arising out of this ongoing reconciliation process.

So, for Brash, the widespread alienation of Maori land leading to the New Zealand Wars came about 'partly through settler greed [and] partly through a couple of generations of deficient leadership by some Maori'.⁴⁵ While that statement contains strands of truth, the balance that Brash strikes is hardly close to the historical reality.⁴⁶ 'Settler greed' is somehow equated to the

³⁹ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 15.

⁴⁰ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 15.

⁴¹ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 3.

⁴² Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 3.

⁴³ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 9.

⁴⁴ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 9.

⁴⁵ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 5.

⁴⁶ See especially James Belich, *The New Zealand Wars and the Victorian Interpretation of Racial Conflict* (Auckland: Penguin Books, 1986); also King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, pp. 210-23; Belich, *Making Peoples*, pp. 235-46; and Sinclair, *A History of New Zealand*, pp. 131-48. If one looks to the massive decline in Maori population after the Maori Wars, as a result of exposure to diseases the Maori had not yet built up immunity to, in concert with the massive increase in the European settler population and its economy, allied to the confiscation of enormous tracts of Maori land and then the further legally sanctioned dispossession of same, it is difficult to single out deficient Maori leadership as a

Maoris' own defective leadership. This is another example of 'dog whistle' code: 'they' were also to blame. Brash concludes this section of his speech by saying: '[w]hile we try to fix the wrongs of the past we should celebrate the good things and shared experiences that underpin our nationhood'.⁴⁷ The problem with the Orewa speech is that it is entirely silent on what these 'good and shared experiences' are. There is little if any recognition of contingencies or uncertainties. Brash projects his absolute conviction and certainty about his diagnosis, prognosis and remedy. That is one of the major reasons, of course, why his speech was so successful. Brash's apparent integrity, the speech's simplicity, and the projection of certainty made the speech a powerful communication tool.

As a result, valid criticisms of the Orewa speech or critiques of its inaccuracies never resonated with the public during the period immediately after its delivery. For instance, the Governor-General, in her Waitangi Day Address, pointed out that Lieutenant-Governor Hobson's comment to each Maori Chief to accompany their signing of the Treaty, 'He iwi tahi tatou', did not mean, as Brash claimed, 'We are one people'. Rather, as anthropologist Dame Joan Metge argues, the phrase, narrowly translated, means 'We two people together make a nation', or, more expansively, 'We many peoples together make a nation'.⁴⁸ Brash also denies the 'principles of the Treaty', yet these principles do exist and are worth talking about, including the principle of equality, the main focus of Brash's political attack.

This leads to the third of Hargrove's criteria: did Brash seek to manipulate or educate, and did he make use of stereotypes and scapegoats? One subtle but highly effective manipulation in the Orewa speech is the use of the term 'non-Maori' rather than the previously and commonly applied label 'Pakeha'. 'Non-Maori' was used only five times in the speech, but it proved an effective rhetorical trigger because it has been given far greater currency since Brash's speech. And here, also, one can discern the crux of the cleavage politics being attempted by National's strategists – a deliberate rhetorical device to change its political dynamic, what William Riker calls a heresthetic manoeuvre.⁴⁹ Not only did National wrest control of the political agenda from the government, but Orewa set out to create a new majority around the issue of race, consisting of all those who do not identify themselves as Maori, whether they be of European, Asian or Pacific descent. These last two minority groups found themselves invited into a new majority, in all likelihood for the first time since settling in New Zealand. The term 'non-Maori', which embraced all those adversely affected by so-called Maori special privilege, also served to isolate Maori as a major impediment to the nation's progress. That can only be called scapegoating.

Brash's language and cues reveal more overt manipulation specifically targeted at conservative Pakeha voters. Most of these have already been discussed. Others include highlighting the behaviour of some Maori – such as using taniwha to prevent roading projects, or tapu-lifting ceremonies at New Zealand embassies overseas – and generalising beyond the small number of occasions and contexts in which they have occurred. Sometimes Brash also overstates a behaviour without offering any real evidence that would validate the strength of his assertion, such as threatened Maori 'veto rights' over all and sundry development projects (which would cost jobs); or their 'stand-over tactics'; or their 'deeply corrupt' practices. Thus his criticism appeals to popular anger at quirky and maladaptive, but fundamentally unrepresentative, manifestations of the Maori renaissance that the media choose to highlight.

decisive or even 'partial' factor. The forces released by colonization are more akin to Machiavelli's Fortuna, a release of wild torrents that no man could stand against.

⁴⁷ Brash, 'Nationhood', p. 5.

⁴⁸ See Joan Metge, 'Ropeworks – He Taura Whiri', 2004, <http://firstfound.org/waitangiruarautau2004joanmetge.htm> (11 August 2004).

⁴⁹ William H. Riker, *The Art of Political Manipulation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). The word 'heresthetic' is derived from Greek and means choosing and electing. Orewa manipulated the dimensions of Treaty discourse to seize the agenda and realign party loyalty by creating a new majority. Hence the use of the term 'non-Maori', a new supermajority pitted against the minority.

Recall the *New Zealand Herald* reporting that National had decided that race relations was the issue most likely to change voting allegiances. That is precisely what took place, although one imagines that party strategists and Brash himself were as surprised as anyone by the magnitude of National's poll surge. Brash, without doubt, provoked and mobilised 'angry white men', as evidenced by a truly dramatic shift of support to National by men, blue-collar workers, and the 45-59 year old and over-60 age groups. Likewise, the income groups most supportive of Brash's sentiments were the lowest-paid – who perhaps feel particularly aggrieved by perceived 'favorable treatment' towards Maori – and our country's highest earners. In the *National Business Review*/UMR Insight poll for February 2004, these groups shifted towards National in greater proportions than the party's overall 17.9-point party vote increase.⁵⁰

While support for National rose across every demographic grouping (UMR recorded a 15-point shift among female voters), indicating the undeniable nation-wide effect of the Orewa speech, three groups remained more resilient against the Orewa effect: students, office workers (including public servants), and people under 30 years of age.⁵¹ Indeed, the disparity between age groups points to one of the crucial underlying features of Treaty discourse. There is a real generational divide between older New Zealanders – who are more conservative and, perhaps, nostalgic for the more predictable days before the Maori renaissance – and younger ones who have been socialised since the mid-1980s. These younger New Zealanders have responded to their country's increasing cultural diversity with far less apprehension than their parents and grandparents' generations, which is cause for tremendous optimism about longer-term race relations in New Zealand. Polling showed that Brash resonated most strongly with people of his own generation and gender.

The question of manipulation must also incorporate events that occurred immediately following the speech. After the initial wave of support broke, Brash benefited from three significant events that fueled yet greater momentum for National. The first was the political stunt engineered at Waitangi Marae on Waitangi Day, the 6th of February. A partial media ban had been put into place, incorporating mainstream media and even several Maori media organisations. Declaring that he was defending the rights of all New Zealanders, as the media were their eyes and ears, Brash sparked conflict at the marae by refusing to enter once he was told of the ban – which had been signaled well in advance. Television cameras caught Brash being hit in the face by a clod of mud as journalists were questioning him. In 'Hurricane Brash', the TV One documentary that chronicled his spectacular rise in popularity, the then-National Party Senior Whip, John Carter, was overheard telling his leader that the day's incident should be worth a good 3-4 points.⁵² Harassment of the Prime Minister at Waitangi provided further images of unruly Maori showing disrespect to the nation's elected leaders. This seemed to reinforce Brash's claim that race issues were out of control.

A second event focused on Georgina te Heuheu, National's Maori Affairs spokesperson. Her position became untenable after the Orewa speech. However, instead of resigning on principle, te Heuheu chose to wait until Brash dismissed her from her portfolio. This gave Brash the opportunity of projecting himself as a strong leader who had set a clear direction on race policy, without fear or favour.

A third factor which facilitated National's dramatic rise in the post-Orewa polls was the Prime Minister's immediate dismissal of Brash's speech – and by implication the groundswell of

⁵⁰ UMR Research, who poll for the business weekly *NBR*, provide the most comprehensive demographic breakdown of party vote allegiances and its February 2004 poll recorded a 17.9% increase in National's party vote. The age group of 60 years and over showed a 24-point increase in support for National: retirees, a group largely synonymous with the over sixties recorded a phenomenal 29.4-point spike and Blue-Collar workers showed an 18.2-point jump. Males recorded a 20.8-point increase. The \$15-25,000 income group recorded a 27.4% increase in their support for National and those earning over \$70,000 flocked to National to the tune of 23.4-points.

⁵¹ The UMR poll showed a 7.8-point gain for National amongst students, clerks represented only a 2.4-point gain and for people under 30-years National's gain was 6.1-points.

⁵² 'One News Special: Hurricane Brash', aired 12 April 2004.

New Zealanders attracted to it – as ‘racist’. These three events provided Brash with saturation media coverage for the weeks immediately after his speech. The polls reflected this, with National achieving exponential increases in its levels of support.

Finally among Hargrove’s criteria: did the Orewa speech appeal to abstract creeds rather than carefully explained policies, and was the rhetoric Brash employed rigid and dogmatic? It undoubtedly did appeal to abstract creeds (‘one law for all’ and ‘race not need’ being the two leading examples) and Brash’s language was indeed rigid and dogmatic. There was no acknowledgement of uncertainty, just a strong projection of Brash’s belief that ‘enough was enough’. ‘One law for all’ appealed to the egalitarian strand of our culture, as did the slogan that government policies should be targeted towards ‘need not race’. The trenchant attack on ‘Maori privilege’ and the anecdotal examples and distortions Brash used to support his proposition aroused New Zealanders’ negalitarian tendencies and their less savoury instincts. The fact that Brash’s evidence for ‘privilege’ was frequently anecdotal and remarkably thin when compared to every social indicator reveals how emotion, when stimulated, can swamp reason, especially when saliency about race issues is high.

National has pledged to accelerate the Treaty settlement process, with the aim of bringing it to a conclusion. No time frames were set during the speech, although Brash has said that he wanted it ‘sorted by next year’.⁵³ National subsequently announced that, if it gains office in 2005, all claims must be lodged by 2006, with all Treaty settlements to be concluded by 2010. Brash also signaled his intention to remove what he labeled ‘divisive race-based features’ from legislation. These include what he sees as the ill-defined ‘principles of the Treaty’. In reality, of course, this requires removing references to ‘Treaty principles’ from over thirty pieces of legislation. Constitutional lawyer Mai Chen told Wong that, after two decades of legal precedent and tribunal decisions, this would trigger legal challenges which would continue for years.⁵⁴ Some of Brash’s colleagues told the *New Zealand Herald* that removing ‘race-based’ references to the Treaty of Waitangi in legislation ‘would be near impossible to implement’.⁵⁵ Creating a new ‘grievance industry’ is surely not what Brash intends from his new policy.

There will also be, if National wins power, no government funding based on race (except for kohanga reo – which, interestingly, Brash sees as a matter of choice, not race), no introduction of Maori wards in local body elections, and no obligation for local bodies to consult with Maori in preference to other New Zealanders. The Maori electorates will also be abolished, a policy that National has since confirmed by announcing that it will not stand candidates in them, but will instead campaign only for Maori-roll voters’ party votes. There was no reflection by Brash on how his policies might affect the nation’s social cohesion. Indeed, his peroration repeated Chris Trotter’s line about New Zealand moving forward as a modern, prosperous, democratic nation based on one rule for all, its attempts at nation-building no longer being undermined by a so-called relic of 19th century law, the Treaty of Waitangi.

CONCLUSION

*Though then, God knows, I had no such intent,
But that necessity so bow’d the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss.*

— Bollingbroke, *2 Henry IV*, III.i.72-74

The purpose of this article has been to illuminate one leadership concept – ‘teaching reality’ – and to consider in some detail whether Brash’s Orewa speech represented it or its antithesis,

⁵³ Wong, ‘I Have a Nightmare’, p. 76.

⁵⁴ Wong, ‘I Have a Nightmare’, p. 76.

⁵⁵ Ruth Berry, ‘Waitangi waits for Dr. Brash’, *New Zealand Herald*, 5 February 2004, p. A3.

‘teaching illusion’. Hargrove asks that leaders exercise discernment to temper their purpose with prudence so that their political action is realistic and does not overreach.⁵⁶ The National Party’s observations of its context, as discussed, led to a decision to effectively re-launch its leader at Orewa during late January 2004. The party’s desperate political situation lent itself to attempting a high-risk, high-reward strategy. National’s strategists believed that there was an untapped public frustration and devised twin instruments for exploiting it – the speech itself and Brash’s positioning as an honest broker unsullied by politics. They also expertly prepared the ground for the speech. Expectations were created among media organisations, and the public reaction to the speech no doubt exceeded even Brash’s own hopes. The *primary* purpose of the Orewa speech was to restore the party’s relevance in the eyes of the public, and this was quickly achieved. National’s salvation was attained through a dramatic break from the previous consensus around race discourse and policy. Brash’s speech offered a compelling mix of cleverly crafted appeals to equality wrapped around a significantly negative attack on Maori.

Did Orewa embody prudence? Depending on one’s own standpoint, the speech could be variously described as brave, as lacking rigour, as divisive, or even as racist, or any combination thereof. Prudence, however, is one test that Orewa failed. Notwithstanding the liberation of language that Orewa achieved, a prudent leader does not pit one group of New Zealanders against another in pursuit of partisan self-interest, especially when it is highly debatable whether the significant policy solutions offered can even be implemented. Still, no one can deny Brash’s political courage. As the first leader from one of New Zealand’s two main parties to fully defect from the two-decade old consensus, he took an enormous gamble at Orewa. It had an immediate and positive payoff for his party’s standing in the eyes of the public, but by late 2004 a large measure of the enthusiasm for his leadership, and for the National Party more generally, has dissipated.⁵⁷ The public now appears to be far more sceptical about lending Brash its listening ear. This phenomenon evokes the memory of another National Party opposition leader confronted with politicking on race. In 1988 Jim Bolger was warned by two of his caucus colleagues that he shouldn’t rule out playing the race card because they might need it to win the 1990 election. Bolger replied, ‘Playing the race card may help us win – then come Monday how do we run the country?’⁵⁸

This is the dilemma that Brash faced during the later months of 2004. The prospect of winding back two decades of jurisprudence is a stark reminder of how far New Zealand has traveled. The 2005 campaign will test Brash’s resolve about turning his back on the progress already achieved. Orewa was introduced as the first of five major speeches that Brash would deliver in 2004; National’s strategists, however, did not take advantage of Brash’s new-found populist support by having him advance other key policy ideas to the public. A speech on law and order made no discernable impact other than to slow down the rate of National’s steady decline in the polls since its large Orewa-induced gains. Allied to this phenomenon has been the unremitting negativity of National’s politics throughout 2004. With the mood of the country buoyant and the economy prospering, National’s negative politics has been perceived as increasingly incongruent with the reality of most New Zealanders’ lives.

Examining the antecedents of the Orewa speech highlighted one of the most revealing features about Brash’s contribution to our national political discourse. The National Party leader’s understanding of our nation’s history is parsimonious at best. He, like most New

⁵⁶ Hargrove, *The President as Leader*, p. 41.

⁵⁷ A rolling poll of polls, which is an average of all the major public polling companies, showed National 10-12 points behind Labour at the beginning of December 2004. Among the groups who have largely abandoned their post-Orewa flirtation with National – finding their way back to either Labour or to NZ First – is the largely male blue-collar/elderly coalition. In the November 2004 NBR poll; National’s standing with the blue-collar vote is 17.2-points down from its post-Orewa peak. National has shed 17 points among males and about 12 points from the 45-59 and over 60 age groups. The low-income groups’ surge towards National after Orewa has evaporated, with a 17.6-point drop recorded since February. The highest income earners have also, to the tune of 20.9-points, abandoned National since February.

⁵⁸ Jim Bolger, *Bolger: a View From the Top: My Seven Years as Prime Minister* (Auckland: Viking, 1998), p. 177.

Zealanders, has not read the historical treatments that are widely acknowledged as most authoritative. That, naturally, is his choice. Unlike most New Zealanders, however, he has offered himself as someone who could lead our nation. That will be the country's choice. Successful leaders, historically, have a deep understanding of where their nations have come from. Brash's interpretation of New Zealand history did, however, affirm Gardner's insight about the unusual power of stories of identity. Brash offered his subjective interpretation of where the country had come from, he diagnosed its present condition, and he offered stark alternatives about its future. It was a powerful narrative but one that is internally corrupted by the political desperation that was the genesis of Orewa, and by the language employed in it, the political motivations behind it, and Brash's own lack of affinity with our history.

The Orewa speech could not, on balance, be said to have contributed to the quality of discourse in the polity, although now, over a year on, emotion has been replaced by more considered perspectives. While a new equilibrium has slowly emerged post-Orewa, the scars are still evident from the political bombshell that the speech represented. Noise at the extremes, on both sides, has received more coverage than before Brash addressed Orewa's Rotary Club members. In the wake of the foreshore and seabed controversy, Cabinet Minister Tariana Turia left the Labour Party to form the Maori Party. Some Maori who still maintain that sovereignty never passed to the Crown in 1840 refuse to see the foreshore and seabed legislation as anything less than yet another land confiscation. Incendiary talk of civil war has further polluted our race discourse. The new assertiveness of the National Front, and the media exposure it has received during 2004, is at least partly attributable to the race furore that enveloped New Zealand post-Orewa. The desecration of Jewish graves in New Zealand cemeteries was another manifestation of heightened racial tension. These events cannot, nor should they be, linked to Brash and his strategists, but they are an unintended consequence, part of the cultural milieu that emerged after Orewa.

How *authentic* was Brash at Orewa? Clearly he did not fully develop the ideas that lay behind his speech, although he did tell Gilbert Wong that he had 'a major input into it'.⁵⁹ The question is a difficult one to answer, but regardless of his specific contribution to the speech's final form, he is ultimately responsible for every word and phrase. He is National's leader, and he gave the speech. There is no evidence to suggest that Brash did not believe every idea and every word he expressed at Orewa. Indeed he has a deserved reputation for integrity and I certainly cast no aspersions on his personal integrity. But, as Brash himself has said in response to criticism about aspects of the speech, 'everything one needs to know is in that speech'. One can only agree, but for the substantially different reasons argued in this paper. Orewa may have combined politics with principle, but it did not represent principle over politics.

To be fair to National's strategists, in trying to discern the balance of political motivation and deeply held conviction behind the speech one's analysis is missing one crucial part of the jigsaw. If the earlier drafts of the Orewa speech could be studied it would be possible to trace the evolution of the underlying thinking through the drafting process. What was the significant emphasis and wording of the first draft? Which paragraphs were later added or removed? Why? Which specific words or phrases were changed or de-emphasised, and which words or phrases were given greater or repeated prominence in subsequent drafts? If one could answer these questions, the political motivations behind the speech would become more apparent. Nevertheless, my analysis does reveal the use of several distortions and manipulations that feed into divisive and negative stereotypes of Maori culture and behavior. Maori were scapegoated in the Orewa speech. It was not a speech of unity. It primarily stands as a Machiavellian strategy to change a desperate political dynamic in National's favour.

Ultimately the voting public will decide the degree to which they find Brash and his policies authentic. Since the first flush of Orewa, he has steadily lost ground in all the major political polls. The 3 News/TNS Global poll has the most in-depth exploration of leadership

⁵⁹ Wong, 'I Have a Nightmare', p. 74.

	Mar.	Dec.	Δ
Positive Leadership Qualities			
‘Is a capable leader’	61	47	-14
‘Would be good in a crisis’	54	45	-9
‘Has a lot of personality’	32	20	-12
Negative Leadership Qualities			
‘Tends to talk down to people’	43	52	+9
‘Is rather narrow-minded’	40	48	+8
‘Is too inflexible’	35	41	+6

Table 1: Leadership assessments of Don Brash in the 3 News/TNS Global poll, March and December 2004 (percentages agreeing with quoted statement)

Note: Poll conducted 25–31 March and 25 November–1 December 2004 (margin of error \pm 3.1 percent).

attributes among the major polling companies. It reveals that since the peak of Brash’s popularity, which it recorded in its poll taken at the end of March 2004, voters now consider Brash less capable, more rigid and narrow minded, and more prone to talk down to people; see Table 1. Helen Clark now leads Brash by approximately 20 points in the preferred Prime Minister polls, as Brash’s rating has slumped back almost to its pre-Orewa level. One senses that 2004, while restoring a measure of respect to the National Party compared to its nadir in 2002, is

yet another year of missed opportunity. People look to their leaders for signs that they are competent and can be trusted, that they understand their concerns and can lead them to the achievement of their dreams. After his initial impact, Brash has slowly but steadily seemed less able to meet these expectations. For all Brash’s claims that racial separatism has ‘so bow’d the state’, he and greatness might not yet be compelled to kiss.

In the final analysis the Orewa speech was an exercise in teaching illusion. It was, moreover, a first-order transgression, having more in common with Winston Peters’s ‘Howick’ speech in 1996 than with any second-order transgression of obscuring policy intent. Indeed, National’s post-Orewa polling trend, if not overall levels of support, is very similar to the phenomenon that followed Peters’ anti-Asian immigration speech nine years earlier. It is difficult in New Zealand to sustain a dramatic rise in support from the shallow reef of race. While Brash expanded the range of our public discourse, freeing our language, he taught us little. His speech lacked any inner sympathy and his cultural interpretation was too shallow and distorted to have educated the citizenry. But Labour cannot escape responsibility for creating the environment that Brash so briefly and dramatically exploited. The government’s lack of leadership on race issues can be considered a second order transgression. The Prime Minister has never adequately framed her government’s policies or provided rhetorical leadership on race relations of a kind that would have provided a safety valve for the effects of National’s defection from the bipartisan consensus.⁶⁰ This then leads to one question: what form might a more adaptive speech on race relations than Orewa have taken?

A unifying speech on race would have focused, in the first instance, on acknowledging public unease and frustration. It would have attempted to frame and explain the context in which the current policy direction is embedded. A unifying speech on race would focus on the ties that bind Pakeha and Maori together. It would accept our past, without rancour, but infuse its meaning with tolerance and understanding. Rather than denying outright any ‘partnership’ created by the Treaty, as Brash did at Orewa, it would have said that if people have grown impatient at the ambiguity that they believe flows too freely from the Treaty’s articles, the Treaty actually provides a fruitful ambiguity of language, one that allows us to forge our own future, in our own way, together as one. And in this sense the Treaty will always be a living document, a partnership, because it lives on in our memories and in our imaginations. What we as New Zealanders must do is grasp the opportunity it provides to advance our collective interests. A

⁶⁰ Jon Johansson, ‘Our leader lacking in uplifting rhetoric’, *New Zealand Herald*, 4 September 2004, p. A19.

unifying speech would say that if there is a limit to how much one generation should apologise for the sins of its great grandparents (a much quoted line from Orewa), there can be no limit to our patience during this transitional phase of our history to ensure the future prosperity of our nation's great grandchildren.

An uplifting race speech would argue that the patience that is our generation's responsibility palls when compared to that which Maori have shown with so much grace for so much of their shared history with us. It would say that the patience that is our generation's calling will harvest a rich reward for our future generations. Our patience now will form an important part of their legacy. An appeal to unity would not confuse patience with paternalism. Rather, the patience described is the patience to persevere while Maori strive to find a balance that is appropriate to their and all our interests. It is, also, a patience that Maori are due, even as Maori must be aware of everyone's, including their own, wish to embrace a future freed from guilt and blame. It would say that the Treaty does not mean that we are forever bound by our injurious past, although we must always respect it and learn from it so that we may even come one day to honour it better than we have managed so far. Rather, it means that we can proudly walk together in a spirit of mutual respect and mutual compromise.

Such a speech would embody the confidence in our people that Michael King expressed before his untimely death:

And most New Zealanders, whatever their cultural background, are good-hearted, practical, commonsensical and tolerant. Those qualities are part of the national cultural capital that has in the past saved the country from the worst excesses of chauvinism and racism seen in other parts of the world. They are as sound a basis as any for optimism about the country's future.⁶¹

Finally, to exhort our political leaders to 'teach reality' is ultimately to place one's faith in their individual character and quality: faith that a leader will not cross the Rubicon separating rhetoric from demagoguery, nor manipulate public fears and prejudices for short-term political gain; faith that the moral commitment of a leader will allow him or her to see that the articulation of a compelling purpose might prove a better political strategy over the long haul than more base appeals to division. And finally, one must have faith that the citizenry can ultimately distinguish between claims made by a leader in a desperate political situation from those of a leader who prefers appeals to our better angels. Brash's Orewa speech raises more questions than it answers about my first two articles of faith, but, like Michael King, I am optimistic about the third.

⁶¹ King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, p. 518.

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