

# #BlackLivesMatter

Will McMahon introduces this issue of *cjm*

*In the last year, the USA has been shaken by the deaths of a number of black people at the hands of local police forces. A social movement has grown up around these deaths that has adopted the slogan 'black lives matter'. Fuelled by mobile phone coverage and circulated on social media, there are images showing black people being shot dead while running away or surrendering to police, or being dragged to the ground by multiple police officers and killed in the ensuing struggle.*

Even when a death does not result, there are images that can be hard to watch. For example, in early June 2015, mobile phone footage was circulated on social media from a Texas pool party showing a bikini-wearing black 14 year old girl being pulled over and crunched to the ground and sat on by a white police officer holding a gun.

On 17 June, 21 year old Dylann Storm Roof walked into the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston South Carolina and sat with those attending a bible study for nearly an hour before pulling out his handgun and perpetrating a massacre, killing nine people. One survivor recalled him saying: 'You all rape women and you're taking over our country'.

Had Roof been a Muslim, terrorism would have been invoked; as it was he was a common or garden white racist who, it was subsequently reported, had 'self-radicalised' on line and had authored a 2,500 word manifesto posted on the self-published website, The Last Rhodesian. At the end of June, six black churches were burned down in the USA and, while this was not a new phenomenon, the symbolism of burning down a core institution in Black American life following the Charleston mass murder is clear enough.

In *A People's History of the United States*, Howard Zinn details the history of a nation founded upon one of the greatest genocides of modern history. The aboriginal North American population, who, outgunned and systematically lied to, with treaty after treaty being signed and then broken by white men (who did indeed speak with forked tongue), and despite a heroic combination of negotiation and resistance, were subject to a two-century long massacre.

Having almost liquidated the original inhabitants, the colonial occupiers then developed a slave trade to exploit

the land they had stolen – millions of Africans lived and died as slaves, either in transit or through physical exploitation.

The linkages between slavery in the plantations, and the black civil rights movement that came to fruition in post-war USA, and the ongoing contemporary campaigns for equality in the face of racism embedded in police forces and other institutions, seem clear enough from a vantage point across the North Atlantic. Genocide and slavery cast a long shadow and have centuries-long consequences.

Meanwhile in the UK, it is not so long ago that hot-house think tankery led some to suggest that, the UK was a 'post-racial' society and now a land of multi-cultural milk and honey, where chicken tikka masala was

the favourite dish, rap music the most popular of popular music and couples from different ethnic backgrounds could walk the streets without a second glance. One implication being that whatever the configuration of the UK's racial politics, there are few similarities with the USA

Yet according to the recent report from the Young Review, *Improving outcomes for young black and/or Muslim men in the Criminal Justice System*, there is greater disproportionality in the number of black people in prisons in the UK than in the United States. Data recently published in *The Guardian*

show the proportion of black and ethnic minority children and young people held, in a thankfully much diminished youth justice system, has risen by 66 per cent since 2005/2006 with the Asian proportion having risen by over 75 per cent. The proportion of young white prisoners has fallen by approximately 20 per cent in the same period. Today one in fifteen young prisoners are now Asian, and one in five are black. The campaign Stopwatch has highlighted the disproportionate number of black people impacted by police stop and search, and there are now significant concerns being raised about the likely disproportionate sentencing of black men under joint enterprise convictions. All of this should give pause for thought.

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a pittance or shipped off to the slavery in the 'new world'. Murder, massacre, rape and pillage of black populations was the *modus operandi* of the Empire.

The resistance to colonial rule was fierce, taking a firm hold from the second Opium War in China (1850-1856) and the 1857-1858 great sepoy rebellion in India. A century later in Africa, the rising of the Land and Freedom Army in 1950s Kenya, and the overthrow of white rule in Rhodesia in the 1970s signalled different moments in the slow eclipse of colonial governance.

By the time Ian Smith, truly the 'last Rhodesian', had surrendered power at Lancaster House to avoid military humiliation, the migration of black populations to the metropolitan centre had been established for generations. They came to live in British cities whose streets were lined with buildings of Victorian grandeur paid for by the systematic looting disguised as the integration of 'backward' colonies in to the world capitalist system.

In his recent BBC series, Britain's Forgotten Slave Owners, historian David Olusoga uncovers the records of the thousands of slave owners who were not just the super-rich, but widows, clergymen and shopkeepers, ordinary members of the middle-classes, many of who never met a slave but had lived off their exploitation. By the time of the formal abolition of slavery, the benefits that sustained the colonial economy had seeped into every corner of domestic society as had the ideologies that sustained it; 'compensation' of over £17 billion in today's money being paid to the slave owners with the former slaves being paid nothing.

So, perhaps rather than a 'post racial' perspective, is it not time UK society began to come to terms with embedded racism born of hundreds of years of colonialism?

**Rebecca Roberts** explores the social and historical context to the ethnic disproportionality in criminal justice, while **J M Moore** widens the frame by suggesting that the rising percentage of black and minority ethnic people incarcerated is a case of Empire coming home, arguing there is nothing 'new' in the so-called 'New

Penalty', just a movement of punitiveness from the colonial periphery to the metropole.

**Aggrey Burke** challenges us to think about the links between Britain's colonial past, and the black experience of loss and trauma in contemporary society, and **Anthony Gunter** writes about the experience of 'black youth beyond the criminal (in)justice statistics'. He describes the experience of discipline and punishment in the classroom and on the streets. **Jules Holroyd's** piece on the anatomy of institutional racism describes how deep rooted racial stereotypes are and **Rebekah Delsol** analyses contemporary racial profiling in Europe and the UK and the damage that it is causing to those groups and communities who are singled out for police attention. **Matt Ford** brings together data highlighting areas of life where people are penalised for the colour of their skin – the 'ethnic penalty'.

But this issue of **cjm** opens with a personal story from **Janet Alder**, whose brother Christopher, a paratrooper veteran of the conflicts in the South Atlantic and Ireland, died on the floor of a police custody suite in 2008. She describes how his death, captured on CCTV, was accompanied by police officers talking about 'banana boats' and the Ku Klux Klan. The spying that Janet and her family were subsequently subjected to will form part of the Pitchford Inquiry into undercover policing. Janet's article is the edited transcript of a speech she gave at the February 2015 conference 'Police corruption, racism and spying' co-hosted by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies with The Monitoring Group. Film of all of the introductions made at the conference can be found on the Centre's website by entering the term 'spying' into the website's search engine.

To end this issue, **Steve Tombs** reviews Simon Pemberton's book *Harmful Societies. Understanding social harm*. ■

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