

MARANGA AKE AI (by Anahera Herbert-Graves – CEO Te Runanga-a-Iwi o Ngāti Kahu)

‘There’s a movement a movement on the street,
People movin’, they shuffle to the beat,’

[Maranga Ake Ai](#), written by [Joe Williams](#) and recorded by his band [Aotearoa](#), first aired in 1984. At the time its militant English lyrics caused quite a stir.

‘Where’s my freedom from oppression?
Cos that’s what my people need,’

Many [Pākehā](#) were deeply offended. How many? Enough that the song was banned from mainstream radio.

We must remember that in 1984, even though the modern [Māori](#) protest movement was well established, the voice of Māori protest was still only heard by Pākehā in snippets through their news media; it made little or no impact on their consciousness or their conscience. Maranga Ake Ai did. It was seminal. So too were a number of other events in 1984.

At that time the use of [te reo](#) Māori was not terribly welcome by most Pākehā. But when a tolls operator at the telephone exchange was told by her supervisor at New Zealand Post Office to stop answering calls with, “Kia ora, tolls here,” and instead use the standard greeting of, “Good morning / afternoon / evening, tolls here,” that changed. [Naida Pou](#) refused to comply with this racist demand and was placed on “off-board” duties. She is now the Chair of one of our largest iwi authorities.

‘Hear them talking, they’re talking on the street,
“Words like “freedom from oppression”;
Cos that’s what my people need,’

It was a time when many Māori were [ngoikore](#) from internalising the racism all around us. The annual [hiko](#) to [Waitangi](#), which started in 1978, caused a number of us to squirm because it also triggered the annual commentary from Pākehā mates and colleagues like, “What do you Māori want?” or, “You’re just bloody lucky the English got here first and not the Spanish.”

‘No more knockin’, knockin’ on closed doors,
I said Maori people gotta wake up, gotta take up the cause.’

In 1984 the [Waitangi Tribunal](#) was still finding its feet as a Commission of Inquiry and had yet to release reports that clearly captured the full experience for Māori of being marginalised in our own land under Pākehā colonisation and Crown domination. In 1984 Ngāti Kahu lodged its claims before that Tribunal.

Today as I write we are two hours away from the start of the Waitangi Tribunal hearing into Ngāti Kahu’s claim and I am thinking of Maranga Ake Ai and its composer, Joe Williams, who went on to become Chief Judge of the [Māori Land Court](#) and Chair of the Waitangi Tribunal. He is now a High Court Judge.

‘Can you feel it coming, a brand new time?
I said [Aotearoa](#) maranga ake ai.’