



**Office of the
Race Relations Conciliator**

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Race Relations Office

Let's Work Together
"Kia Mahi Tahī Tatou"

**Racism and
Rental Accommodation**

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RACISM AND RENTAL ACCOMMODATION

The Office of the Race Relations Conciliator has received many complaints about racial discrimination in the letting of rental accommodation. The complaints came from people of many ethnic groups; the largest number being from Maori and Pacific Island Polynesians who believed that they were being rejected as tenants because of their skin colour. Their allegations were hard to prove because discrimination is often very subtle and can be hidden. However, because of the number of complaints being laid, the Conciliator called for an investigation of the rental housing market. A survey of landlords and land agents was carried out at the end of 1985 to discover whether there was racial discrimination in the letting of private rental properties, and if so, how much.

At the time of the release of the report on Racism and Rental Accommodation the Conciliator emphasised the following points:

- * Racism is alive and well, but the mechanisms of its expression are subtle.

- * To the simple question - "Is there racial discrimination in the processes of gaining private rental accommodation in Auckland?"; the answer is "yes".
- * To the question - "who are the people most discriminated against?". The answer is "Maori and other Polynesian".
- * To the question "Should the Code of Ethics as established by the Real Estate Institute of New Zealand Incorporated and the tenets of the Race Relations Act apply at the present time; the answer is "yes".
- * To the question, "does research show that members of society as individuals; and members of the Real Estate Institute abide by their particular code of ethics?" The answer is for a greater number - "No".

The following is a summary of the survey:

THE SURVEY

The Code of Ethics, which all members of the Real Estate Institute agree to follow, says:

"Members must not accept any instructions from a client or customer which require them to discriminate

against any purchaser or tenant, or against any member of the public by reason only of sex, race, colour, religion, ethnic or national origins of that person or any related person".

Because discrimination on the grounds of race is contrary both to the law of New Zealand and the land agents' Code of Ethics, landlords and land agents could not be asked directly about their letting practices. Instead, a team of researchers, working in pairs, applied for rental properties to test the market, both answering newspaper advertisements and applying to land agents.

Each person in a pair of researchers had the same characteristics and the same requirements. For example, both members of one pair posed as women with three children and a husband who earned \$380 a week. They asked for a three-bedroom house to rent. Another pair were young professional men looking for a flat for themselves and a working wife. Several other pairs were also used to test the response to a wide range of family sizes and income levels. The only difference in each pair was that one member was Maori or Pacific Island Polynesian while the other was Pakeha.

The reason for using pairs of researchers for this experiment was to make sure that the only difference between them was skin colour (ethnic identity). Therefore if one member of a pair was rejected as a tenant and the other was accepted, it could not be because of family size or income because they were identical. The difference in treatment was most likely to be a response to a difference in skin colour. Nearly 200 applications were made to landlords and land agents.

The findings showed that when a telephone application was made for a house or flat, both Polynesian and Pakeha researchers were asked to come and view the property in 78 cases, but in another 30 cases, only the Pakeha was given the address. It became clear to the researchers that, in some cases, an accented voice was sufficient to trigger rejection of an applicant.

The figures were much worse when face-to-face applications were made to land agents.

Only 4 agencies offered the same address to both researchers while 27 agencies gave addresses to the Pakeha only and not to the Maori or Pacific Islander applicants. Because the applicants had the same requirements and the same ability to pay, the only reason for the different treatment they received was because they had different skin colour. The survey showed very clearly that racial discrimination was being practised despite the law against it.

The researchers found that landlords and land agents used a variety of techniques to make finding a rental property difficult or nearly impossible for Maoris or Pacific Islanders.

Some of the techniques encountered in this survey were:-

- a. the direct lie. A Maori or Pacific Island applicant was told that a property had been let then a Pakeha inquiring later found that it was still available;
- b. imposing conditions, such as "no children" on Maori or Pacific islanders but not on Pakeha;

- c) asking a Pacific Island or Maori applicant to call back later. (There is a shortage of rental accommodation in Auckland and properties are quickly taken. An applicant calling later will almost always find that the property has been let);
- d) quoting a very high rental to the Maori or Pacific Islander and a lower one to the Pakeha.
(A Tokelauan researcher was told that a particular house cost \$300 a week while the Pakeha was offered the same house for \$150);
- e) Maori and Pacific Island researchers were offered poor quality accommodation or properties in less desirable areas;
- f) Maoris and Pacific Islanders were offered short-term rentals which meant that moving expenses would be incurred more frequently. Pakeha were rarely offered these properties;
- g) a non-Pakeha applicant was sent to a non-existent address.

THE LAW

Section 6 of the Race Relations Act 1971 states that it is unlawful to deny any person the right to accommodation or to treat any person seeking accommodation differently by reason of colour, race, ethnic or national origins.

The Accommodation Survey demonstrated that the extent of discrimination is even greater than the number of complaints received under Section 6 of the Race Relations Act would indicate.

RACE RELATIONS OFFICE

It is a fundamental function of the Office to affirm and promote racial equality throughout New Zealand.

The Office gives balanced emphasis to its major functions of:-

1. Investigation and Conciliation
2. Education
3. Exerting influence

A primary responsibility of the Office is to investigate complaints of discrimination on the grounds of colour, race, ethnic or national origins. If a complaint is upheld, the Race Relations Conciliator seeks to mediate between the parties in order to reach some mutually acceptable settlement. If there is no agreement as to settlement the matter may be referred to the Equal Opportunities Tribunal.

CAUSES OF DISCRIMINATION IN RENTAL ACCOMMODATION.

The survey concluded that landlords and land agents who discriminated held stereotyped views of Maori and Pacific Island Polynesians.

The Race Relations Office is concerned to overcome prejudice and stereotypes. Prejudice is a negative unfavourable attitude towards a group or its individual members; it is characterised by stereotyped beliefs which are inaccurate. Prejudice and stereotyping occur when there is competition for limited economic and political resources.

If you think you have been refused accommodation on the grounds of your race, then phone the Race Relations Office and discuss it with one of our Investigating Officers at 771-295 or 774-060 Auckland or write to P.O. Box 68-504, Newton AUCKLAND 1; or the Race Relations Office, P.O. Box 1578, CHRISTCHURCH. Phone 792-015 Christchurch.

Copies of the full report on
Racism and Rental Accommodation
are available from
THE RACE RELATIONS OFFICE
at a cost of \$5.00



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