

The Removal of the Pacific Community from Greater Ponsonby

From the late 1970s and into the 1980s the identity of Greater Ponsonby began to shift yet again. Unlike the changes that occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, in which Pacific people moved into and started to dominate this region, this period saw the removal of the Pacific community from Auckland's central suburbs. There were a number of reasons which contributed to the gentrification of this area, but at the core of the change was the urban renewal that took place, and the subsequent increase in cost of living in the inner-city.

A renewed interest in inner-city living occurred due to rising fuel prices and heightened motorway traffic, meaning that commuting into the city from the outskirts of Auckland became problematic.¹ With the resurgence of interest in living in suburbs such as Ponsonby, Grey Lynn and Freeman's Bay, more people competed for what was already a relatively small housing market. There was the substantial, existing Pacific population and a growing diverse group of young, socially liberal, tertiary-educated Pakeha who wanted to live in this area.² On top of this competition for housing, there was a significant reduction in available houses. There was a loss of over a hundred dwellings a year, as they were converted to professional offices and light industry, and many were demolished for commercial, industrial and residential redevelopment.³

The result of all this increased competition for housing meant that prices went up, and many Pacific families could not afford to pay the new rental costs. Furthermore, with the urban renewal in the inner-city, many manufacturing and other industrial jobs moved to South and West Auckland.⁴ Pacific peoples thus began to move either south or west of Auckland, where they were able to afford to either purchase a home, or rent comfortably, and they could be closer to the jobs that many worked in. This shift can be shown through the fact that by 1986 the Freeman's Bay Pacific and Māori population had declined from 40 per cent to 24 per cent, compared to an overall increase in 15 per cent for all of Auckland.⁵ This dramatic change is further exemplified by looking at the Pasifika Education Centre (PEC). Founded as the Pacific Islanders Education Resource Centre in 1978, its purpose was to provide Pacific peoples with an educational centre, as well as extramural community education.⁶ The PEC was initially founded on Jervois Road, in Ponsonby, in order to be close to the large Pacific community in this area.⁷ However, with the gentrification of the central city, the PEC had to leave with the Polynesian population into the outer suburbs.⁸ This exodus also had a significant impact on Karangahape Road, as Pacific people were not going to make a big trip from South or West Auckland just to come and shop on K' Rd.⁹ Therefore, Polynesian shops began closing and disappearing from Karangahape Road, as rents continued to increase but their turnover was substantially down.¹⁰

Whilst it may seem as though it was simply a matter of not being able to afford to live in the renewed and revitalised urban environment, there certainly was discrimination against the Pacific community which contributed to their removal from the central city suburbs. The first way in which Pacific

¹ Carlyon and Morrow, *Urban Village: The story of Ponsonby, Freeman's Bay and St Mary's Bay*, 17-19.

² Latham, "Urbanity, Lifestyle and Making Sense of the New Urban Cultural Economy: Notes from Auckland, New Zealand", 1704.

³ Terrini. "Polynesian Overfill."

⁴ Salesa, *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures*, 62.

⁵ Carlyon and Morrow, *Urban Village: The story of Ponsonby, Freeman's Bay and St Mary's Bay*, 221-222.

⁶ Salesa, *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures*, 16.

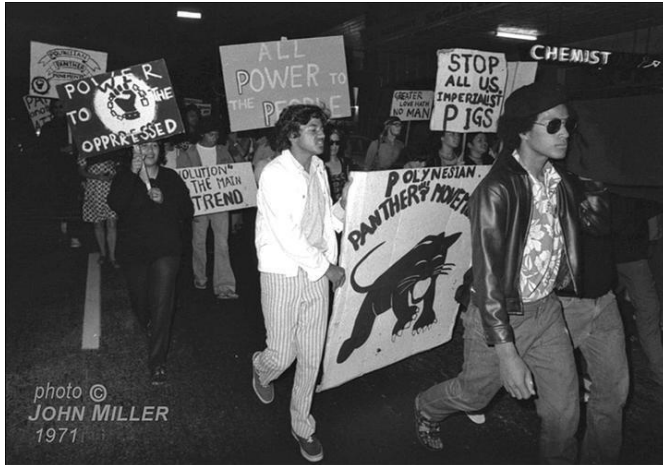
⁷ Salesa, 16-17.

⁸ Salesa, 16-17.

⁹ Kearns, *On the Road: K' Rd*, 25.

¹⁰ Kearns, 25.

people were discriminated against, and subsequently removed from Greater Ponsonby, was a very direct and overt form of discrimination – the Dawn Raids. The Dawn Raids started in 1974 and were initially only directed against Tongan overstay immigrants.¹¹ These continued in Ponsonby and other regions of Auckland in 1975 and 1976, and the targets of these raids expanded to include the wider Pacific community.¹² Resistance movements were quick to respond to these attacks, with people from all over the country, not just the Pacific community, rallying together to stand up against this horrific discrimination.



¹³ *Protests against racial discrimination and oppression towards Pacific people*

Alongside these attacks, which obviously caused much fear and resentment, there was also significant opposition towards a police task force, called Operation Immigration, that was set up in 1974. The objectives of the task force were to “curb street and tavern disorder”, but the majority of offenders who faced charges were Māori and Polynesian.¹⁴ This task force stopped hundreds of Pacific people, and Māori, on the streets of Auckland – specifically on Karangahape Road – in pubs, in taxi ranks and at bus stops, where they were forced to provide evidence of their right to be in Aotearoa.¹⁵ This would have made the Pacific population in the inner-city region feel targeted and discriminated against, as they were harassed by this special task force and not made to feel comfortable in their local area. This certainly would have contributed towards many moving out of the central city, as they were not able to express their culture and identity in a way that they previously had been.

The second way in which the Pacific community of central Auckland was pushed out of their homes was a bit more subtle, but nonetheless resulted in a similar outcome. With the influx of Pakeha into the central city, there was obviously now an increase in competition for housing. Housing discrimination against Pacific families thus became all too apparent.¹⁶ Landlords set the price for rental properties at a much higher rate, deliberately so in order to exclude Pacific families from being able to afford them.¹⁷ Moreover, some landlords flat out refused to take Polynesian tenants, as reflected in some submissions put before the Commission of Inquiry into Housing.¹⁸ This attitude of

¹¹ Carlyon and Morrow, *Urban Village: The story of Ponsonby, Freeman’s Bay and St Mary’s Bay*, 264.

¹² Carlyon and Morrow, 264.

¹³ <https://e-tangata.co.nz/history/the-terror-of-the-dawn-raids/>

¹⁴ Carlyon and Morrow, 266-267.

¹⁵ Carlyon and Morrow, 267-269.

¹⁶ Terrini. “Polynesian Overfill.”

¹⁷ Terrini. “Polynesian Overfill.”

¹⁸ Terrini, “Polynesian homeseeker’s nightmare.”

landlords towards the Pacific community resulted in many not having a choice but to leave their neighbourhood in search of somewhere more affordable to live.

There were deliberate and extreme measures taken in the late 1970s and early 1980s to racially segregate Auckland. This legacy certainly has lasted into the present day, however it is a taboo topic to talk about.¹⁹ Although the removal of Pacific people from inner-city Auckland certainly occurred, it did not mean that the Pacific influence on the central suburbs completely disappeared.

Despite efforts to force Pacific people to the south and west of Auckland, Pacific culture has a lasting influence on central Auckland right through to the present day. Whilst inner-city living became unaffordable for many second-generation Pacific families in the latter half of the twentieth century, a group of early migrants remained in the central suburbs where they bought houses in the early migration years before house prices increased substantially.²⁰ Although the younger generations have had to move away, Pacific culture in central Auckland remains very strong with groups formed in the 1950s and 1960s still being dominated by Pacific peoples. Most commonly, Pacific churches in Greater Ponsonby attract families from the outskirts of Auckland. For example, at St John's Methodist Church, and Ponsonby Baptists and Adventists churches, in the 1990s members would return from all over Auckland in order to worship at their traditional family church.²¹ Furthermore, many Pacific people return to the inner-city to play in sports teams that have long-established roots in the Polynesian community. An example of this is Ponsonby Rugby Club, where many parents send their children to play, despite the fact that they live in the outer suburbs, as it has long been regarded as a Polynesian club.²² Pacific identity remains strong in the Greater Ponsonby region due to these long standing traditions in church groups and sports clubs.



²³ *Ponsonby Rugby Club remains a strong club into the present day, with many members travelling from the outskirts of Auckland to play for them.*

Pacific influence is also still evident at some of the local schools in Greater Ponsonby. At Richmond Road Primary School, about a quarter of the school roll is Polynesian, many of whom come from out

¹⁹ Salesa, *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures*, 35.

²⁰ Huntsman, "The Migrants and their Communities: The Ethnic Communities and Beyond – 1980s", 54.

²¹ Carlyon and Morrow, *Urban Village: The story of Ponsonby, Freeman's Bay and St Mary's Bay*, 102-107.

²² Carlyon and Morrow, 162.

²³ <http://www.ponsonbyrugby.co.nz/>

of zone, and a Samoan bilingual unit remains intact.²⁴ Moreover, at Auckland Girls Grammar School, a diverse school population exists, with 30 per cent of the school being from the Pacific community.²⁵



²⁶ *Parents protesting outside Richmond Road Primary School about the lack of care for and maintenance of the bilingual unit in recent years*

The influence of Pacific culture remains strong in the suburbs of Grey Lynn, Ponsonby, Freemans Bay and Newton right into the present day. This is despite the efforts of many to remove the Pacific community to the outskirts of Auckland. On top of this, there has also been an attempt to forget the fact that Pacific people once dominated the streets in and around Karangahape Road. Many city tours which go directly through Ponsonby make no reference to the former Pacific population, despite the fact that it is a key area for understanding early Pacific immigration to New Zealand.²⁷

Pacific identity thrived in the Greater Ponsonby region in the 1960s and 1970s, so much so that despite the efforts of many to remove and subsequently forget Pacific peoples' influence on the area, their legacy remains strong and obvious to see for those who care enough to pay attention to what is right in front of them.

²⁴ Carlyon and Morrow, 129.

²⁵ Carlyon and Morrow, 135.

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<https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/education/65694541/richmond-road-school-parents-protest-about-bilingual-unit>

²⁷ Fresno-Calleja, "Trans/locating Pacific Identities — From the Small Island to the Largest Polynesian City in the World", 211-212.

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