

How much evidence do you need?

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Racism permeates societies in ways that make it hard for most of us most of the time to recognise how omnipotent it is. Racism is also in the ether in a much wider sense than is usually recognised. Thinking that is racist in origin, in underlying argument, is used in much talk by affluent people when they try to justify why others are poor. Others are often assumed to be of different 'stock', not to have the supposedly inherent abilities of those in power. It is often suggested, if not that often directly, that many people are not well-off because they 'have not got what it takes'. In essence such an argument is no more or less racist than those arguments that people with darker skin pigments are somehow inferior to those with lighter skins.

Overt racism in 21st century British works on the basis of skin colour first and religion second. In the past religion ranked higher as a marker of who were to be discriminated against (Catholics, Jews and Huguenots for instance). The signs and labels change even though the underlying ways in which groups are stigmatized and devalued remain very similar over time. Racism occurs when it is suggested that some peoples are less valuable, less needed than others, have less of a right to be and to things than others. This is how it is put in reports of surveys by academics.

"The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Health (Nazroo 2001) finds there is also 'a sense of being a devalued member of a devalued low status group' and the 'stress of being a victim of racial harassment.' and 'suggests a relationship between experiences of racial harassment, perceptions of racial discrimination and a range of health outcomes across different groups' which are independent of socio-economic effects." ((Roberts and McMahan 2008) page 42)

And how many people experience being victims of racial harassment?: "Over a **third** of minority groups reported experiencing overt racism in Britain in 2005 and at least five times as many racially motivated crimes occurred as were reported ."¹

And how racist is the population at large?. That you can find in numerous surveys depending on what you think a racist attitude might be. You might think racism is more common amongst the working class, however **thirty percent** of the supposedly most influential movers and shakers of London surveyed in late 2007 said they would not vote for a London Major if the candidate were Muslim²

¹ Lewis, M. and N. Newman (2007). Challenging Attitudes, Perceptions and Myths. Report for the Commission on Integration and Cohesion. London, The Commission on Integration and Cohesion. (page 6).

² Evening Standard. London. Tuesday 13 November: pp.8-9

And, when a senior police officer in the London Metropolitan Police Force complained of racist discrimination, it was repeatedly suggested in the press that because he was on a high salary he should not complain³. There is great ignorance.

On ignorance, education policy “itself remains unaddressed, as a source or carrier of racism...”⁴ many more black pupils are excluded from schools due to “systematic, racial discrimination in the application of disciplinary and exclusions policy ... [and in 2006 we learnt that] Black pupils were ‘**five times** less likely to be registered as ‘gifted and talented’”⁵. Those who are most vocal and confident in their criticism show how on race New Labour’s education policy has been assessed overall as being in its effect: “actively involved in the defence, legitimisation and extension of White supremacy”⁶. This is through the choices that are being made over what is taught, how ideas of inherent difference are propagated, and whose version of history and geography, literature and science is presented in our national curriculum. But the wider face of racism in education is IQism – the idea that inherited ‘talent’ exists and hence diverges between different social groups including people grouped by race/ethnicities.

Ignorance was one of the five great social evils identified over 60 years ago. Another was “Want”, and the most acute want in Britain tends to effect those which are most often the target of racists. In the year 2000 mothers labelled as asylum seekers had to beg if for their new born children they “ran out of milk ... mid-week, having spent their single £25 [food] voucher...”⁷. In 1943 Winston Churchill had written that “...there is no finer investment for any community than putting milk into babies.”⁸

Over a thousand refugees were recorded as having died or been killed due to government control on migration in just a three year period in the late 1990s. Two brothers from India tried to get to Britain holding on within the undercarriage of a plane. One survived. Just after the end of this three year period another two boys aged 15 and 16 were found dead in the landing gear of a plane that had arrived in Brussels from Mali. One had written a letter found on his body⁹.

“Excellencies, gentlemen – members and those responsible in Europe, it is to your solidarity and generosity that we appeal for your help in Africa. If you see that we have sacrificed ourselves and lost our lives, it is because we suffer too much in Africa and need your help to struggle against poverty and war ... Please excuse us very much for daring to write a letter.”

³ In the last few days of August 2008, on radio 4’s “Today Program” (including on 1 Sept.)

⁴ Ball, S. J. (2008). The Education Debate. Bristol, Policy Press. (page 172).

⁵ Ibid. (page 173, quoting in turn from the Independent on Sunday’s release of an unpublished Department for Education and Schools report in December 2006).

⁶ Ibid. (page 172, quoting in turn David Gillborn from 2005)

⁷ Hayter, T. (2004). Open Borders: The case against immigration controls. London, Pluto Press. (pages 108-109).

⁸ Timmins, N. (2001). The Five Giants: A biography of the welfare state, new edition. London, HarperCollins. (page 47).

⁹ (on page 103 of Hayter 2004 (see above)– also see pages 108-109 for how those who survive are then treated).

If it were white children dying in the undercarriage of a plane you would have heard of their stories, the letters, lives, wishes, hopes and fears.

The Labour government of the millennium introduced new laws in Britain to fine lorry drivers if stowaways were found in their vehicles, with no exceptions: "...the Conservatives asked if drivers would be fined if the asylum-seeker on board was a baby? They would. What if the baby had died en route? The police would have to investigate whether he or she had died in British territory before deciding if a fine was necessary."¹⁰ As long as the baby is long dead you would not be fined for accidentally bringing it into the country, but by implication even if you were to kill the baby...

They were not thinking of a white baby when they said that. They were not thinking that much at all.

After Ignorance and Want, amongst the five evils next came Idleness. The years of life people suffer from being unemployed or underemployed can be estimated given data on their ethnicities, qualification, residents and occupation¹¹. Years of life are lost from being more likely to be convicted to a prison sentence, or a longer sentence for committing a crime if you are black rather than white. In 1991 the census revealed that in crude terms a man was **twelve times** more likely to be in prison if he were black¹². By "...2005, BME people accounted for approximately 24% of the male prison population and 28% of the female prison population (Home Office 2006a). Between 1995 and 2003 the numbers of BME prison doubled from 8,797 to 17,775 (Home Office 2006c). [When] The Home Office changed the recording method and began using new census categories." (Roberts and McMahon 2008).

The Fourth evil was disease. Most people in Britain who are too ill to work due to be ill health now suffer from mental illnesses rather than physical ones. It is worth again simply repeating the evidence: "The 2007 census (Commission for Healthcare Audit, 2007) further highlights higher rates of admission, detention under the Mental Health Act, seclusion (being locked in a room) and referrals from criminal justice agencies. For men and women, the rates of admission for BME groups were over three times higher than average (ibid). In the 'other Black' group, admission rates were **ten times** higher than average. For detentions under the Mental Health Act on admission, there was an increase from 39% in 2005 to 43% in 2007 with overall rates of detention higher than average among Black Caribbean, Black African, Other Black and White/Black Caribbean Mixed Groups. Seclusions were also higher than average among Black Caribbean, Other Black men and among Other white in both genders. Black Caribbean, Black African and White/Black Caribbean Mixed groups had higher than average rates by 56%, 33% and 33% respectively (ibid)." ((Roberts and McMahon 2008) page 33).

The fifth and final evil was squalor. Slums in Britain have almost all been cleared. Overcrowding for most has been rapidly declining – but by 1998-2006 – in the UK "...over an eight year period the number of statutory homeless household fell by slightly over 8%; yet, in the same period the number of non-white BME homeless

¹⁰ Cohen, N. (2004). *Pretty Straight Guys*. London, Faber and Faber (page 74).

¹¹ Simpson, L. ... et al. (forthcoming) *Local labour market profiles: jobs deficits, ethnic penalties and neighbourhood effects*, Environment and Planning A.

¹² Dorling, D. (1995) *A New Social Atlas of Britain*, Chichester: Wiley.

households increased by 14.5%. There was a striking increase in the number of homeless African/Caribbean households of between 25% and 42%” ((Roberts and McMahon 2008) pages 17 and 18). The unequal distribution of squalor continues: “33% of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis living in unfit dwellings compared to 6% White” (ibid).

British society, like many other societies, is a very racist society. A society bound together partly though ideas of racial intolerance, of inherent inability, a society in which a majority of people are willing to accept or at least ignore gross inequalities based partly on the racist views of others (and their own). This racism is most obviously manifest in attitudes to people who try to flee here (as it was before for the Huguenots, Catholics and Jews). It is least overt in official talk about the inherent abilities of some groups over others. But once you accept racism of any kind, other kinds seep into the consciousness, become more acceptable.

From the senior police officer being paid in excess of £100,000 a year to the boy from Mali found dead with a letter in his pocket, to the class of poor mainly white school children written off because they supposedly come from the ‘wrong stock’, racism is a crime that causes both gross harm and which partly constructs ethnicity. The Huguenots, Jews and Catholics partly have their places in British ethnic history recorded because of the crimes committed against them that formed them as groups and had huge impact on their lives. Without such crime, without such discrimination, ethnicity and race fade and disappear.

Main Reference

Roberts, R. and W. McMahon (2008). Debating race, ethnicity, harm and crime. London, Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.