

## RACE RELATIONS

Race relations in this country are often cited by New Zealanders in the main, as an example that other countries' would do well to follow. It is an issue rather like class that invites an immediate and defensive response if anybody tries to highlight the problems apparent in New Zealand. That there are problems of a racial origin should be obvious, and this section will explore some of these, especially in the context of social change and conflict.

### Social Change and Race Relations

The major change in race relations that has occurred this century has been the increasing contact between Maori and Pakeha and the growth of the Maori population as a proportion of the total New Zealand population. The contact has taken place as a result of the migration of the Maori from rural areas and small towns (often in parts of the country which have relatively small numbers of Pakehas) to major towns, and especially Auckland. Spoonley provides detail of this migration. To underline the point, Pacific Islanders migrated to New Zealand at the same time, and they gravitated to the same cities, and to the same suburbs as the Maori. In essence, this means that contact between Pakeha and Polynesian is now probably greater (i.e. it is more intimate as a result of geographical proximity) than anytime this century and as a result, various tensions and issues are becoming more apparent. This situation will continue as more Maoris migrate to the cities and as the birthrate of Maoris remains higher than that of Pakehas. There will be more people of Maori descent, or more importantly, who claim Maori identity, as a proportion of the New Zealand population as the century progresses. Some Pakehas may well feel threatened by these developments.

### Conflict and Race Relations

One question is whether the situation will lead to increased violence and more widespread conflict. The presence of large numbers of Polynesians in city areas has promoted a re-evaluation of beliefs by both Polynesian and Pakeha. For the Pacific islanders the issue embraces a number of aspects including the struggle to continue traditional cultural beliefs and practices in an environment that is often unsympathetic. The Maori is also increasingly faced by the problem of ensuring the continuation of traditional ethnic practices in a non-traditional environment. There are outstanding land grievances and the issue of Maori language use combined with conflict with many institutions and practices of the dominant Pakeha society (e.g. criminal offending, educational failure) that provide a political edge to Maori concerns. And the Pakeha is also assessing their relationship with minority groups. As Spoonley (1982) suggests, race relations in New Zealand have been reasonably good mainly because the Maori has not

constituted an economic or social threat. This has changed, and while some people have become more sympathetic to the Polynesian position, others have tended to harden in their attitudes, fears and beliefs. The nature of intergroup relations in New Zealand has potential in a variety of directions, and it is important to acknowledge the conflict that already exists and that which is inherent.

### Continuity and Race Relations

While it is difficult to compare race relations in various countries, it is nevertheless true that there are characteristics and processes common to all of them. An essential feature is the use of physical characteristics to classify others, and associated with this are various positive or negative beliefs. The power to implement those beliefs produces discrimination, both positive and negative, and the resulting racial inequality tends to mark race relations situations. What differs is the dominant group, how it attained that dominance, how it continues to justify and protect the dominance and the nature of the dominance. New Zealand cannot be compared with the extreme examples of racial dominance where a minority group subjects a larger racial grouping to various restrictions, as is the case in South Africa. But many of the processes required to maintain dominance are surprisingly similar, although the degree of severity and extent of application vary enormously.

"New Zealanders are trying to relate the South African Black problem with Maoris. It can't be done. Some Blacks are not far removed from the kennel stage. How can you allow them to run the country. It would be utter chaos.

What would happen in New Zealand if 22 million Islanders came here?" (ex All Black, Allan Sutherland, Marlborough Express, 18/12/1978).

In New Zealand, relations between various groups has been marked by the dominance of the Pakeha since the mid-nineteenth century and it is this dominance which is an enduring characteristic of local race relations. It is also apparent that many of the means of ensuring the continuation of that dominance (e.g., the courts, the education system) were used from the beginning and continue to be used today.

## A Short History of Race Relations in New Zealand

Read "Historical Patterns" in Spoonley's chapter in the set text.

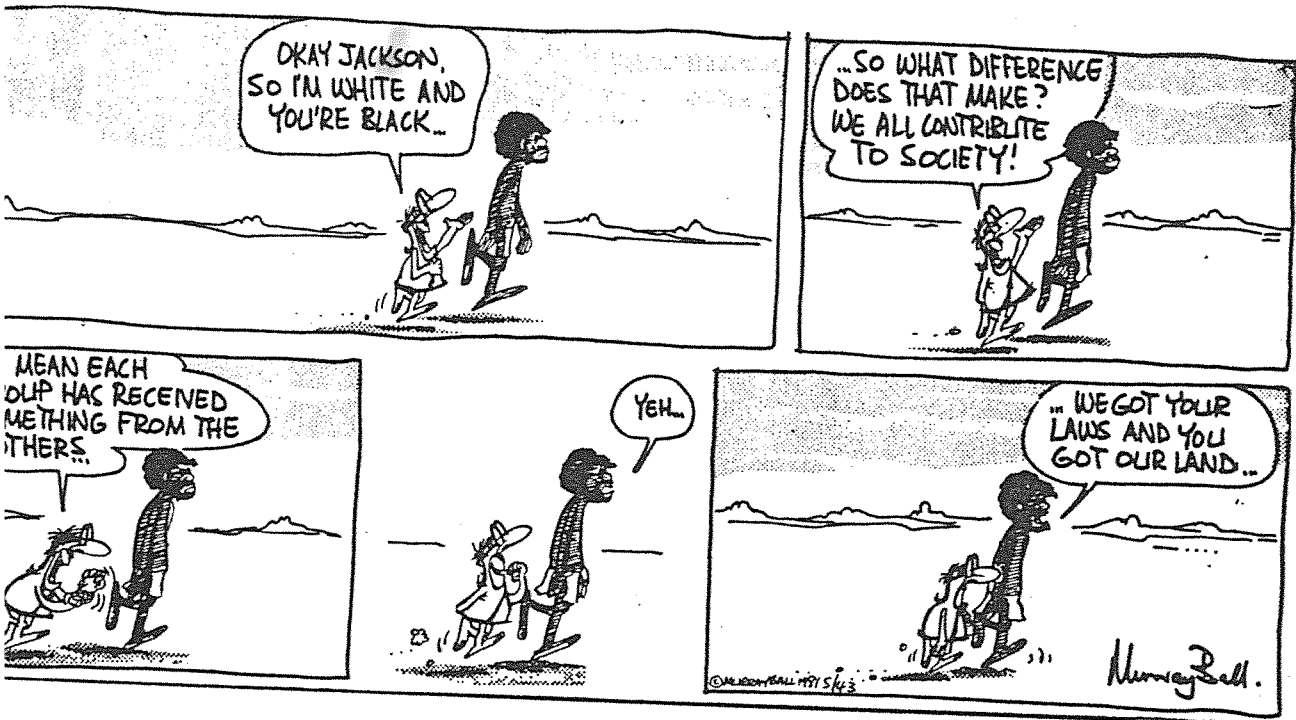
### a. Maori and Pakeha

Colonial policy towards the Maori by nineteenth century Pakeha administrators is often viewed as enlightened. It is certainly true that the legal standing of the Maori was more advantageous to him than was often the case elsewhere. English law was modified to preserve Maori rights, so long as they lived beyond European settlements, and to help incorporate Maori concepts of legal administration. This was helped by the Maori response to the Pakeha. Initially, at least, they selected those features they required or wanted from European technology or society. But this situation changed as the Pakeha settlers sought to extend land-holdings and urged or forced the colonial administrators to use the forces available to them to achieve this aim. From 1863 onwards, the Maori resisted by initially trying to retreat and hold interior areas, and after, by armed resistance. Howe (1977) argues that the Pakeha aim was to civilise and help amalgamate the Maori into Pakeha society, by force if necessary. So that while the Maori was the subject of a military offensive, the administrators introduced legislation to ensure that the Maori was protected and incorporated into their "civilisation". Thus in 1867, the Maori Representation Act established four Maori electorates and gave the vote to all adult Maori males. And the same year saw the Native Schools Act which was an attempt to provide something of a state education to the outlying areas which were predominantly Maori.

The other aspect to this is the reason why many settlers advocated armed confrontation in the first instance. After the Anglo-Maori Wars 1.3 million hectares were confiscated and offered to Pakeha land developers and speculators. And in 1865, the Maori Land Court was established to do away with various Maori corporate systems of land tenure and to individualise land titles. It was now easy to buy off a few people who could show that they had a claim to a particular block of land rather than the many hundreds of corporate owners who were difficult to contact and often reluctant to sell.

"The Treaty (of Waitangi) had acknowledged as Maori reserves over twenty-eight million acres in the North Island and thirty-eight million only in the South; by 1891, these had shrunk to a quarter million only in the South Island and less than eleven million in the North. Four fifths had gone". (P. Mason, 1970, Race Relations, London, Oxford University Press).

The effect of European colonial policy was to alienate the Maori from traditional cultural patterns, especially from the very important land base. This was exacerbated by the considerable decline in the Maori population in the last part of the nineteenth century, and by the rural-urban migration of the Maori this century.



For more extensive material, see Oliver (1981) in the section "Growth and Conflict", especially the chapters by Parsonson and Sorrenson. A critical review, and one worth reading as background is provided by Nairn and Nairn (1981).



Prejudice is not an irrational feeling, but serves a purpose to those people who are racially prejudiced. Which sections of New Zealand society would have most to gain from economic and social restrictions on the Chinese and Yugoslav communities (in the appropriate periods)? Why has the level of racial tension and conflict declined between Pakeha and Chinese now? Don't rely on your own perceptions (if you are not a member of a minority community) but try to locate sources (personal contacts, literature) that will convey the experiences and observations from the point of view of the minority concerned.

## Sociological Perspectives on Race Relations

### Key Concepts in the Sociology of Race Relations

#### a. Race

Our concern is with race as a social fact, and not as a set of biological facts. By this, we mean that race refers to the meanings that people attach to physical characteristics as a basis of classifying others to produce recognizable and distinctive groups.

At this point, it is important to state that race has no scientific meaning in a biological sense. Scientists did attempt to classify man into races right up until the mid-twentieth century. But they discovered the more they knew about man, the less clear cut the differences among races became. The main difficulty was that for a long time the different races were assumed to be different species. A species does not generally interbreed or exchange genes with other species. Of course, humans belong to one species and the races, so-called were genetically open. In spite of the barriers of segregation, apartheid and slavery there has been considerable gene interchange between "races". Biologically, it is technically impossible to identify racial groupings with any degree of accuracy. So the concept has no scientific validity. But people still use physical characteristics to classify and group others, and it is this social usage which concerns us as sociologists. Race relations is the study of social beliefs and perception which categorise others according to physical characteristics. Sociology is concerned with the 'relations' of race relations, or the social reaction to race (also see Spoonley in the set text).

- (i) Racism - Racism is the belief or theory held by some people that there are important biological differences between identified groups, and these genetic differences explain cultural, behavioural and intellectual differences. Inevitably they believe some races to be superior to others and therefore more deserving in the distribution of social goods and services.

Sir, All New Zealanders with any vision should acclaim the pro-abortion zealots for their heroic and patriotic crusade for race suicide.

(letter by H.A. Smith, Napier, to Dominion, 10/1/1978)



- (ii) Racial prejudice - Racial prejudice has two irrational elements, prejudgement and overcategorisation. Prejudgement refers to attitudes that are not amenable to reason or modification in the light of first hand experience. Overcategorisation describes the way in which all people of a certain group are conceived of as acting in a certain manner or of having a particular appearance, independent of whether they in fact are all the same.
- (iii) Stereotypes - Stereotypes are a form of overcategorisation. Stereotypes categorise all group members as being the same and do not allow for the wide range of differences that exist in any social group. Further, when examples are encountered that do not fit the stereotype, the individual dismisses the evidence because it is not "typical". Inevitably, stereotypes are based on the unfavourable aspects held to characterise the group.
- (iv) Racial discrimination - Racial discrimination refers to the behavioural component of prejudice. Prejudice is a negative attitude towards a group and discrimination (negative) is the behaviour adopted towards group members. Discrimination is unequal treatment which favours some groups against others. It isolates the subordinate group and restricts the opportunities open to minority members. We can make several distinctions about those who discriminate. For instance, Merton noted that there are reluctant discriminators and timid bigots. Reluctant discriminators are those who are free (or relatively free) of prejudices against particular groups of people but who find it hard to challenge the norms of their social world. If their social group discriminates, they discriminate. Timid bigots harbour all kinds of negative attitudes about particular groups but they are afraid to act out their hostile feelings, at least in those situations where group norms are nondiscriminatory. The point about this distinction is that there are people who are racially prejudiced but their behaviour is non-discriminatory, and vice versa. It is clear that people's social surroundings play an important part in influencing patterns of prejudice or behaviour.

b. Ethnic Group

An ethnic group is a social group that is characterised by cultural homogeneity. There need not be complete uniformity but within the group there needs to be loyalty and adherence to the cultural beliefs and behaviour of the group. This might include distinctive kinship and family patterns, language, folkways and mores, dress, religion and art. So an ethnic group is defined by cultural features. Secondly, there is a consciousness of kind or a feeling of belonging or association. The people of a particular group are aware of the links they share with others of the group, and that they are different to people who are not members of the group.

The advantage of talking about ethnic relations or the interaction between ethnic groups is that it avoids the belief that humans are merely the result of their biological heredity. Ethnic groups reflect a cultural grouping and this is often a more appropriate concept than race.

**Exercise:**

1. The terms race and ethnic are often confused. How does the sociologist distinguish between them? Which of the following groups is an ethnic group? And Why?

New Zealander, Pacific Islander, Dalmation, Gujurati, Tokelau Islander, British.

2. How widely is "race" used as an "explanation" of human behaviour in New Zealand. How often do you hear the word used, and is it apparent from the context what the speaker means by the word?

### Approaches to Studying Race Relations

#### 1. Interactionism

This label covers a number of sociological approaches to the study of race relations. All the approaches are marked by an acceptance that racial problems arise from the meanings used by social actors, and in this case, the negative or positive beliefs attached to skin colour. Interactionism tends to draw heavily on psychological explanation, and more recently, the understanding of beliefs and behaviour advanced by a school of sociology called symbolic interactionism.

Robert Park, an American sociologist writing and researching in Chicago in the first decades of this century, was the first to produce a comprehensive and systematic theory of race relations. Park argued that the key to understanding race relations lay in a "cycle of events" which is repeated everywhere. It begins with contact between racial groups which leads onto competition accommodation and eventually assimilation. Park relied on Social Darwinist arguments, and racial competition was seen as resulting from an instinctive factor based on fear of the unfamiliar. Park's students went on to extend and popularise these arguments in research that is now an important part of the sociology of race relations. These include notions such as the "marginal man" or "social distance" between various groups. Park, however, failed to understand or include any consideration of class or stratification, he failed to discuss wealth, status or power and looking back at his material now, it can be seen as overly concerned with consensus and optimistic in terms of its expected outcome.