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REPRESENTATION OF  
NEW ZEALAND IDENTITY

# REPRESENTATION OF NEW ZEALAND IDENTITY

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Early Media representations of New Zealanders portray our people as rural, brave, loyal, inventive and hardworking individuals who are self-deprecating, wary of authority and sympathetic to the underdog. This picture of New Zealanders predominantly stems from their history as pioneers who colonised a harsh and unforgiving landscape. After the pioneer period images of a healthy life, a sportsman's paradise, a scenic wonderland, an egalitarian society began to appear. Overseas commentators saw our country and society as a 'social laboratory of the world'.

Later depictions, which reflect social changes in the demographic of New Zealanders, introduce ideas of ourselves as more urban, sophisticated and multicultural. Filmmakers in particular, have begun challenging earlier stereotypes and drawing more complex pictures of our way of life.

## ACTUALITIES / NEWSREELS

### **Sights In New Zealand**

[1906] Duration 2:39

Taken at a hui at Tamatekapua Marae, Ohinemutu, Rotorua this footage shows groups of Maori men and women performing on a marae. Maori were often used in publicity material or travelogues giving New Zealand a special Polynesian 'flavour'.

### **Scenes at the East End Picnic, New Plymouth**

Empire Theatre 1912. Duration 1:46

Being an island nation with close proximity to beaches as well as parks and reserves, New Zealand has always encouraged a healthy outdoor lifestyle and been seen as a great place to bring up children. The emphasis on leisure was encouraged by the introduction of the automobile which made outdoor life more accessible. It was also encouraged by the development of sports grounds and stadiums in the 1920's. This footage shows children at play at the East End Beach in New Plymouth. Water is a common theme, after they finish with the beach they entertain themselves a small distance up the river.

### **Somebody Else's Horizon (extract)**

National Film Unit 1976. Duration 1:19

"Rippling Waters" is archival footage from the 30's that was used in a later documentary. Again it shows the opportunities that abound for outdoor leisure activity. The dialogue reinforces the popular idea of the New Zealand landscape as being 'romantic' and 'sublime', and man being humbled in the presence of such majestic natural phenomena.

### **Country Lads (extracts)**

National Film Unit 1941. Duration 3:04

Troops march through Wellington city, in and around parliament grounds and along Waterloo Quay before embarking for WW2 action in North Africa. The commentary sheds light on the tremendous effect the two World Wars had on generations of New Zealanders. The Anzacs and New Zealand's part in international conflict have a special place in our collective identity.

New Zealand has traditionally had a special relationship with England whom we call our "mother country" and whose culture we predominantly adopted. It is said however that during the First World War fighting for our 'mother country' the New Zealanders, in comparing themselves to other nationalities, first gained a sense of nationhood. They saw themselves as more refined than the uncouth Australians and their society more classless than the British. From this time the term 'Kiwi' became used.

The second World War reinforced the idea of the Kiwi hero. New Zealanders were known as physically strong, tough fighters, who were loyal to their division or squadron. Their undemonstrative nature became the stereotype. Maori and Pakeha both saw themselves as fighting for New Zealand and in this, for the first time perhaps, developed a joint identity. Meanwhile at home, New Zealand woman gained a reputation as being capable and enduring.

### **Meet New Zealand (extracts)**

National film Unit 1949. Duration 1:35

This footage both reinforces the idea New Zealanders have of our country being a good, safe and healthy place to raise children, and illustrates our pride in a Welfare System that has perhaps disintegrated since the 1980's. New Zealand was seen as a country of equality and opportunity. Liberal government legislation from the 1890s was founded on egalitarian aims. The Liberals

introduced pensions for the old, they gave votes to women, they disestablished large estates and introduced industrial arbitration. The great socialist experiment was initiated and completed by the First Labour Government 1935–1949. Here we see the emphasis of state provision in education – some historical explanation will be required by today's young generation from teachers on the extent of the word free.

### **Weekly Review 270**

National Film Unit 1946. Duration 1:39

This interview with Norman Corwin a leading American radio dramatist visiting New Zealand reinforces the positive image we like to have of our country's social security, health, education, housing and recognition of the equality of races. The National Film Unit re-used the item in later production.

### **Pictorial Parade 35 (extracts)**

National Film Unit 1955. Duration 1:55

Originating from both our pioneering background and distance from the manufacturing centres in Britain and the U.S., New Zealanders have a respect for the Do It Yourself, inventive attribute. This is reflected in the popularity of home renovation programming today. Here, Bill Hamilton, a local inventor demonstrates another one of his inventions: the jet propelled speedboat. Hamilton epitomises the kiwi bloke: rugged, individualistic and capable.

## **ADVERTISING**

### **Greggs Coffee Ad**

Pacific Films 1970. Duration 0:55

Nearly ten years after the introduction of television to New Zealand homes, this is the first New Zealand made advertisement that showed non-European faces! The extract also illustrates the introduction of a more urban New Zealand: we were beginning to see ourselves as cosmopolitan and sophisticated. The images are also multi-cultural. The 1961 census showed that barely 1% of New Zealanders were recorded as other than European or Maori ancestry.

### **Mitre 10: Billy T James**

Charles Haines 198– Duration 1:10

An 80's version of the kiwi do –it –yourself image using an icon of New Zealand comedy. It is interesting that Billy T James' character is self depreciating, and exaggerates the accent and colloquialisms of Maori.

James' humour is not only based on the negative stereotyping of Maori, but on New Zealand characteristics made famous during the war years: kiwi's had also gained a reputation as unpretentious, hard partygoers and humorous.

### **Toyota Hilux: Barry and Scottie**

Colenso 1985. Duration 1:11

In this advertisement the stereotypical 'kiwi bloke' is embodied in Barry Crump, a tough hunter and fisherman, who is juxtaposed against an effeminate urban male, who is obviously not as capable. Crump's 1960 book "A good keen man" reinforced the stereotype of the kiwi male.

A particular New Zealand humour is also shown in this ad: "Take sugar, mate?... "No"... "Oh, well, just don't stir it then". While in some cultures this might be seen as rude, New Zealanders are amused by the implication that one just has to endure things one might not like.

### **New Zealand Butter: Ellie Smith**

NZ Dairy Board/ Lee Tamahori 198- Duration 1:10

Ellie Smith plays a capable New Zealand mum who not only shocks her American friend by announcing that she uses real butter, but that she makes her children's school lunches. Again we represent ourselves as clean, green and natural. This theme was especially dominant in the 80's once New Zealand had become nuclear free.

### **Steinlager Advertising: Stand by Me**

Mackay King 1987. Duration 1:10

New Zealander's are proud sportsman and rugby reflects the idea we have of ourselves as tough, strong, physically fit team players, still with individual skills.

Between 1899 and 1902 6,000 New Zealanders fought in the Boer War in South Africa. It was here they had first gained a reputation as begin physically superior to other nationalities: especially with regard to their height. The idea began to emerge that the colonies made the British better. This reputation was strengthened in 1905 when the All Black's toured England and Wales and won 31 out of 32 matches.

### **Trustbank Ad.**

Lee Tamahori 1994. Duration 1:39

Set in rural paradise this ad reinforces New Zealander's belief in teamsmanship and our dislike of tall poppies (those who rise above the majority) and show offs. Here the older sibling gently reminds his brother that while his try deserves respect, it was not his success alone, but that of the team and the coach. Note that by the mid 1990s it was kosher to use Maori in advertising to represent New Zealand values.

### **Kiwiburger: McDonalds' TV Ad**

[ 199-] Duration 0:55

An advertising campaign for McDonalds', this campaign used kitsch New Zealand images to try to sell a very American product locally. The 90's saw a resurgence of interest in kiwiana which may have been a reaction to the renaissance of Maori culture that began in the 80's: non-Maori searching for a new identity. While kiwiana embraced Maori iconography (the plastic tikis and Rotorua's tourist spots) it did so in a way that showed European commodification of that iconography.

### **Lotto Ad**

Saatchi & Saatchi 1997. Duration 0:53

Although our dream of a quarter acre paradise is becoming increasingly unrealistic as house prices soar, New Zealand still likes to think of itself as a place of opportunity; where anyone, if they work hard enough (or win Lotto) can achieve success.

## **FICTIONAL NARRATIVE**

### **On the Friendly Road (extract)**

NZ Film Guild 1936. Duration 2:31

"A whimsical story of our own life – how we have braved difficult times and are winning out". Mac and his wife face difficult times when Mac is forced to help out two escaped convicts on his release from prison.

This early feature film capitalises on a romantic ideal of ourselves as hard working pioneers who struggle bravely against the odds. New Zealand's temperamental climate and rural lifestyle were thought to be character building

and said to form tough, uncomplaining and capable men and women. James Froude an English historian wrote in 1886 that “it will be in the unexhausted soil and spiritual capabilities of New Zealand that the great English poets, artists, philosophers, statesmen, soldiers of the future will be born”.

### **Runaway (extract)**

Pacific Films 1964. Duration 4:03

Reiterating this idea of individualism is David Manning's character in the feature film *Runaway*. Here, bored with a conventional life Manning embarks on an adventure that not only rejects his parent's authority, but the authority and expectations of conventional society. His attitude is symbolised poignantly in the final scenes of the film when Manning, trying to escape from the police, is seen struggling unprepared and ill equipped over the snow covered slopes of the Southern Alps.

This suspicion of authority and allegiance to the underdog is a theme repeated in New Zealand film and television. It is not only sympathetic with our socialist tendencies, and ideas of egalitarianism, but reflects our identity as a nation at the mercy of more powerful countries. In 1945 the New Zealand Prime Minister Peter Fraser spoke at the United Nations to curtail the veto rights of all the great powers and to guarantee a binding of all members to come to the aid of a victim of aggression. Essentially he was standing up for the rights of smaller nations.

### **Sleeping Dogs (extract)**

Aardvark Films 1977. Duration 3:20

*Sleeping Dogs* is set in a make believe New Zealand where the Prime Minister has fabricated events and declared a national state of emergency to create an authoritarian state. Those individuals who try to speak out against the political situation are stopped by a Government formed antiterrorist force. The main character Smith gets entangled in the situation despite his best efforts not to.

The film reflects New Zealanders respect for the 'little person' and an underlying fear of authority. Historically this aspect of our identity began to assert itself in the Vietnam protests of the 1970s, a cancelled Springbok tour in 1973 and increasing unrest, and protest during the 70s and 80s against visiting nuclear ships. When New Zealand became Nuclear free in 1985 and David Lange won the Oxford Union debate arguing for a nuclear free world our pride in New Zealand's willingness to stand up against those more powerful than ourselves

was cemented. The narrative of *Sleeping Dogs* indicates quite clearly the actual leader in power at the time, and eerily plays out the street violence that was

### **Vigil (extract)**

John Maynard 1984. Duration 2:26

The notions of 'man against the land' and our brave struggle against adversity are reinforced in the film *Vigil*.

A lonely young girl is frightened by a hunter who comes to help on her family farm after the death of her father in a farm accident. The dark, stormy atmosphere of the film develop the sense of the land as a threat and force we have to overcome.

### **Once Were Warriors (extract)**

Communicado 1994. Duration 2:51

A rarely seen representation of New Zealand as hard, violent and unforgiving: this feature film struck a chord with New Zealander's who felt that it did accurately reflect the lives of a minority. The film tells the story of alienated urban Maori and focuses on the Heke family, whose father Jake takes out his frustration through his fists.

The opening sequence is of particular interest in that it cuts from a close up of a billboard showing a rural New Zealand paradise, to the harsh city streets of South Auckland; immediately acknowledging its digression from a typically New Zealand representation.

Contemporary representations of New Zealand, especially within the genre of film, are becoming increasing more complex and diverse, consciously using and challenging the way we have represented, and defined ourselves in the past.

### **Shortland Street: Episode 2806 (extract)**

South Pacific Pictures 2004. Duration 3:40

Soap operas reflect the concerns and interests of their country of origin. *Shortland Street* is no exception. Increasingly urban and multicultural the programme reflects our city dwelling, latte drinking, fashion conscious youth. We appear wealthy (unrealistically so – these are supposed to be nurses wages!) and educated. Auckland's strong Polynesian population is reflected in the characters on *Shortland Street*.

From the 1980's onwards the term biculturalism began to be used: the idea being that two different cultures could reside side by side harmoniously. Today this idea has expanded to become multiculturalism and reflects the influx of Pacific Islanders into New Zealand from the mid 1980's, and Asian, African and Middle Eastern immigrants from the mid 1990s.

## NEWS / DOCUMENTARY

### **Heartland - Haast: The Last Frontier (extract)**

Anson Grieve Productions 1993. Duration 1:41

Haast is an isolated area on the West Coast of New Zealand. This footage emphasises New Zealand's preoccupation with the land as something sublime, even spiritual: whose presence dominates us but makes us stronger.

### **3 News: 14/05/98 (extract)**

TV3 Network 1998 . Duration 1:49

New Zealander's are very proud of their successes in an international arena. This news item highlights Kiwi Designers in Australian Fashion week. The item also establishes New Zealand's developing identity as sophisticated and urban.

### **One Network News: 01/11/99 (extract)**

TVNZ 1999. Duration 3:36

When the all Blacks lost the World cup to France in 1999, much of New Zealand was devastated and the news was headlined nation – wide. On One News the story ran as the lead and was allocated 18 minutes of the programming! The news started with a solitary headline and even 'mother of the nation' Ms Bailey laid in to the defeated coach and captain – oh dear.

The importance of our sporting success is relative to the level of national pride and identity we have embodied in it.

### **One Network News: 01/01/00 (extract)**

TVNZ 2000. Duration 1:49

Keen on superlatives, which is perhaps a sign of our insecurity as a small and young country, New Zealanders like to compare ourselves statistically with other nations. This news item emphasises the fact that New Zealand is the first country in the world to see the sun on the new millennium.

### **One Network News: 25/04/00 (extract)**

TVNZ 2000. Duration 3:43

Lead item. SIXTEEN minutes on Anzac memories. Some emotional footage from Helen Clark's visit to Gallipoli features the opinions of young people who had travelled with the PM.

### **3 News: 07/09/00 (extract)**

TV3 Network 2000. Duration 2:36

News items often represent New Zealanders abroad in their capacity as heroes reinforcing an idea of ourselves established during the war years. This footage shows New Zealand troops helping UN staff in West Timor as brave and resourceful.

### **One News 09/02/2004 (extract)**

TVNZ 2004. Duration 3:42

As New Zealanders we like to think of ourselves as part of a clean, green environment and are upset by any threats to that image. One person questions who would want to maliciously spill oil in the Milford Sounds " (such a) beautiful part of the world." This perception of New Zealand is shared by other countries: in 2005 Conde travel magazine subscribers voted New Zealand to be the 'Best country in the world' receiving a high score of 99% for environmental friendliness. In reality New Zealand does have its share of environmental problems: declining native biodiversity including the extinction of one third of native and freshwater birds, soil and water degradation because of high rates of nitrate and solar radiation 9% higher than it was ten years ago.

We also like to think of ourselves as friendly and co-operative; all of the locals are described as working together to clean up the spill as part of "a real New Zealand effort".

### **3 News 26/04/2004 (extract)**

TV3 Network 2004. Duration 2:31

Reiterating New Zealand's sense of itself as clean and green this news item establishes that New Zealand has some of the safest and freshest food in the world: free from harmful toxins.

### **3 News: 01/12/03 (extract)**

TV3 Network 2003. Duration 1:55

John Campbell, Hilary Barry, Carolyn Robinson, Belinda Henley and Whena Owen present a live programme from the world premiere in Wellington of Peter

Jackson's *Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. Perhaps part of Peter Jackson's popularity and support here has to do with his DIY attitude; he made special effects from a very early age with a resourcefulness he attributes in part to his New Zealand upbringing. His popularity might also stem from his humble beginnings as the far flung underdog from the other side of the world, who in 2005 was voted the most powerful man in Hollywood by *Premier* magazine.

### **The Tem Show: Episode One**

Greenstone Productions 2005. Duration 3:20

This more contemporary extract reinforces the ideas in the previous example. It is interesting too that Temerua Morrison chooses to exaggerate his parochialness by seeming impressed with notions of fame and emphasising his Billy T James accent.

The extract shows New Zealander's pride in the DIY attitude when Temerua explains that Karen Walker has built up an international fashion empire from the \$100 she began with at 18 years old.