

White Privilege: The Hidden Benefits

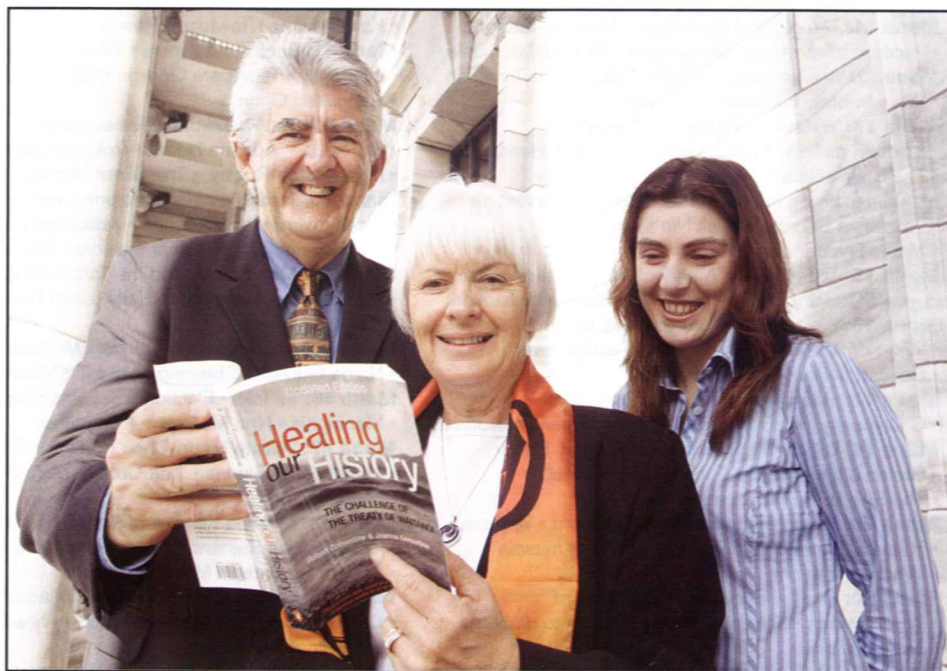
For more than 20 years Robert Consedine has campaigned for greater understanding of the Treaty of Waitangi by all New Zealanders. His special mission has been to reach fellow Pakeha. His best-selling book "Healing Our History" (Penguin) has been revised and updated, in collaboration with his daughter Joana, and re-launched for election year. The following excerpt is abridged from one of the new chapters. For more information go to: www.waitangi.co.nz

The environment of Koukourarata or Port Levy on Banks Peninsula is spectacular and the silence begins to calm my grieving heart. Standing at the top of the urupa, I view the harbour before me in all its colours as the setting sun creates a canvas of contrasting light across the water and into the valleys. In the ground at my feet, slightly higher up the hill than her Tikao and Manawatu ancestors, Irihapeti Ramsden (Ngai Tahu/Rangitane), my friend, colleague, mentor and fellow traveller on the journey, lay in her final resting place.

Banks Peninsula was 'purchased' by the Crown in three blocks. Between 1849 and 1856 negotiations occurred at Port Cooper, Port Levy and Akaroa. Commitments were made about Maori reserves and natural resources. Most of these promises, however, were not kept, and as a result of these Crown acts most Ngai Tahu of Banks Peninsula were driven off the land and lost their turangawaewae.

Irihapeti's anger about the plight and place of her people and other indigenous peoples was never far below the surface. She had endured ridicule, like most prophetic people, in her struggle to develop her lasting legacy of cultural safety. As is the lot of many indigenous peoples, some of the criticism included the added sting of racism. Yet the levelling influence of a mischievous sense of humour prevented her from ever becoming bitter—whatever the provocation.

Standing on top of the urupa that day, looking out over the land and sea, caused me to reflect, once again, on my connections to this country, the differences in the life journeys of myself and my friend Irihapeti. Although



Authors Robert and Joana Consedine present a copy of their new edition to the speaker, Margaret Wilson.

she never raised the subject directly in the many years we worked together, I became increasingly aware of the many privileges I enjoyed as a white middle-class male as we travelled and worked together throughout New Zealand.

What I took for granted, she fought for daily. This was evident in a range of different ways: the way people deferred to me in conversation; the appointments I could secure for both of us (often only after vouching for her competence and political reliability) that would not have been readily available to her alone; the patronising way she was 'tolerated' in some groups; the way I almost never had to think about 'being Pakeha' in the way she had to think about 'being Maori'; and the fact that I could worry about racism without being seen as 'self-interested'. I could express alternative views and not be seen as speaking

for all Pakeha; did not have to educate my children to be aware of how systemic racism may impact on their lives; was not singled out as a failure or a success because of my culture; and had always been free to criticise the government of the day without being seen as a demanding Pakeha seeking more benefits for my own people. I could have an argument with a colleague, or be late for a meeting, without these 'failings' being attributed to my culture. Never once did I have to carry the cultural stereotypes of laziness, violence, trouble-making, poor parenting and living by 'Maori time'.

My experience with Irihapeti, and increasing knowledge of New Zealand's colonial history, made me more aware of the immense benefits I had simply inherited by virtue of belonging to the majority culture. I live in a system that, despite significant

limitations, largely reflects my cultural values. But while I have a love of and pride in my Irish Catholic Pakeha culture and history, it stands alongside my awareness of the privileges I have inherited as a result of the dispossession of Maori.

What is White Privilege?

White privilege is based on a set of assumptions about what is regarded as neutral, normal and universally available.

Says James Baldwin: 'The biggest problem with white privilege is the invisibility it maintains to those who benefit from it most. The inability to recognize that many of the advantages whites hold are a direct result of the disadvantages of other people ...' In New Zealand white privilege evolved in colonial times where structures were put in place that were designed to meet the needs of Pakeha settlers.

Immigration, assimilation and integration policies directly benefited Pakeha and marginalised Maori, yet these systemic structural benefits remain 'invisible' to most Pakeha.

White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, codes, tools and blank checks. It is crucial, if we are to further this debate, to understand the origins of the invisible systems of institutional racism and policies from which Pakeha have benefited.

Maori Land: The Historical Foundation of Settler Wealth

In the 19th century there was nothing unusual about the dis-possession of aboriginal peoples by European powers. Despite solemn commitments by the British at Waitangi and some legal protection, what happened in New Zealand was normal for the times.

After assuming sovereignty in New Zealand, Britain brought Maori under its colonial authority. That meant British governors imposed a legal process intended to deny, ignore and de-legitimise the tribal and kinship system that underlay traditional Maori society, making Maori structures and systems illegal. Maori were 'stripped of their tribal and kinship

identity... rendered institutionally naked to their enemies, completely deprived of the shield of social identity . . . [and] made strangers in their own native land'. As in all colonised countries, the colonised people (Maori) were unilaterally assigned a place in the new system defined by the coloniser (the British).

In 1840 all land and resources were recognised by the Crown as being owned by Maori hapu, under Maori customary tenure. There had been pre-Treaty 'sales', but these were thoroughly investigated. The 'Chief Protector of Aborigines', George Clarke, who had been appointed on 6 April 1840, returned some land to the Crown—but not to the Maori owners. Because Clarke was also responsible for purchasing Maori land on behalf of the Crown he had a clear conflict of interest. In 1842 he asked to be relieved of his land-purchasing role, and this was agreed to.

Fraudulent land deals had started well before the Native Land Courts were set up in the 1860s, despite the explicit royal instructions from the Marquis of Normanby that 'the acquisition of land by the Crown for the future settlement of British subjects must be confined to such districts as the natives can alienate, without distress or serious inconvenience to themselves'. The 'Right of Pre-emption', which made the Crown the sold land agent, was included in the Treaty in order that the Crown could protect Maori from land sharks. Maori were not allowed to sell directly to settlers.

But in the event the Crown became the biggest land shark of all. The Waitangi Tribunal's 81 claim reports and 29 research reports detail widespread and systemic theft and fraud by Crown agents, to the ultimate benefit of the government and British settlers. And yet all the transactions by the Crown in the following examples are still considered legal sales, so the land involved cannot be reclaimed:

- In 1840, the centre of Auckland city (3000 acres) was bought from local Maori for cash and goods worth £341. Within nine months a mere 44 acres was resold for £24,275.

- In 1845, 16,000 acres of Ngati Whatua land were retained by the Crown without compensation.
- In 1850, in suburban Auckland, 700 acres, 'after prolonged and wearisome interviews' were bought for £5000 and one-third of this was then sold immediately for £32,000. The whole block eventually realised £100,000.
- From 1844 through to the 1860s, 34 million acres of land passed from Ngai Tahu to the Crown for a total of £8750. In effect the Crown paid six one-hundredths of one penny for each acre purchased.
- In North Canterbury, 'two years prior to concluding the purchase of 1,140,000 acres from Ngai Tahu for £500, the government actually sold a block of land containing 30,000 acres for £15,000, which on a per-acre equivalent was 1142 times more than Ngai Tahu was paid two years later. It was also more than the Crown paid for all Ngai Tahu's 34.5 million acres'.

Historian Jim McAloon describes another government strategy that contravened the Treaty of Waitangi. This policy forbade Maori to lease land to settlers directly. 'This edict proved essential in the purchase of the Wairarapa and Hawke's Bay, for it threatened Ngati Kahungunu income and left them with little choice but to sell in order to raise capital, despite the obviously low price'.

Legislation passed to alienate Maori land proliferated. From 1865–90, some 360 Acts of Parliament were passed that affected Maori land. Another 199 Acts came into force in the period 1891–1908. In fact the entire infrastructure of New Zealand was initially paid for by Maori, as their land was alienated and sold to settlers by the Crown at staggering profits.

Gaining possession of New Zealand had cost the British government a derisory £3365/18s, with 'gifts for Maori' valued at an additional £562/1/5.

The true value of the overwhelming transfer of wealth from Maori to settler society over the past 165 years is impossible to calculate. When Ngai Tahu accepted \$170

million in 1998 as a full and final settlement of their claim, their chief negotiator, Sir Tipene O'Regan, stated that the full value of their South Island claim was about \$16 billion. O'Regan observed that 'this level of generosity to Pakeha society has never been acknowledged'.

Native Land Courts

The Native Land Acts, which created the Native Land Courts of the early 1860s, were supposed to 'acknowledge Maori rights as British subjects by recognising their legal right to all their land and allowing them to do what they chose with it, including getting full market value if they sold it'.

In practice, however, the Native Land Courts became a vehicle for further Maori dispossession. A leading Maori scholar, Sir Hugh Kawharu, has called the courts a 'veritable engine of destruction for any tribe's tenure of land, anywhere'. Historian Bryan D. Gilling notes that the courts have been 'the subject of sustained condemnation by historians as the central instrument of colonial oppression, depriving Maori of their lands peacefully and with a minimum of inconvenient fuss'.

Government Policies

Although downstream economic benefits to Pakeha were obviously not evenly spread, new settlers arrived in a country that was governed by, and for the benefit of, primarily Anglo-Celtic immigrants. Maori became increasingly marginalised in a process that was systemic. It was an English, largely male landowning Parliament that spawned New Zealand's criminal justice system, land courts, education and health systems. Maori were systematically excluded from any influence or decision-making. Hundreds of laws were passed without any reference to a Maori view, let alone Maori authority.

The idea of power-sharing with Maori, as guaranteed in the Treaty of Waitangi, was anathema to most settlers. The so-called guarantee to Maori (in Article Two of the Treaty) of *tino rangatiratanga*—unqualified exercise of authority—was denied time and

again. Maori were expected to discard their traditional way of life, including their language, as the new settler government proceeded to pass an overwhelming number of policies that ensured British 'rule' was normalised. Maori were denied ordinary citizenship rights that Pakeha took for granted.

The Old Age Pension

The introduction of the old age pension in 1898 highlights the ways Maori have been denied a range of welfare benefits to which they were legally entitled. Despite the equal opportunity underpinning the Act, Deputy Registrars were instructed to make Maori access to pensions extremely difficult. A decision was made to refer all Maori claims for pensions to the Native Land Court, which then had to place them in front of a magistrate, effectively slowing the process.

A wide range of mechanisms was used against Maori, including removing a significant number of Maori from the pension rolls.

For those Maori who managed to stay on the roll the most common discriminatory policy was to reduce their pension to two-thirds of the amount paid to Europeans. In 1904 a decision made by New Plymouth magistrate Thomas Hutchinson to pay a reduced rate of pension (£12 rather than £18) to a Maori pensioner 'set a precedent for an unofficial policy which lasted over 40 years'. From 1925 the maximum Maori pension rate was £32.6s per annum, or 71 per cent of the maximum of £45/10s. In 1927 many Maori pensions were below £20, less than half the rate paid to Pakeha. While officials were targeting Maori with these administrative mechanisms designed to block their entitlement to pensions, 'Maori pensioners were starving'.

Other Social Welfare Benefits

Social security benefits followed the same discriminatory pattern. Maori were promised that the Social Security Act 1938 would mean a fresh start of new rights and entitlement. Yet a loophole was provided by section 72 (2). 'In the first few years of administering social security, Social Security Department officers

used this to continue their earlier pattern of clear-cut discrepancy between Maori and Pakeha payments by disbursing Maori benefits at a consistently lower rate. In the early 1940s leaders in Rotorua and Ratana communities complained that not one Maori in their district was receiving full payment'.

World War I and World War II

After World War I Pakeha soldiers went into a ballot for land for resettlement, but returned Maori soldiers did not. Apirana Ngata thought it might be seen as 'improper [for] the Crown to earmark land for Maori soldiers when it was popularly supposed that Maori had sufficient land of their own'.

Provision for Maori was therefore made out of Maori tribal lands. A clause in the Native Land Adjustment Act 1916 enabled Maori to either sell land to the Crown or set their own land aside for soldiers who had been discharged.

During World War II the Maori War Effort Organisation, approved by Cabinet in June 1942, operated with relative autonomy in profoundly Maori ways. Custom and tradition were central to the functioning of this voluntary organisation, which involved all tribes. While its primary purpose was military (recruitment for the Maori Battalion), it also came to have a welfare function. Some 315 tribal committees were formed, co-ordinated by 41 executive committees.

The popularity and the heroism of the Maori Battalion began to have a positive impact on Pakeha attitudes to Maori. But despite this, it was not until the late 1940s that 'equal levels of age, widows' and invalids' benefits were accorded to Maori beneficiaries, and this was achieved in small stages as Maori protests made dents in the government's policy'.

White Privilege 'Normalised'

The dispossession of Maori land as well as the impact of the Native Land Courts and of successive social welfare policies demonstrates how the colonial infrastructure excluded Maori and guaranteed 'white privilege'. Every institutional aspect of the new society was

imported and implanted, and the wealth owned by Maori was systemically transferred to the new settlers. White privilege was further reinforced through a long-term policy to ensure that only 'suitable' British and other European immigrants, with a few exceptions, immigrated to New Zealand until the early 1970s. The emerging majority British culture guaranteed that the New Zealand Parliament governed primarily in the interests of settlers. This 'white' immigration policy only changed with a labour shortage in the early 1970s.

The full impact of these major policies has taken generations to emerge and intensify. The 1907 Suppression of Tohunga Act and assimilation policies that required Maori to abandon their culture and become English were other examples of policies that discriminated against Maori.

Public works legislation theoretically applied to all citizens, but there is overwhelming evidence that Maori were targeted disproportionately for public works schemes.

Although some individual settlers had mutually beneficial relationships with Maori, most people's attitudes were shaped by the beliefs of the time, which portrayed Europeans and European practices as superior and 'normal'. Maori were expected to learn the Pakeha way of life; Pakeha certainly did not expect to learn the Maori way of life. Cultural misunderstanding was naturally rife. For example, the Muriwhenua land report notes that 'transactions posited as land sales by one race were contracts for long-term social relationships for the other'. Maori had no word for sale and differences in understanding were endemic.

Maori as 'The Other'

In this colonial climate emerged the idea of Maori as 'the other'. In essence this was a way of thinking that meant Maori and Maori culture were seen as being 'less than' and 'inferior to' everyone and everything European. Settler thinking was that Maori were lazy,

immoral, degraded and dirty, and suffered from 'natural depravity'. This thinking created a rationale that made white supremacy inevitable, particularly as British settlers became the majority.

The notion of Maori as 'the other' remains deeply embedded in the unconscious of Pakeha New Zealand. Otago University lecturer Brendan Hokowhitu sums up the phenomenon thus: 'Racially based traits imposed on Maori . . . were the antithesis of those qualities desired by Europeans . . . representing Maori as physical, unintelligent and savage; a process that continues unabated'. The savage was represented as 'immoral and sinful, ruled by mythical ritual, and burdened by an encumbering collective', while the 'civilizers' were 'virtuous, secular, liberated in thought and autonomous'. However, while Maori and tikanga Maori (Maori culture) were viewed as abnormal and inferior, the dominant culture approved of aspects of Maori culture that were in accord with colonial

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thinking. Consequently, kapahaka and ka mate as well as Maori success in war and sport were praised, and cited as further evidence of Maori as the savage other.

Irihapeti Ramsden's thinking about Maori as 'the other' was prophetic. 'If you think Maori have experienced racism when we are poor, powerless and marginalised, you wait and see what happens when we begin to become more powerful and successful. While we remain in our colonised state, know "our" place and remain "the other", it will be less evident. But, watch the climate change when we begin to threaten the privileges of the dominant culture and their normality, which Pakeha take for granted and assume is "their" right. Then we will really experience the deep ugly underbelly of racism that exists in this country.'

We didn't have long to wait.

Despite the political, social and legal advances of the last 20 years, Pakeha amnesia concerning our colonial history remains. The public uproar against the Labour government's Closing the Gaps policy in 2000, designed to target poverty among Maori and Pacific Islanders, revealed a significant level of confusion and racism in the majority culture. Many New Zealanders still do not want to face the ugly side of our colonial history. Others claim that colonialism happened so long ago that there are no contemporary outcomes. Still others argue that colonisation was for the benefit of Maori.

The source of Pakeha privilege remains embedded in the functioning of our institutions. There are some outstanding examples of the fact that our democratic system still functions on the assumption that the Pakeha way of doing things is 'normal', and fails to include Te Ao Maori—the Maori world view.

Conservation: A Recent Pakeha Discovery?

What are modern conservationist values? How have they come to be in opposition to Maori rights?

The colonisation of plants and animals was driven by the same imperative as the

colonisation of the 'natives'. New Zealand scientist and historian Ross Galbreath records that the 'British colonists arriving in New Zealand came armed with the expectation that all the native life—plants, animals and people alike—would inevitably be supplanted and displaced'. He further contends that 'ideas concerning the native people on the one hand, and native plants and animals on the other, were closely connected'.

It was expressions of alarm from Britain and the subsequent promotion of protection ideas that prompted some small policy changes, including colonial laws, from the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. This initiated the preservation of some native bush, flora and fauna. But it took mass protests from the 1960s to see the government act to 'conserve, protect and preserve the eco-systems that . . . give this country its unique character'.

When Pakeha did discover conservation, around 1900, this was pretty much at the expense of Maori traditional use. Bird protection laws made no exceptions for traditional harvest. Distinguished doctor, anthropologist and Maori leader Sir Peter Buck summed up the contradiction in 1910. 'There is no greater menace to the animal life of this country . . . than the so-called sporting proclivities of the white man . . . the attitude taken up by the Maori race in this country in that respect was totally different. The Maori never killed for sport, he killed for the pot'. The modern conservation movement could learn much from studying this history.

Foreshore and Seabed: The Latest Pakeha Land Grab

At a meeting one evening with concerned local residents, our local MP attempted to explain the Labour government's response to the foreshore and seabed controversy. A group of about 60 vocal Pakeha had arrived and the atmosphere was electric. Some were so angry they refused to allow the MP to explain the government's policy. The anger was palpable: 'Those bloody Maori are getting everything'; 'More privileges for Maori'; 'Haven't they got enough?'; 'Now we can't even go to the beach'—it was a litany of fear and prejudice.

The Court of Appeal in June 2003 decided in the case brought by Ngati Apa, Ngati Koata and others in Marlborough that 'the Maori Land Court has jurisdiction to determine the status of the foreshore and seabed'. It has this jurisdiction under Te Ture Whenua Maori Act 1993. The case was designed to protect commercial rights to coastal space. The judgement further noted that 'the transfer of sovereignty did not affect customary property. They are interests preserved by the common law [of England] until extinguished in accordance with the [new] law . . . the legislation relied on in the High Court does not extinguish any Maori Customary property in seabed or foreshore'.

This decision affirms that Maori held customary property rights to land at the time of Pakeha settlement. It confirms that those rights were not dependent on or derived from the Treaty of Waitangi or Crown recognition. Furthermore, these customary rights continue to exist after the Crown assumed sovereignty. The Court of Appeal noted that 'native property over land is entitled to be respected and cannot be extinguished, "at least in times of peace" otherwise than by the consent of the owners'.

Despite the limited nature of the decision, public fear and confusion, mainly created by politicians and the media, was widespread. Subsequently, all major political parties broadly supported the Labour government's proposed seabed and foreshore legislation, which aims to place the foreshore and seabed in Crown ownership.

All parties thus committed to extinguishing Maori property rights. Little wonder many Maori leaders labelled it confiscation, and more than 20,000 Maori from all walks of life, supported by many Pakeha, marched on Parliament in 2004 in the biggest hikoi in the country's history. The current position of the mainstream political parties is to confiscate Maori citizenship rights only. These are the rights guaranteed in Article Three of the Treaty of Waitangi to all New Zealand citizens. No Pakeha—non-Maori—rights are being touched. This is highly discriminatory. On 18 November 2004 this legislation was passed by

a Labour government, with the support of NZ First. Will future generations look back and ask how a government in the new millennium, with the vast knowledge, expertise and resources at its disposal, could repeat the shameful land confiscations of its colonial forebears? Will they discover that Pakeha privilege was, once again, guaranteed at the expense of Maori legal rights? Or will they look back and celebrate a government and a political system that had the maturity and the courage to do what was right and just—and legal?

Democracy: Tyranny of the Majority

The right for Maori to exercise full authority—tino rangatiratanga, as guaranteed in Article Two of the Treaty—has always been marginalised. However, the extent of Maori exclusion from political power in the majority system may well be driving some of the current political struggle. The nation state has failed to provide Maori with the same citizenship rights (as in Article Three) as other New Zealanders.

In New Zealand, democracy was designed to exclude Maori from political power, and there is no more obvious example than in the restriction of Maori to four parliamentary seats right up until 1996. In 1867 Maori were thus considerably under-represented: some 50,000 were given four seats, whereas some 250,000 Europeans had 72 seats. A Maori MP had to represent 12,500 constituents, while a non-Maori (European) MP had only 3472 constituents to look after. There is overwhelming evidence that Maori, representing Maori interests, cannot get elected at any level of the system in a First Past the Post (FPP) system.

This fundamental issue emerged at the time of the Royal Commission on the Electoral System in 1986. The commission considered the FPP system 'unfair, inequitable, and unrepresentative of the general population'. It noted that FPP 'favours the election of middle-class, middle-aged Pakeha (upper-income) males'.

In 1996 the introduction of the Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) Representation

system enabled Maori to gain representation in Parliament proportional to their population size for the first time. Without Maori seats in Parliament and ministerial appointments to health boards allowed for in legislation, Maori would be left very marginal in all areas of governance. In the current political climate these special mechanisms are wrongly being called privileges.

Comedian Mike King summed it up succinctly when he delivered a message to what he called 'all those worshippers of the democratic system': 'I have this to say: democracy only works when you are the majority. As soon as you become the minority, it's a pretty stink system ... just ask Maori'.

Conclusion

New Zealand, through its colonial history, has been designed primarily to benefit Pakeha. Maori were required to fit into Pakeha culture and systems. Only the exotic features of Maori culture were encouraged, where they benefited the country in areas such as tourism and sport.

The legacy is the exclusion of an enormously rich indigenous culture – the marginalisation of an entire way of life.

The appalling record of intergenerational discrimination against Maori needs to be considered alongside the contemporary assertions of Maori privilege. In the mid-1980s New Zealand began to move towards being a more Treaty-based, bicultural society—one that began to recognise the existence of Maori culture in its structures. It has been a painfully slow change for Maori, and an extremely rich experience for those Pakeha who faced their fears and had the courage to begin the bicultural journey. Tragically, in 2004, white supremacy has reasserted itself in all its ugliness, as the major political parties compete to take New Zealand back to a time when Maori 'knew their place' and white was right. But it won't happen, can't happen, because Maori, after 165 years of marginalisation, are better equipped than ever to confront the racism of the political system and find a way forward, drawing on their own strength and the inspiration of their tipuna.

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