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### Classroom topics

Classroom ideas - Maori leadership in the 19th century

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We have 40 biographies, 11 articles, related to Māori King movement origins.

## Māori independence

Pōtatau established a boundary between the territory in which his authority held sway and that of the governor: 'Let Maungatautari [River] be our boundary. Do not encroach on this side. Likewise I am not to set a foot on that side.' His aim was not to oppose the Crown but to provide authority in the lands placed under his mana (authority). Supporters believed it was possible for the mana of the two monarchs to be complementary. To Māori, the Kīngitanga was a development for Māori, not against Europeans.

Given the tribal nature of Māori society, there was some surprise that a pan-tribal movement had been established. Most Māori were loyal to their own hapū (sub-tribe) first and foremost. The historian Michael King believed that as the European population grew it created a sense of Māoriness that made it possible for Māori to think beyond their tribal affiliations and distinguish between a Māori and a non-Māori world. British unity under the Crown was perceived as a strength, and supporters of the Kīngitanga believed that if Māori could replicate this sense of unity they would have a better chance of withstanding the full impact of colonisation.

Despite this argument, important iwi such as Ngāpuhi, Te Arawa and Ngāti Porou did not join the Kīngitanga. Some opponents dismissed it as a Waikato movement that had little support in other parts of the country. Historian James Belich maintained that the Kīngitanga did not symbolise a radical change. 'It was not a declaration of Maori independence – this already existed – and it added no new territory to the Maori sphere. It sought merely to unite pre-existing polities. But in other ways the Movement was an important change. Together with the rise in anti-land-selling generally, it raised the profile of Maori independence from a level which the British disliked but tolerated, to a level which many found entirely unacceptable.'

When fighting broke out between British troops and supporters of Wiremu Kīngi in Taranaki in March 1860, the Kīngitanga was portrayed as being behind the war. Most Kīngitanga supporters in lower Waikato, including Pōtatau himself, actually opposed involvement in the Taranaki War, but when Ngāti Maniapoto fighters arrived to help Kīngi's men, the finger of blame was pointed at Waikato.

...settlers and politicians saw this as an opportunity to crush all

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the so-called Māori troublemakers in one hit. Instead, the war in Taranaki eventually reached a stalemate.

The Kīngitanga resisted further European encroachment and opposed new roads, and it sought self-government in Māori areas. The movement took on the appearance of an alternative government with its own flag, newspaper (*Te Hokioi*), councillors, magistrates and law enforcement system. The Kīngitanga government even had a minister for Pākehā affairs.

### See also:

- [Te Kīngitanga – troubled times, 1860–94](#)

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