

Thank you for using our printer friendly story page.

[Return to story](#)

Carousel Bayrd: Housing bias remains, and it must be stopped

By Carousel Baird

April 24, 2007

"I'm glad you're interested in the apartment," the Madison landlord said to me, as I toured the two-bedroom, two-bath rental. "Because the person before you was a n-----, and I don't want to rent to her."

I can only imagine the look on my face when I heard those words.

As we mark Fair Housing Month in April, it is important to take note that housing discrimination is alive and well in Dane County. The problem is, most people don't know they're being discriminated against. Take the person who looked at the above-mentioned apartment just before me, a black woman. Do you think the landlord told her, "I'm not going to rent this to you because of your race"? Do you think when the landlord later told her the apartment was rented, she could tell the landlord was lying?

Discrimination is subtle. Landlords and real estate agents and lenders are out there hiding their biases -- by quoting black families a higher rent price, by requiring Hispanics to provide application fees, by telling single moms the housing is taken when it isn't. It is illegal to deny housing because of race, gender, age, family and marital status, arrest and conviction record, national origin and disability, just to name a few protected categories. But when you don't get the place, how can you tell?

Subtle actions or not, the numbers speak loud and clear. In 2006, an estimated 2 million incidents of housing discrimination occurred in the United States. Wisconsin's share was more than 300 housing discrimination complaints filed. Of course, these numbers are just the tip of the iceberg; the majority of cases go unreported because the majority of people being discriminated against have no idea it is happening.

And the home ownership market is just as bad. Glance at the past month's papers to learn about the millions of foreclosures taking place across the country. This is largely due to predatory lending practices, which happens when uninformed home buyers are given subprime home loans.

In Dane County, minorities are more likely to receive these subprime loans, and factors like income and credit history cannot account for this racial discrepancy. Yes, predatory lending is here in Dane County. And it is disproportionately affecting racial minorities.

We can combat housing discrimination. We can urge all levels of government -- federal, state, county, city -- to enforce the housing discrimination laws already in place. We need to support giving our

