

are we there  
yet?  
a collection  
on race and  
conservatism

Edited by Max Wind-Cowie

Collection 31

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DEMOS

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# are we there yet?

Edited by Max Wind-Cowie

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Max Wind-Cowie  
October 2011





# 1 There's no choice between prosperity and equality

Trevor Phillips

*We have an opportunity to learn from the past and to make the recovery sustainable, politically and economically, by making our path back to prosperity secure and inclusive.*

This chapter is an extract of a speech given by Trevor Phillips in 2010.

Pretty much daily now, I read that in a time of financial restraint we cannot afford our anti-discrimination and equality laws. That we cannot afford to do the right thing. That the Equality Act passed last year is bad for business. And that our Commission is a fearsome Stalinist bureaucracy terrorising wealth creators and crushing small businesses.

I want to argue that to the contrary, equality and human rights are essential to economic recovery, and that the critics of the fairness agenda are plain wrong. They are wrong because:

- They are out of step with Coalition Britain; in May 2010 the electors opted for fiscal conservatism coupled with social liberalism; people want fairness even in a time of austerity.
- Without an equality law we encourage cowboy capitalism, in which businesses cheat their fair-minded competition by treating their employees unfairly and short-changing their customers.
- At the EHRC we already know that there are many businesses that exceed even our expectations on the equality and diversity agenda – and who are prospering because of it.
- The Equality Act will help us to spend public money on those who really need it.
- There will not be a sustainable recovery unless it's an inclusive recovery.

There's no choice between prosperity...

We cannot solve our public spending problems at the expense of the poor and disadvantaged; and if jobs and prosperity return for everybody except women, ethnic minorities, the young, the old or disabled people then we will still be paying the welfare bill for people who are kept out of work by discrimination. They want to work and we need them to pay their taxes.

So whatever the answer to Britain's economic problems, in this recession, being fair, and being seen to be fair, will be central to the task of bringing Britain back to prosperity. Equality and inclusion are good for our economy. We are not making a case for special treatment. We are just asking everyone to do the right thing.

## **Culture wars**

But to read our papers and follow our media you wouldn't imagine that the fairness agenda had much to contribute to the economy. Instead, recently, the nation has been both entertained and outraged by a spate of public controversies about identity politics. So I want to start with some of the media preoccupations of the past few weeks.

Disputes about how we manage the differences between social groupings are just about the only thing that competes with the economy for volume, frequency and stridency of media coverage. Consider the record since the start of 2011. Barrels of ink spilt on:

- Age discrimination at the BBC
- Gay rights at a B&B in Cornwall
- Pakistani men and the 'grooming' of white teenagers
- Sexist behaviour among football commentators
- The Top Gear take on Mexican culture
- The Prime Minister's remarks about terrorism and integration.

From America, there has been a raging controversy about whether the tough regime presided over by Chinese mothers is the secret of educational success – or is it just a racial myth?

All of these issues had people talking. And I have probably missed some stories.

### **A new consensus**

Let us start with the discrimination cases. The law is the law – it doesn't really matter what you want it to say; what it actually says is that you may not discriminate on grounds of sexual orientation: end of.

In the bed and breakfast case if the boot had been on the other foot and someone had been turned away because they wore a cross and carried a Bible, I am pretty sure that we would have supported their case because the law is quite clear – you cannot discriminate on religious grounds either.

On grooming, both the courts and the investigation by *The Times* have shown that there is a real, despicable crime being conducted and that a specific, racialised version of it is concentrated in a particular group of communities. No amount of contextual explanation can or should disguise that fact. But Pakistani communities don't need to be defensive here, any more than African Caribbeans have to be about the disproportionate levels of gun crime in our communities; or white communities about the fact that white-collar fraud is by and large carried out by white men.

Today most reasonable people can accept that a specific group of criminals may come from a particular place or ethnic group. But we don't need to stereotype an entire community to acknowledge that fact. I think on this kind of issue, we could all do with a bit of calming down. There are just too many real causes of disadvantage and discrimination for us to be passionate about.

## **Change in public attitudes**

My first message is that things have changed. Britain has changed. And that means that our business has got to change.

In the last 30 years, we have achieved real reductions in the levels of overt and everyday discrimination that were common a generation ago. Most people would now be ashamed to think that working people like my parents were shoved into Rachman slums because they were not even entitled – many years after they had arrived – to seek social housing. The ghastly sexism we saw in *Made In Dagenham* today looks antiquated and comedic at this distance; and thank heavens, today, queer-bashing is no longer a male rite of passage but a ticket to jail.

But the fact that attitudes in general have changed should not lead us to adopt the complacency that some of the equality agenda's critics are inviting. That would be fatal for many in our society. Ask any black or gay or transsexual person who lives with the threat of hate crime. Or the learning disabled person befriended and then brutalised by bullies. Or the one in four women who have experienced domestic violence.

The gender pay gap is still unjustifiable. The educational failure of some groups, including poor white boys is a national disgrace. And the new sport of cyber-bullying has taken homophobia into the internet age.

There's still so much to do. The equality warrior's job isn't over. Far from it, but the battle has moved on to new fronts.

## **Concentrate on what matters**

Our Triennial Review published last October revealed some of the major issues for this decade: the fact that black and Pakistani babies are twice as likely to die in their first year as white or Bangladeshi babies; the dreadful educational outcomes for groups like Gypsies and Travellers, some black and some white groups; the downward spiral of outcomes for disabled people, particularly those with a history of mental illness; as well as the seemingly unshakeable employment and pay gaps facing even the most successful women and ethnic minorities.

These are the challenges that really matter in today's Britain. I've been an equality warrior for nearly 40 years now and I'm fully aware that prejudice and bigotry are still alive in Britain. But I think we need to be able to recognise our successes and stop wasting energy and resources on yesterday's battles.

Today some would like us to stay trapped in pointless disputes about words. They say they are waging a war on political correctness and doublespeak. But I think those who are still fighting the phantom armies of political correctness need to wake up and smell the coffee. They've lost the argument and to some degree lost the plot; they are really now fighting a rearguard action against the public, particularly the under-40s, who are more liberal and tolerant than ever before, as our review showed.

On the other hand there are those who still act as though we are still in the days of Alf Garnett's imagination, of men-only clubs, of routine, pervasive racism, and of the vicious baiting of disabled people. Of course, there are still many examples of such bigotry – and I will come to Sky Sports in a moment – but the difference is that, today, most of us recognise the ugly face of prejudice when we see it.

This isn't about suppressing free speech or humour. There's always been a rich vein of humour about being Jewish or black, or older, say, that pushes at the edges of our anxieties about human difference. Americans particularly – like Richard Pryor, Woody Allen and Joan Rivers – have been funny for decades and are still making us laugh. But they don't just lazily point the finger at black or Jewish or older people and invite us to laugh at them – they are smart and observant and hold up a mirror to our own shortcomings. The playground style finger pointing that now sometimes passes for comedy is cruel and bullying – and above all it just isn't funny.

Britain has moved on. In politics, too, there's now a consensus among all three major parties that we need a legal basis for the fight against unfairness and inequality. I think the politicians also agree that though we are doing better, we still have a lot of work to do.

That political consensus was embodied in the 2010 Equality Act, which provides a new, rational and scientific approach to promoting change and was supported and written by Harman, May and Featherstone (and, for what it's worth, by Phillips). The principle of equality has now risen above the left-right divide; the argument now is not about whether we need the 2010 Act but about what we do with it.

So what we really don't need is people hurling epithets at each other in the media. We may disagree about what to do about unfairness and inequality when we see it but that difference of opinion doesn't make us obnoxious or bigoted. Nor should we shirk the sort of debate triggered by the Prime Minister's speech on Saturday.<sup>1</sup> I don't agree with those who say that he was wrong to address this issue, and I don't think that any leading public figure should time their speeches according to the dictates of the English Defence League; we truly would be lost if we gave in to their bullying.

I appreciate the sensitivity in Muslim communities that has led even some of the politicians I most admire – and I am speaking here of Sadiq Khan – to respond in a way that seems uncharacteristic. But while we're talking about common values, perhaps we can also deploy a little British understanding here. I would not have used Sadiq's words and I don't agree with his sentiments. I'm also glad that the Prime Minister has not responded in kind. But it's vital to the debate that we understand the depth of feeling in a community that feels itself under siege. I do, and I have felt it continuously for most of my life.

I first saw a black man being beaten mercilessly by the police, at the age of 8, on my way home from church, outside the gates of Finsbury Park. To this day I can hear the sounds of the truncheon on bone and see the sight of the blood.

My parents left Britain for America in the late 1960s because of Powellism. The moral panic of the 1970s focused on young black men; every young black man was treated as a possible mugger; you couldn't drive while black; no one would give you a job; and too many died in police or prison custody.

I was lucky to escape through education, although many of my friends weren't. So I really do know what it feels like to have the finger pointed at your community and your culture, and I sympathise with those who feel picked on. But we cannot deal with this debate by effectively declaring some views off limits or saying that we can talk about it, just not today. That was the strategy that led to fascist parties becoming a permanent part of the political landscape in France and Holland. We have to engage with the substance.

So let me say a word about David Cameron's speech. I think that there is a great deal in what the Prime Minister said. Yes, we need to tackle extremism. Yes, I'm delighted that he set commitments to human rights and to equality as his first key benchmarks for social decency. And yes, on the tricky issue of culture, he is right that the state should not aid in the construction of walls around communities, but focus on providing support for integration.

I can give my friends cassava pone and conkie at home, but I don't need a government circular to tell me to do it, and, God forbid, I don't require my children's schools to provide it as a symbol of state approval. But if we are truly to live a common culture, Mr Cameron has to set a challenge for his ministers, and we need to hear more about how they will meet that challenge. Integration is a two-way street.

Most minority communities don't choose to be isolated; the barriers of discrimination and exclusion are built by the whole society. So the state does have a role in bringing down those barriers, first by backing determined action against discrimination, and second by ensuring that its economic strategy is paralleled by an inclusion plan that prevents cuts and unemployment isolating some communities even further. But above all we ought to be able to discuss these issues without name-calling. What the public really wants is a pragmatic, systematic approach to making our society fairer and more equal.

Both the *Top Gear* tendency, which bangs on about obnoxious feminists, and the PC lobby, which wants the Commission to be a strident, boot-faced, politically correct



thought police, are now just hanging on at the fringes of public life. They are all, like the dinosaurs, on their way out.

Britain has moved on. So we too have to move on, adopting an approach that learns from the past but is designed for the future.

### **Equality and fairness are good for our economy.**

We've faced recession before, but this time we have an opportunity to learn from the past and to make the recovery sustainable, politically and economically, by making our path back to prosperity secure and inclusive.

What might that mean in practice? A fair and inclusive recovery. First, the spending review and the cuts that follow must not fall disproportionately on already disadvantaged social groups. That is why we have launched a formal assessment of the October Spending Review's effects on social groupings protected under equality laws.

I am pleased to say that the Chancellor and the Chief Secretary have strongly supported us, and that we have the Treasury's cooperation; they too understand that unless their plans can be shown to be fair they stand little chance winning the sustained and widespread political support they need.

In particular we know that the job cuts in the public sector are likely to hit female employment massively; 40 per cent of women work in the public sector compared with 15 per cent of men. You actually don't need to do any maths to see what's going to happen here, but we do need to think what might happen to ordinary families who depend on both parents working.

Second, as thoughts now turn to the issue of growth, we also need to consider how we ensure that the recovery, however faltering or fragile, is fair and inclusive. No one is going to accept a plan for growth unless it offers opportunities for everyone to benefit – particularly when it comes to jobs. And the history of recent recovery plans doesn't look so good for some groups.

Before this recession, the UK enjoyed a long period of sustained growth. Around 4 million jobs were created in that period. But the country suffered persistent unemployment, with some 4.5 million people on benefits before the recession started. So, what do we know about who was being left out?

Ethnic minorities were far less likely to be in employment than their white counterparts. Before the recession, about three-quarters of the population were employed but only 46 per cent of Bangladeshis were in work. Even the most successful minority groups, outperforming all other groups educationally, fell far below the national average levels of employment: 61 per cent of the Chinese population and 69 per cent of Indians were in work.

It's a dreadful waste. If the 2 million new jobs in the private sector do arrive, they too must be part of a fair and inclusive approach to restoring prosperity. We have a choice: a jobless recovery with all the social problems that follow, or a continued dependency on immigrants who are expensive or exploited. Or a truly determined effort to reduce the scale of unemployment and underemployment among the young never-worked, the older forced-outs, women, ethnic minorities and disabled people, especially those who have experienced mental illness.

That would require a serious programme for a fair and inclusive recovery, to run alongside the economic strategy. It would have to bring every part of government to bear on the task of ensuring that the effects of painful spending reductions of the next few years will be fairly distributed by social grouping; and that makes sure that we create a recovery that is truly inclusive.

There's no choice between prosperity...

## **Regulation and fairness**

Does the Equality and Human Rights Commission have a role here? Yes. We have a part to play in the process of deficit reduction by:

- Ensuring fairness and transparency, through for example carrying out regular surveys of the impact of the cuts.
- Providing evidence of need that will help public bodies focus their scarce resource on those who need them most.
- Removing unlawful and structural barriers to employment among under-represented groups.

And when it comes to recovery, there are some specific uses of our powers that we believe can play a major role getting Britain back to prosperity. We can do this by:

- Effectively enforcing the Equality Acts, to ensure that the Spending Review is implemented fairly and to make sure that private companies which are doing the right thing are not put at a disadvantage.
- Proper monitoring of human rights to ensure that the dignity and respect of the vulnerable is protected – as we are doing through our inquiries into hate crime against disabled people and home care for the elderly.
- Increasing the confidence of employers, especially the smaller businesses, that anti-discrimination law won't land them with huge liabilities if they take on more women, older, minority or disabled staff.

We want to help firms find their new talent among people who are eager to work and keen to show what they can do.

In the next few years we will be focused on one thing above all – bringing about an inclusive recovery and showing that equality and human rights, far from being an expensive luxury, are essential to our sustained prosperity.

In the end our job is to help Britain as a whole do what we all want in our own lives:

- To be decent
- To be fair
- To do the right thing.

*Trevor Phillips is chair of the Equality and Human Rights Commission.*

**Note**

- 1 See 'PM's speech at Munich Security Conference', 5 Feb 2011, [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/) (accessed 27 Sep 2011).



## 2 Racial justice springs from conservative liberalism, not ‘muscular liberalism’

Andrew Boff

*We don't need gimmicks and tokens to prove our representativeness or to justify our place in modern society; we just need more confidence in conservatism's close affinity with difference and diversity.*

The Conservative party is black. It is Catholic, Chinese, Jewish, Pakistani and Arab. It is also, for the record, young, female, gay and working class. It is like Britain, and rightly so. Because this is, whether people like the term or not, a multicultural country. And the Conservative party has always, deep down, been a multicultural party.

That is the reality of the Conservative party – not the all male, all white, ageing cliché that is often presented. But, as Conservatives, we are as guilty of allowing the stereotype to define us as are those who push it in the media: we have allowed ourselves to believe that we are somehow ‘different’ from everyday, modern, multicultural Britain. And it is that mistaken self-doubt – convinced as we are that we must be failing to be diverse and failing to be holistic – that too often persuades the party to act in strange and counter-productive ways. We are guilty, I am afraid, of tokenism sometimes. Not because our political and philosophical perception of black and minority ethnic (BME) communities and individuals is inherently patronising but because we have not been confident enough about our own diversity, our own representative nature and our own reflection of the society we seek to lead.

And this is a vicious circle. Because our cack-handed attempts to show off our diverse appeal to the public – ensuring black faces behind the Prime Minister when he speaks at conference, making a colossal fuss about the appointment of

BME individuals to posts inside the party – make us look like the out-of-touch embarrassments that our enemies accuse of being. It is awkward, it is odd and it is visibly tokenistic. We make a big deal of BME inclusion in the party to allay criticism but that big deal only makes us look worse.

And what is true of the party's public relations around ethnic and racial diversity and justice can sometimes, sadly, also be true of our policy in this area. We can be too eager to please and too easily led on racial justice – precisely because we are so afraid of being depicted as something we are not: racist.

So why do we get caught, seemingly perennially, in this trap? If the Conservative party is not racist, why is it constantly trying to prove that fact? If the Conservative party is in fact representative and diverse then why must we always be on the back foot, defending ourselves against arguments that we are not? I think that the answer lies in the character of Conservatives. Conservatives are guilty of projecting our own good intentions, our own tolerance and our own lack of interest in race onto society. We are not a racist movement but too often we are blind to the fact that there are still racists in Britain and that, sadly, there probably always will be.

We are philosophically predisposed to see similarities more than differences, and indeed to be more tolerant and glad of difference than the left. Whereas socialism demands conformity and sacrifice, conservatism demands only that individuals and families pursue the best life possible for themselves. Whereas socialism is uncomfortable with diversity – which it sees as a threat to the collectivised identity that it seeks to build – conservatism actively celebrates it because difference and diversity are the best weapons society has against overreaching and totalitarian government. We also – as capitalists who know that the prosperity of society is built on wealth-creating individuals – see that a mixture of backgrounds, cultures and beliefs means the best possible chance of fresh, good new ideas emerging and succeeding. It may be a hackneyed cliché that London's melting pot is what makes it such a great city, but

– as any good Conservative will tell you – simply because something is clichéd it does not mean it is untrue. London – the city I grew up in and have served as a councillor and member of the London Assembly – is the most diverse city in Britain (if not in Europe and perhaps even the world), and it is now the richest and most successful city our country has ever known. These two facts are not simply correlations; diversity causes wealth and prosperity because it cultivates difference and competition and it keeps the state in the state's proper place.

That is why the 'muscular liberalism' narrative worries me so deeply. It is not that I disagree with the meat of what the Prime Minister actually said in Munich<sup>1</sup> – it is hard to imagine who could possibly disagree with what he actually said – rather that the packaging and messaging are fundamentally misguided. Conservatives should not seek to police the views, ideas and thoughts of members of our society – we can leave that to the left – we should instead be prepared to tolerate the nasty, the disgusting and the downright illiberal until the point at which a law is broken and harm is actually done. That tolerance of the intolerable is precisely what being a liberal means. If we start trying to pre-empt actual harm, and start excluding and denigrating people simply on the basis of what they happen to believe, we cease to be liberals and become authoritarians. For now, of course, this narrative is mostly limited to attacking so-called 'extremists' within the Muslim community – bullying those whose devotion to their God and their particular interpretation of Islam while self-righteously congratulating ourselves that this 'isn't racism' but rather some kind of enlightened, robust, 'muscular' liberalism. It isn't. It's a cultural pogrom dressed up as democracy – it is profoundly dangerous and essentially un-Conservative.

It is not the job of the state to decide what people can believe, or even what people can say; it is the job of the state to protect us from harm not from hurt-feelings. This is what Conservatives believe and it is this belief that should, in fact, connect us very deeply with those in BME communities who wish to be able to continue to practise their faiths and their



traditions while also making the most of the economic and social opportunities that Britain (and London especially) can provide. We can, and should, be the party that defends the civil liberty to be offensive, to be heretical, to be different – not because we always agree with what is said under such freedoms but because we know that such freedoms produce a society that is open, entrepreneurial, dynamic and successful. That is what has always divided Conservatives from socialists – while the left seeks to shape a society that reflects its own values, Conservatives seek to shape a society that allows for difference and promotes individual choice and responsibility.

As I say, while conservatism is not racist it can be naïve. The temptation has been strong in some parts of the party to ‘fake it till we make it’ – to act as though Britain is free of racial injustice in either the hope or the belief that it either is or will become so without further action. This, to me, is an equally dangerous mistake as attempts to force conformity on society. People are different and Conservatives should celebrate that fact, but we should not pretend that British society is always as comfortable with difference as we are. Opposing equality legislation is a natural direction for Conservatives, who are wary of the state’s capacity to solve social and cultural problems, but it also fits within this vein of thought. Because we are able to accept difference and diversity we sometimes struggle to understand why further action should be required to safeguard the equal rights of people from minorities. This is a mistaken and lazy assumption.

The best example of what I mean lies in the debate about stop and search powers. There is no doubt in my mind that the Metropolitan Police have come a very long way indeed since the tragedy of their incompetent and prejudicial mishandling of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. Equally, as a Conservative who abhors unnecessary bureaucracy, I am certain that policing in the capital would be much improved if the force were able to spend more time on the beat and less time filling out forms. But the notion that we can now drop the requirement for officers to record the ethnicity of those they stop and search strikes me as foolhardy and naïve. Even were there not

a single police officer left who harboured (knowingly or otherwise) racial prejudice it would still be dangerous to abandon our recording of suspects' ethnicity. It could mean that the police are less able to defend themselves against accusations of a disproportionate interest in young black and Asian men – giving potential for feelings of victimisation in particular communities and the undermining of trust in the Met once more. It may mean that BME communities will be less able to verify what they are told about stop and search against the facts of how, where and against whom it is used. And it could mean that a lad who is stopped far too often, who does feel harassed and targeted, has less recourse to hold his police force to account for their behaviour. Conservatives often bemoan the existence of 'identity politics' in modern Britain but the way to reduce the pull of ethnic and racial identities over people is not to deny they exist or to exorcise them from paperwork – it is only by amassing and displaying evidence of fair treatment and equal engagement that we can lessen resentment and reduce the dangers of fracture.

Of course, recording the ethnicity of those the police stop and search is passive – it is generating evidence of how the state operates with regard to racial justice – but there are constant calls for more active involvement too. For many, racial justice is something that the state should pursue through actions and interventions.

Justice is a complicated, complex and sensitive subject no matter how we look at it. But when justice is tied up with issues of identity and community, when the feeling emerges that justice for one group necessitates injustice for others, it can quickly become politically and socially toxic. Racial justice – and the pursuit of it – risks becoming especially toxic because it is so inextricably bound up with historic injustices, discrimination, prejudice and disadvantage. Of course we must tackle racism and discrimination but we must also tread carefully because righting some wrongs can mean creating new injustices, new wrongs, that will not only need to be righted later but will exacerbate existing resentments and create new ones. I do not believe that Conservatives should

seek to right historic wrongs through the state – via ‘positive discrimination’ for example – because I believe that attempts to fix the past merely build up problems for the future. Everything the state does must be concerned with treating people equally so as not to repeat the wrongs of the past, but equal treatment rules out preference and discrimination, however tempting either might be and however good the cause. Competing claims for preference must be ignored by the state and an egalitarian approach – one that is blind to colour, religion and ethnicity – must be adopted. Of course it is tempting to fiddle the system in aid of those who have been disadvantaged but that is a short-term approach that does not deliver long-term justice and creates fresh grievances.

Instead, the state can and should focus on eliminating the systemic and social exclusion that still permeates areas of our society. I mentioned earlier the new aggression that is being called for – from across the political spectrum – in the state’s dealings with Muslims. Suddenly, it seems, our politicians do not simply want to see the end of terrorism; they want to change religious and cultural practices, from veil wearing to sharia arbitration, that (while they may be alien or even offensive to some) are not harmful or illegal. It is my belief that it is this hardening of attitudes, this increasingly illiberal climate, that inspires young Muslim men and women to the kind of ‘extremism’ that is so often bemoaned. A pervasive sense of othering of the Muslim community has excluded, from the economic and social fabric of Britain, many more British Muslims than the burkha ever has or ever will. It is unhelpful, it is unkind and it is illiberal. And too often the very avenues through which British Muslims might be better engaged with society and their means to lessening exclusion are the focus of paranoid and deranged attacks.

The East London Mosque, which I live near and visit often, is characterised as a den of ‘extremism’, when it is in fact a focal point for a community that feels let down and shut out of much state provision. We are quick to deride the

East London Mosque as ‘extreme’ while applying a different standard altogether to the Jewish community in Stamford Hill or the Pentecostal communities of East London. They too observe familial and social practices that jar with modern, Western ideals about gender and sexuality – but we call them devout. This is what it means for the state to treat people equally – it means having an equal level of acceptance for the quirks and oddities of people’s beliefs and practices as well as an equal application of the law to keep people safe. It is at odds, completely, with a political narrative that alienates and denigrates one group, faith or race for their way of life while tolerating and celebrating another’s.

For Conservatives, then, there are two key rules that we must apply to our thinking on racial justice. The first is that we must be what we believe rather than constantly trying to pretend to be it. We are a party with members from every race, every faith and (myself included) those with no faith whatever. We don’t need gimmicks and tokens to prove our representativeness or to justify our place in modern society; we just need more confidence in conservatism’s close affinity with difference and diversity. The second rule is that we must not give in to the temptation to treat people differently on account of either their race or their ethnicity – neither in privileging certain groups nor in singling others out for special condemnation. It is mistaken and dangerous to pick on Pakistani Muslims and to busy ourselves fretting about how they pray or what they wear. But it is equally mistaken to try to correct ancient wrongs with positive discrimination and affirmative action. Both are founded on a sense of society as comprising homogenous communities that is profoundly un-Conservative.

We are a party of all colours, for all colours. That’s not because we have decided that’s what we need to be in order to win votes in modern, multicultural Britain. It’s because we have always believed in a Britain that lets people get on with their lives and doesn’t worry too much about the differences. As long as we stay true to that belief we can be

confident not only of winning votes in BME communities but also in the fact that we will be doing the cause of racial justice a great service.

*Andrew Boff is a Conservative member of the London Assembly and was the Conservative candidate for Mayor of Hackney.*

**Note**

- 1 'PM's speech at Munich Security Conference', 5 Feb 2011, [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/) (accessed 27 Sep 2011).





### 3 We need to be working on both sides of the deal

Max Wind-Cowie

*The robust defence of British values is a means to achieving racial equality and community cohesion, not a barrier to those aims.*

It is an unpleasant and unpalatable fact that racial inequality and injustice exist in modern Britain. No matter how much we may wish it was not the case there is no escaping what the evidence tells us. Black and minority ethnic (BME) children are a fifth less likely to achieve five GCSEs at good grades than their white peers, less likely to go on from school to a prestigious university, less likely to enter the professions and less likely to earn a great deal of money over their lives. This is not up for debate – it is a truth about our society.

I would emphatically agree with Fiona Melville, writing for this collection, when she says that ‘Conservatives believe in meritocracy’. That statement seems uncontroversial – after all, it would be a brave or foolish politician who declared that they didn’t believe in the meritocratic society – but it is, in fact, the defining soul of conservatism as a modern political movement. Unlike the left, for example, Conservatives do not believe in post-hoc income transfers as the answer to economic inequality because for us poverty is not primarily a problem of wealth; it is a problem of frustrated ambition and wasted opportunity. We believe that all must have the opportunity, to quote the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove, to ‘write their own life story’. That this is not the case in modern Britain – that too many are held back by their birth, their background and their circumstances – is a source of immense concern and anger for Conservatives.

So, while we as a movement are just as likely to worry about injustice in society – be it unfair inequalities of income or discrimination on the basis of race – it is also true that our



solutions are wholly different from those proposed by the left. Just as we do not favour income transfer as a salve for poverty – viewing it as a sticking plaster rather than a cure – so we do not see in the left’s approach to racial inequality and injustice the route to a more racially fair society.

Although it is true that conservatism should care deeply about racial injustice – as a movement steeped in meritocracy we should be especially concerned with it – it is also true that we sometimes allow ourselves to ignore this issue and to belittle its reality. I would agree with the words of Andrew Boff, a Conservative member of the London Assembly, who writes in these pages:

*Conservatives are guilty of projecting our own good intentions, our own tolerance and our own lack of interest in race onto society. We are not a racist movement but too often we are blind to the fact that there are still racists in Britain and that, sadly, there probably always will be.*

The apparent lack of feeling or sympathy for issues of race does not spring from a sense that there is some justification for racism. Rather, not entirely forgivably, it stems from a lack of understanding and awareness of the continued prevalence of racial discrimination and injustice in our society. While not guilty of racism en masse I think it is fair to say that we are guilty of wishful thinking. We believe that Britain ought to be ‘colour-blind’ – a not altogether uncontroversial notion in and of itself – and we are too easily led to believe that we are a society that is, already, in the tolerant and liberal state we wish for.

That is the first barrier to a genuine, Conservative solution to racial injustice in modern, British society – our lack of awareness. It can be overcome but it will require us to turn and face society, and our own party, in a more honest and direct way. We must stop making apologies and excuses for evidence of discrimination and inequality, and instead accept the veracity of reports such as the National Equality Panel’s *Anatomy of Inequality*,<sup>1</sup> which outline where disparities and

disadvantage still exist. In doing so we can learn more about Britain, more about the experiences of British people who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and gain a better understanding of what can be done to mend part of our social contract that are broken.

The modern Conservative party has an admirable track-record in accepting as problems things that have previously been dismissed or ignored. On economic inequality, so long not simply pooh-poohed by the right but actively celebrated as evidence of functioning meritocracy, the party has shifted its ideological position in tune with the evidence. It would have been almost unimaginable a decade ago for David Willetts – now minister for universities, science and skills – to stand up and say he believed that the gap between rich and poor was a problem. But that is precisely what he did at the launch of *Everyday Equality*, a Demos pamphlet outlining the evidence of the negative impact that it has.<sup>2</sup> In tune with their acceptance of evidence, the party has shifted tone and policy in order to seek Conservative solutions to a newly found problem. That is not to say that they have adopted the means of the left wholesale but, confronted with evidence, they have developed the will to put Conservative means to work in pursuit of the traditionally ‘left-wing’ end of a more economically equal society.

It is this journey – from scepticism through robust engagement with evidence to imaginative, Conservative solutions to a problem that may not have previously been treated with due seriousness – that I hope the Conservative party will undertake when it comes to racial injustice. And the good news is that this journey is a shorter haul on race than it has been on economic inequality. The Conservative party has long been repulsed by racism and has always, ostensibly, been highly committed to racial justice. The shift that is now needed is into a more serious and deeper engagement with the evidence so that solutions – rather than platitudes of intent – can form the Conservative response.

And a serious response is necessary not simply because it is ‘not fair’ that people from certain ethnic groups, on the

whole, do worse than others but because it is damaging to the social fabric of our country and – indeed – to core Conservative values. I disagree emphatically with Andrew Boff's rejection of 'muscular liberalism' as a Conservative ideal but I do share his concern about its capacity to succeed while denying the impact of ethnicity and background on people's life-chances in the UK. The truth is not that it is a choice between one or the other – between defending British values or worrying about racial justice – but that the two can and must go hand in hand.

We can, and should, demand that people who live in the UK subscribe to basic 'British values' – that they accept our pluralistic politics, that they tolerate the differences we celebrate and that they understand that Britain is a liberal country. But a prerequisite for that deal is surely that everyone who lives here will be treated fairly, that they will see the benefits of our liberalism and our tolerance as well as having to demonstrate them themselves. Without that – without a clear, conscious and vocal effort to go on ensuring that racial prejudice and entrenched disadvantage are tackled – muscular liberalism is in danger of looking like a set of demands we place only on those we're scared of.

And the good news is that most BME people in Britain are very happy to sign-up to British values. Contrary to the grim picture painted by their own, Conservative and clerical leadership as well as extremists who would accuse all Muslims of fanaticism, British Muslims are a fairly liberal bunch. Recent polling (conducted by YouGov on Demos' behalf) showed that over 80 per cent of British Muslims describe themselves as 'proud to be a British citizen' while two-thirds of them agree that they are 'proud of British culture'. We found that fewer than 25 per cent of British Muslims take issue with Britain's relaxed and tolerant approach to homosexuality. What's more, almost half of British Muslims agreed with the statement 'I am proud of how Britain treats gay people'. Not quite the frothing-at-mouth totalitarianism that we are so often urged to fear.

Living in Britain should be a deal. Yes, you should subscribe to British values, whoever you are. But, in exchange, you must be given a fair shot and confidence that everyone else will abide by those values too and, therefore, will never judge you by the colour of your skin or the name of your God. David Cameron was right, and fundamentally Conservative, to reaffirm our demand that all who live in the UK accept our liberal norms. But he, we, now needs to pay attention to the other side of that deal too. We must look again at why BME young people can be disproportionately let down by education, why certain industries are so closed to those who are not white, and at why wealth (or rather the absence of it) is so closely correlated to particular backgrounds.

In shoring up ‘the deal’ we can not only promote the vision of a confident, liberal society that the Prime Minister, and modern Conservatives everywhere, hold so dear but also tackle racial inequality and injustice. The robust defence of British values is a means to achieving racial equality and community cohesion, not a barrier to those aims.

*Max Wind-Cowie is head of the Progressive Conservatism Project at Demos and author of Everyday Equality.*

#### Notes

- 1 J Hills et al, *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK: Report of the National Equality Panel*, London: Government Equalities Office, 2010, <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28344/1/CASEREport60.pdf> (accessed 27 Sep 2011).
- 2 M Wind-Cowie, *Everyday Equality*, London: Demos, 2010.



## 4 Hard-edged but inclusive

Mohammed Amin

*We need to develop a shared vision of British identity, which is sufficiently inclusive that all citizens of Britain can sign up to it. While being inclusive, this vision needs to avoid being mushy so a hard edge is required to enable one to see who is excluded.*

Writing about this topic one is inevitably influenced by one's background, so readers are entitled to know mine. I was born in the Punjab in Pakistan and came to the UK in 1952 aged 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ ; I have lived here ever since. My parents were illiterate and poor but I passed the 11+ exam and from a state grammar school I went to Clare College Cambridge, spending my professional career as a tax adviser culminating with 19 years as a partner in PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP.

Given my life history, I have for many years thought of myself as British and find myself using phrases such as 'We British' when talking to myself. At the same time I live with some amusing contradictions. For example I can be quite emotional while singing 'Land of Hope and Glory' despite knowing that my ancestors were subjugated colonials of the British Empire, an empire which I regard as 'a bad thing', albeit less bad than others such as the Belgian Empire.

The article on 'race' in the online Encyclopaedia Britannica shows that academics struggle with the concept and regard it as primarily a social construct. However, at its simplest, any isolated group of human beings will show signs of differentiation after a few generations. The isolation can be geographic or self-imposed when co-located groups do not intermarry, for example for religious reasons. As an illustration, Islam reached northern India around the twelfth century. Before then all Punjabis were Hindus. Since then intermarriage between Hindu Punjabis and Muslim Punjabis has been

very limited. After a mere eight centuries of divergence, I can usually distinguish between a Hindu Punjabi and a Muslim Punjabi from a person's appearance, although I cannot put into words how they look different.

Apart from biological descent, distinctions of race are often linked in practice with language and culture. However it is entirely wrong to blur together race and religion except for those religions which are primarily practised by specific ethnic groups such as Judaism and Sikhism. Despite frequent attempts to conflate Islamophobia with racism, they are entirely distinct phenomena, since Islam is a universal religion, like Christianity.

There is a very natural human inclination to discriminate in favour of people like oneself and against 'the other'. Accordingly legislation against discrimination is essential. Furthermore the prohibition of discrimination needs to be made effective. For example almost all large employers in the UK monitor the ethnicity of job applicants and employees. Such monitoring means that PricewaterhouseCoopers knows on the basis of solid evidence that it achieves its goal of being an equal opportunity recruiter. Conversely I understand that such ethnic monitoring is prohibited in France; the consequence is that employment discrimination is widespread in France while French employers are free to turn a blind eye to the problem.

Apart from the objections of a few troglodytes, the legal prohibition of discrimination is no longer controversial in Britain. A more difficult question is whether, once one has banned discrimination, anything more needs to be done to promote race equality, and if so what?

While I strongly support ethnic monitoring as a way of identifying potential problem areas, I regard quotas as divisive and ultimately unhelpful. However there is much else that the government can do, either directly or by funding action by voluntary organisations.

For example:

- Americans refer to the president's 'power of the pulpit'. While we Britons don't pay quite as much attention to our prime minister, he or she can still make a useful contribution by talking about the value of diversity in British society and the contribution made by ethnic minorities.
- The government can ensure that when the British people are represented in photographs or representative teams, the diversity of our country is shown. This was a key factor in our successful bid for the 2012 Olympic Games.
- The government can celebrate the success of ethnic minority individuals at events such as the Asian Women of Achievement Awards.
- The government can publicise mentors and role models through initiatives such as the Mosaic Speakers Bureau.

As Conservatives we can be proud of our party's early pioneering of racial equality by selecting a Jew, Benjamin Disraeli, as our party leader and then prime minister. At the same time we need to be objective and recognise that our party produced Enoch Powell, who I regard as a racist; while Ted Heath sacked him from the shadow cabinet he was never expelled from the party and instead left voluntarily over the European Economic Community. Although I myself have been a Conservative party member since the early 1980s, voting and political party membership patterns have for several decades shown that ethnic minorities have regarded the Labour party as more attuned to their concerns than the Conservative party.

One of David Cameron's greatest achievements has been to change the Conservative party into one in which ethnic minorities can feel at home. Since he became leader members of parliament or candidates guilty of making racist remarks have been firmly stamped upon. In the 2010 general election there were a significant number of ethnic minority candidates in winnable seats. As a result ethnic minority Conservative members of parliament have now become 'normal'.



However, much still remains to be done. Page 98 of Michael Ashcroft's book *Minority Verdict* analysing the 2010 election results points out that we did less well in constituencies with a higher ethnic minority population.<sup>1</sup> I frequently meet ethnic minority business owners and professionals who would be expected to vote Conservative if they were white Anglo-Saxon Protestants but who actually vote Labour despite their wealth and socially conservative attitudes.

For several years we have been engaged in a debate about what it means to be British. As a preliminary point we are fortunate because Britain is fundamentally a 'contractual state' rather than a 'tribal state'. A contractual state is one where citizens regard themselves as having come together voluntarily for mutual benefit. The best example is the USA, where the essential requirement for being American is supporting the Constitution of the United States and pledging allegiance to the flag. As a result any immigrant can readily become an American and once naturalised is accepted as such by other Americans.

Conversely a tribal state is one to which you belong purely by descent. An example is the way that Germany has always thought about the concept of 'Germanness' as essentially requiring descent from the Teutonic tribes. Accordingly, until the relatively recent revision of its nationality law, it was difficult to become a German; one could be a second or third generation descendant of Turkish guest workers without being a German citizen. Even now some German politicians do not quite accept German citizens of Turkish ethnic origin as being real Germans.

While Britain is not exactly the same as the USA, both Britain and France are far closer to the US model than to the German model. Accordingly it should be much easier for us than for Germany to come up with an inclusive concept of Britishness, but it still requires careful thought. For example, Sir John Major (whom I generally admire) once mentioned warm beer as an essential marker of Britain, so by implication those who enjoy warm beer could be considered British. However this automatically excludes Muslim Britons as well as teetotallers!

We need to develop a shared vision of British identity, which is sufficiently inclusive that all citizens of Britain can sign up to it. While being inclusive, this vision needs to avoid being mushy so a hard edge is required to enable one to see who is excluded. As an example, in my view Britishness excludes racism; we cannot legally prevent British citizens from holding racist beliefs, but we can make it clear that such beliefs are 'beyond the pale' and un-British.

*Mohammed Amin is Vice Chairman of the Conservative Muslim Forum.*

**Note**

- 1 M Ashcroft, *Minority Verdict: The Conservative Party, the voters and the 2010 election*, London: Biteback, 2010.



## 5 A social approach to equality

Ray Lewis

*The character and challenges of modern race equality are... different from those of previous eras, requiring a new context-relevant frame of reference.*

This essay concerns itself with conservatism as a socio-political commitment to small government, freedom of choice and a decentralised state, its position on the political spectrum defined by a juxtaposition to centralist state interventionism. It briefly comments on implications for one area of social and public policy, namely its perceived punitive approach to crime prevention and social order. Within an array of possible approaches it stands in marked contrast to welfare-based correctionism.

This area is considered important as a result of growing concern in recent years about the breakdown of community safety and the failure of crime prevention measures to tackle observed increases in serious youth violence. In view of government's role in ensuring the rule of law and the maintenance of public order, addressing these issues carries direct and important implications for, among other things, police and community relations. In alluding to the absolutism of race equality as a moral imperative, it finally looks at the need for promoting society-wide support for the notion of race equality as a public good, contesting that a commitment to freedom of choice and local autonomy must not detract from race equality as a collective moral imperative.

In addressing race equality in modern British society the themes and approach of this essay is intentionally sociological. It starts from a premise that much political and policy thinking of recent times has for the most part been devoid of

progressive applied social theory on the changing nature of civic life in modern Britain. It locates current questions on race equality as part of a social evolution, representing a slice of history, which while it reflects previous events also stands apart from them. The character and challenges of modern race equality are therefore different from those of previous eras, requiring a new context-relevant frame of reference.

This essay briefly highlights questions on the present day role of government in promoting the norms and values that help produce stable communities and the need for them to be expressed through social and public policy and service practice. It intentionally sidesteps what is considered a hackneyed debate on the definition of race, ethnicity and culture, which has forced the progressive agenda into an ideas doldrums. It advocates instead that the modern debate on equality must move on to demarcate the issue in terms of social outcome rather than 'equal opportunity'. It therefore proceeds by regarding the intellectual differences between race equality, multiculturalism and other related terms as being part of a single restrictive paradigm and of secondary importance. It proceeds on the basis that what happens is much more important than what is said.

Common popular portrayals of conservatism typify it as drawing from essentialist notions on race and culture, which in view of a coherent rationalism, at its most extreme, advocate racial supremacy. Unfortunately, for a considerable number of years insufficient rigour has been applied to distancing modern Conservative thinking from what can be seen as over-simplistic and stereotypical ideas on race, which some would suggest have found their way into public and social policy. A corollary of this is that much official political advice and policy analysis has fallen back on a crude determinism (such as immigrants are the cause of job shortages). This is not only intrinsically problematic; more importantly, the positivism on which it is founded (for example gangs now exist in Britain and they are behind the problem of serious youth violence) has failed to keep pace with more insightful post-structural and realist interpretations on race. Conservative political thinking on race

equality and cultural diversity has therefore struggled to keep pace with and explain the complexities of class, modern structural economics and the multicultural nature of Britain's communities. It fails adequately to renew and expound the tenets of Conservative ideology.

In the absence of a conservatism that addresses the modern problem of race equality, a rarefied media and political expedient construct has been allowed to take root that critical reflectivity shows to capture or reflect commonplace views and feeling inadequately. The reality of racial discrimination experienced across the country is most validly expressed in the conversations that happen in places such as the street corner, supermarket or school gate. Politics can be seen to have helped construct a reality of race in modern Britain that mostly contrasts with reality of the everyday experiences of ordinary people. This must be corrected before effective equal opportunities can begin.

In the mind of the average citizen, outdated politics have contributed to a form of linguistics and a perception of a traditional form of conservatism that is acrimonious to the needs and concerns of many. Typically, the many are those whose life chances are shaped outside the benefits of a university education, access to a professional career and so on. As a consequence of this the rhetoric of equal opportunities has been seized and viewed as the home base of political positions. This loss of yardage will need to be recovered if progressive conservatism is to gain a firm foothold with black and other minority ethnic (BME) voters again, particularly in poor inner city areas.

We find the reality of many BME citizens defined by a divergence between the intent and attainment of equal opportunities. Liberal and individualist ideals on one hand promise that hard work is a gateway out of poverty and deprivation, while on the other, experience shows in too many instances generations of families and friends become consigned to the burning disappointment of the unfulfilled promise of equal opportunity. Despite years of policy development, for the vast majority of the BME population equal opportunity has been

little more than the hollow promise of meritocracy. This is not to suggest that the policy initiatives of the past four decades or so have produced no progress in helping significant numbers escape observed social disparities. The relevant point, however, is that some parts of the BME community remain unable to use the opportunities that are available to improve their social standing. This moot point persists at the core of the debate, and by all accounts will continue to occupy its epicentre without a radical reframing of why multiculturalism and other approaches to race equality are perceived to have failed.

Traditional conservatism is perceived and even propagated by those with oppositional views as a contradiction or perhaps an anathema to the dissolution of social hierarchy, and race is a means by which this is maintained. Typically this argument can be taken further by those who suggest that structural inequality was formulated and is maintained as a means to preserve the privileges of the social elite. What might be either a real or constructed conservatism has deposited in the popular subconscious a subliminal message of social selectionism – an ‘us’ and ‘them’ division, the lord of the manor (the allusion to gender is intentional) who has jurisdiction over the subservient common workforce. This binary schema, it is suggested, remains a potent, albeit a latent, mental construct that continues to prejudice the attitude and actions of black and white people alike. The image of the well-bred and cultured nobleman and decadent wily commoner has migrated into becoming a powerful metonym on issues of crime, punishment and public order, which has certainly in the post-War years determined the content and direction of public and social policy. By extension, the Conservative party is seen as the primary proponent of the law and order agenda, whose default is to come down hard on those disposed to wilful law breaking and who are deserving of imprisonment or other state endorsed punishment. In broad terms, conservatism is equated with punitive governance. This might be a popular and welcome message to some, but for the more sceptical, aware of its potential for abusing civil and human rights, the actions of the judiciary or

police become nothing more than the symbolic instruments of a more pervasive discrimination.

Compassionate conservatism, as a countermeasure, consummately fails to address the essentialism on which oppositional arguments are based. Real life experience on the effects of intentional or unintended discrimination has however made the BME electorate too smart to be convinced by the policy soundbites popular with New Labour. Progressive conservatism must become more than a variant of the language and posturing of interventionist government. For instance, away from a media-generated hype, many living in inner city communities know that effectively dealing with the growing levels of serious youth violence will require something other than the current methods, from a soft line hug a hoodie approach on the one hand, to the errant search for 'the gang' on the other. Those proposing a truly progressive agenda must be committed to championing a vision for producing tangible social outcomes. Government can and should play a pivotal role and social and public policy should become tools for establishing race equality as something that is not only morally right but beneficial for creating the kinds of community life that ultimately benefits all of society.

The practical experience of everyday prejudices and discrimination has sensitised the BME community's moral barometer, making its members astute to the hitherto political rhetoric on race equality and empty promises of multiculturalism. In the mind of many it has become nothing more than a faded dream. Despite knowing that true equality is the gatekeeper of social justice, the failure of past policy means that BME people are only likely to believe pronouncements when they perceive themselves as getting a real (not to mention fair) bite of the cherry.

Progressive conservatism has to date failed to propagate social justice adequately, and has allowed one of the central tenets of its politics – an individual's right to choose – to have been communicated in ways that have not helped in promoting its core values on equality and fairness. In many practical instances this failing has opened opportunities for extremist



views to muddy important public debates. A crucial element of this omission is how it has been allowed to undermine social cohesion by being propagated independently of values that affirm the benefits of the public good. Through a disproportionate focus on individual gain, the social capital that helps produce the benefits of living in community has been lost. Although these are not new notions, little has been done to relate them to mainstream race equality discourse. In advancing the argument for equality of social outcome, unless essentialised notions of race are accepted and if it is held true that all races share a common humanity, it would be reasonable to expect no significant or permanent differences in the achievements of different racial or ethnic groupings. This would be evident in education results, rates of offending and representation at all professional levels.

A progressive agenda must not view equal opportunity as the golden fleece but instead energetically pursue equality in social outcome as both public good and social capital. Only in achieving this can it be guaranteed that the talents and enterprise from all sections of society contribute to national well-being and prosperity. This objective must feature as a prominent social value in mainstream political treatise. Importantly, our right to choose should not and must not be the sacrificial offering on an altar of individual gain without being carefully balanced against inevitable losses that are derived from community and collective action. All British citizens must together be able to see the positive results of race equality before they are likely to make the necessary personal investments that ingratiate it as part of the nation's moral fabric. If this is not achieved, positive action will be regarded as a social injustice, and will invoke sentiments that see any form of anti discrimination as preferential treatment given to undeserving immigrants.

As previously stated, these are not new issues, and solutions are often less than straightforward. The debate however has suffered from the absence of a progressive framework in which to nurture the ideas and principles that produce relevant and effective policy and practice. What is

clearly needed is a reframing of what ‘modern’ race equality means in Britain, away from the narrow terms of a multicultural debate that belong to the politics and social problems of a bygone era. Part of modern conservatism’s focus should be directed to determining how in situationally relevant terms to get government out of the way so that black citizens can be more involved in and allowed to take control of the opportunities that determine quality of life and reflect local priorities. The positive social outcomes that result from effective race equality measures must be defined and determined as relevant at a local level. Further, a modern approach to race equality must make intelligent links between corporate governance and the variability that arises out of localism.

Progressive conservatism must move towards pulling down the existent divide between government and community and be able to demonstrate that the two are not mutually exclusive. Only in this way can political priorities reconnect with and reflect the needs and aspirations of BME communities.

*Ray Lewis is director of the Eastside Young Leaders’ Academy and adviser to Mayor Boris Johnson.*



## 6 The Big Society will deliver true racial justice

Fiona Melville

*Instead of trying to compensate – which I think is patronising and which often has unintended consequences elsewhere – we should always start from a presumption that we are all entitled to equal opportunity and that being a Briton in the twenty-first century is an opportunity in itself.*

The Big Society is the Conservatives' big idea. Fixing the deficit and paying off our debts is their current (unpleasant and difficult) task, but the Big Society is the defining change that they hope to achieve in Britain. I've heard all sorts of descriptions, but I like this one: 'Empowering people, with information, tools and infrastructure, to make choices that make their lives better.'

It isn't just about volunteering, or charity, or cuts, or the state withdrawing from its citizens' lives; there are two, connected, reasons that Conservatives are (or should be) so strongly supportive of the concept of the Big Society. The first is that we believe that a smaller state – with greater freedom, better and more efficient public services, and a lower tax-take – is more desirable than today's big one. And, second, that this must be backed up by a bigger society – with the emphasis on good education, work and family and/or community – in order for people to flourish.

It is the primary role of any government – indeed, of all politicians and, I would argue, also the responsibility of all citizens – to seek to maintain and promote a society which is safe, peaceful, free from fear, united around a set of common values, and which offers fair opportunity to all.

But what do we mean by society? What are those common values? How do we ensure that opportunity is indeed open to all, not just to those with sharp elbows, while at the

same time rewarding hard work and initiative? The fundamental question being asked by the Big Society is this: what does it mean to be British in the twenty-first century?

Here we get to the nub of a Conservative world-view and to the significance of the Big Society to racial justice. Conservatives believe in meritocracy. We believe in fair opportunities for all. We believe in choice. We believe in responsibility. And we believe that a healthy economy is essential for a healthy society. We don't want to set people against each other, and we don't want to lose our best people either through abandoning them (through not enabling the best start in life that we can) or through their abandoning us by disengaging from our national life or emigrating because they think that another country offers them a better quality of life.

But there is a harsh reality about modern Britain that we have to face if we are to succeed in these aims; it is not, at present, as meritocratic as we need it to be. There are still things that hold people back from achieving their potential that are outside their control – and, sometimes, one of those things is race. Since it cannot be true that Pakistani and Bangladeshi men are 50 per cent less hardworking than Chinese men, how can it be the case that their median wage is 50 per cent less? As it is not true that young black men are 20 per cent less academically able than their white counterparts, how and why is it that only a quarter of them will achieve five A\*–C grades at GCSE while 45 per cent (still too low) of white British children will? As Conservatives we care little for concepts of 'equality of outcome' but we care very much for meritocracy, for people being able to achieve to their full potential. It is clear that in Britain some are still held back partly because of their ethnic and racial background.

Labour's solution is to parcel people up into interest groups, and triangulate policies onto them so that each group feels it is getting something (by implication, at the expense of others). The ultimate expression of this was the way that Ken Livingstone ran London. It is divisive, because it encourages people to see themselves as different and separate; it is

expensive, because the more you create sub-sets, the more it costs you to give each group something; and it is ultimately counter-productive because having encouraged division and an expectation of reward for difference, you risk destroying the values and sense of community that underpin a flourishing society and economy.

As a white, well-educated, middle-class woman with a good job, I know that I have many advantages that are not as universal as they should be. I have only once in my life felt in any way disadvantaged by being female. But that one time, I didn't challenge it. I was so taken aback that I failed to say anything. I should have done; I should have said that it wasn't an acceptable way to think about the issue we were discussing, and I hugely regret that I didn't. Now, I think I would have the confidence to do so. And that is what the Big Society should be about. It is about ensuring that we all have the confidence, the tools, the support where we need it and the power to make a difference – in our own lives and in those of others. It is about what unites us rather than what divides us.

That does not mean that we ignore discrimination or prejudice. Far from it – we should challenge it and ensure that it becomes less widespread and less acceptable until, through practice, a society of equal opportunity becomes the norm. But instead of trying to compensate – which I think is patronising and which often has unintended consequences elsewhere – we should always start from a presumption that we are all entitled to equal opportunity and that being a Briton in the twenty-first century is an opportunity in itself.

This is always a controversial example, but that was what the Conservatives' A-list of candidates was supposed to do. I am generalising but it remained a fact that Conservative associations often picked shortlists of candidates who were all very similar and who – crucially – matched some inner concept of what an MP should look like. The A-list required associations to consider a wider variety of candidates than they might otherwise have done. Many ended up with a white, middle-class married man anyway – who often was the right candidate for that association and

constituency. But sometimes, making a conscious effort to think more widely meant that great people who were a bit different were chosen.

That conscious effort to be more inclusive is paying dividends. Of course, simply updating the 'look' of MPs is never going to make serious headway in tackling prejudice or lack of opportunity in Britain. But it goes to the heart of what a sustainably meritocratic society should be: you don't write someone off merely because of where they come from or what they look like. At the moment, we sadly often have to consciously broaden our preconceptions. That should not have to happen – but the more we do it, the more normal it will become and the less we will have to think about it.

There are several gaping areas in our society where we desperately need to make progress, so I'm going to focus on just one – education. Education is the most powerful force for progress and mobility, and we cannot continue to abandon huge numbers of children to leaving school unable to read and write; we cannot continue to accept that a million young people don't have education, employment or training to give them focus, structure and a future; and we cannot continue to accept the glaring and growing inequality in opportunity that increasing numbers of our fellow citizens are subject to, often largely as a result of where they were born and what background they are from. Nowhere is the evidence of continued racial and ethnic inequality more shocking and more unforgivable than in education – we are failing to equip young people from all sorts of backgrounds with the skills and knowledge they need. But we are failing disproportionately when it comes to black and minority ethnic children.

It is a scandal that the Coalition Government has recently felt it needed to mandate that pupils who fail maths and English at GCSE need to resit until they pass – not that the Government has done it, but that it needed to be done at all. Thank goodness Michael Gove has had the courage to say that our education system is not good enough, and is failing large numbers of our children. Opening it up so that good teachers have the power to innovate and spread their good practices,

ensuring that parents can choose the best education for their child, and encouraging third and private sector providers to fill the gaps where the state will not and cannot do everything is the only way that we can even begin to address the underlying opportunity gap.

What, you may be asking at this point, does this have to do with racial equality? Everything – and nothing. We have, for too long, made excuses for division – sometimes for the right reasons, but it has brought about unacceptable consequences for too many children. We must reform our education system so that everyone, no matter where they are born, or the colour of their skin, has the opportunity for a good education – literacy, numeracy, curiosity about the world, aspiration and all the soft skills that many of us take for granted. It's not about class, colour or creed – it has to be a colour-blind, needs-driven and hard-headed decision to equip our children for a competitive future. In return, of course, they have to participate, take responsibility themselves and expect to work hard, but if we do not assure the basic building blocks for a child we cannot expect them to learn how to be a productive and flourishing member of adult society.

So the most ambitious part of the Big Society project is not the free schools programme alone, nor just the decentralisation of power, nor even the opening up of public services to community, third sector and private providers. No – it is the expectation that all of us, no matter who or what we are, will rise to the challenge of deciding what sort of society we wish to live in. I hope that this will mean better schools, public services and local government for all of us, but I also hope that it will inspire communities and sections of society that have been particularly poorly served by statism to take the reins and push what works. That doesn't mean divisive or fractured lobbying for resources and favours from government, but the freedom to take charge, the responsibility to negotiate with the wider community and the chance to deliver real and lasting change. Racial justice will never be achieved through government diktat alone; it requires the kind of active citizens that the Big Society is focused on encouraging and rewarding



coming together and ensuring that all of society's participants get a fair deal. If we really want to ensure racial equality then it will be as part of that broader move to a Big Society, with shared values and responsibilities to each other as well as to ourselves, which forms the core of modern conservatism's mission.

*Fiona Melville is editor of Platform 10 and an executive board member of the Tory Reform Group. She is a former adviser to David Cameron.*





## 7 Race in contemporary society

Gavin Barwell

*Immigration then is a good thing. But, as the saying goes, it is possible to have too much of a good thing.*

Croydon, the place I have lived all my life and now represent as a member of parliament, is one of the most diverse parts of the country. In just over ten years' time, it is predicted that less than half the population in Croydon will be white British. So issues connected with race – immigration, discrimination, multiculturalism – all feature heavily in my postbag and inbox.

Let me start by congratulating Demos and the Runnymede Trust for looking at these issues. Race is a sensitive subject but one of the lessons of recent years is surely that if mainstream parties don't address it, extremists flourish.

One of the first debates I spoke in after my election just over a year ago was a backbench debate about immigration led by Frank Field and Nicholas Soames, the co-chairmen of the All Party Group on Balanced Migration. Although, like most Conservatives, I certainly believe that immigration was too high under the last government and that this had some negative consequences, I stressed that we mustn't lose sight of the benefits immigration has brought down the years. After the debate, I was interviewed on LBC about my speech and asked why I believed that my constituency had benefitted in some way from immigration. In case the same question occurs to anyone reading this article, my best friend, some of my neighbours, many of the people who worked so hard to get me elected and members of the volunteer group I run – to give just a few examples – are either immigrants themselves or children or grandchildren of immigrants. How could I possibly believe that my life would be better if they or their

parents or grandparents had not been allowed to come to this country? And looking beyond the personal, immigration has brought people with the skills our economy needs, entrepreneurs who have created new jobs and people who play a vital role in our public services. It has enriched our culture – the food we eat, the music we listen to, the clothes we wear. And in today's globalised world, Croydon's connections with other countries are a huge asset.

Immigration then is a good thing. But, as the saying goes, it is possible to have too much of a good thing. Conservatives should, as the Coalition Government is doing, aim to reduce the level of net migration so that it doesn't put pressure on local communities and local public services.

Who we let in, however, is just as important as how many. The tragedy of the last Labour Government's immigration policy is that they primarily admitted people with medium to low skills who took most of the jobs created by the last economic boom while millions of people languished on out-of-work benefits. But the Coalition Government is in danger of making the opposite mistake. In its efforts to reduce numbers, it has put a cap on the number of outstanding scientists who can come to work at our great universities. I don't know a single constituent who has a problem with such people coming to the UK.

Getting policy on a sound footing is clearly essential but language is also important. As Damian Green has said, the last Labour Government talked tough, stirring up prejudice, while actually losing control of the system. Conservatives should make the case for immigration while ensuring that the system is operating fairly and efficiently, letting in the right people and removing those with no right to be here.

When people settle in this country they should not expect special favours but they are entitled to fair treatment just like anyone else. The UK was slow to introduce equalities legislation in the wake of postwar immigration. I am a supporter of such legislation – I don't want to live in a society where landlords can put 'No Irish, No Blacks, No Dogs' signs in their windows.

But ultimately laws can only achieve so much. Britain is a fairer place today than it was when I was growing up but young black people in my constituency still have real concerns about the way they are policed, and more generally people from black and minority ethnic communities are still more likely to be living in poverty, to be let down by our education system, to be victims of crime. The keys to making Britain an even fairer place are not more equality laws but implementing effective policies to tackle inequality of opportunity – like the academies programme to transform inner-city schools started by Tony Blair, held back by Ed Balls and now rekindled by Michael Gove – and, even more importantly, bringing about cultural change.

I am one of life's optimists – I believe that most prejudice stems from ignorance. The best way to break it down is to encourage people to mix with others from different backgrounds. Take the elderly lady I met during the election campaign who complained to me about Croydon being full of foreigners. She has no black friends or neighbours – to her, anyone who isn't white must be foreign. She was genuinely surprised when I pointed out to her that most of the black people she saw in Croydon were born in this country and as British as we were.

Once we get to know people from different backgrounds, we quickly see that though they may look different, may speak a different language or have different religious beliefs, they want the same basic things we do. If you have Muslim friends, you are not going to believe the email someone forwards to you claiming that all Muslims are plotting to force us to adopt Sharia law. If you have met a genuine refugee and heard about the persecution they had to endure and how grateful they are that this country has given them sanctuary, you are not going to believe that all asylum seekers are trying to milk the system.

If my optimism isn't misplaced, it has major implications for public policy. At a macro level, we need to rebuild the sense of community, to get people to mix more with their neighbours – a key part of the Big Society agenda. On a micro level, take the issue of policing I mentioned earlier: there is a great

project in my constituency where police officers and young people get to swap roles – the police officers get to experience what it's like to be taken away from your friends and searched, and the young people get to experience what it is like to have to approach a rowdy group of teenagers on your own. Seeing things from another person's perspective changes attitudes and behaviour.

But tackling inequality of opportunity and cultural change isn't enough. We also need to build what the Prime Minister in a recent speech referred to as 'a clear sense of national identity that is open to everyone'<sup>1</sup> – the elderly lady I met during the election campaign and the newly arrived immigrant.

In the same speech, the Prime Minister criticised multiculturalism. To the extent that multiculturalism is about focusing solely on our differences rather than what unites us, he was right to do so. But I wish he hadn't used that word, because it means different things to different people. And at the risk of stating the obvious, Britishness – a collective identity for the English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish – is by definition multicultural in the literal sense of the word. And that's a good thing. Yes, people who settle here should learn English and integrate into our society, but they should not be forced to choose between being British and being proud of their roots. Identity isn't a digital quality.

Take my best friend. He was born in this country but his parents are from northern India. He would, I think, call himself British Indian (but not English), although first and foremost he sees himself as a Londoner. If England plays India at cricket, he supports India; if they play anyone else, he supports England. But if England plays India at football, he supports England.

What this anecdote illustrates is that identity is complicated. It has many layers to it – the country we are living in, where we or our parents or grandparents are from, our local community, our faith, the football team we support. I would love our prime minister, who has done so much to transform perceptions of the Conservative party for the better, to give a

speech doing to Norman Tebbit's cricket test what he did to the Margaret Thatcher's 'There's no such thing as society' quote. Yes it is important to have loyalty to this country, but your roots are important too. In the words of the Michael Jackson song, no one should spend their life being a colour but our ethnic identity is a part of who we are.

A couple of years ago, I attended an event in Croydon to mark the Islamic festival of Eid – part of a programme of events Croydon Council organises to celebrate the festivals of all the major faiths. Two young Muslim women, Ruhina Cockar and Joanne Kheder, one dressed in western clothing, one wearing the hijab, spoke about what it meant to them to be British Muslims. I wish everyone in Croydon could have been there to hear what they had to say. A single quote doesn't do them justice but I will let Ruhina have the last word:

*I'm a Croydon girl through and through. I was born in Mayday Hospital... My beliefs are entirely compatible with being British... I have thrived in British society ... and I am proud to call myself a British citizen.*

I am proud to have Ruhina as a fellow citizen and I am confident about the future of the Britain she is helping to build.

*Gavin Barwell is MP for Croydon Central.*

#### **Note**

- 1 'PM's speech at Munich Security Conference', 5 Feb 2011, [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-at-munich-security-conference/) (accessed 27 Sep 2011).





## 8 Time to end the Tory war on multiculturalism

Paul Goodman

*Don't be against multiculturalism – be for integration. Be for teaching English history in schools. Be for teaching migrants English (even at this time of tight budgets). Be for cutting immigration to the tens of thousands. Be for a national holiday to celebrate the Queen's birthday.*

Before settling down to write this article, I made myself a cup of tea. In doing so, I carried out a multicultural act. The tea was made from Indian tea leaves that have been plucked, rolled, processed, packaged, transported, sold and consumed by me here at my desk in High Wycombe. The culture of Indian tea-pickers has thereby been brought into contact with that of a British journalist through the medium of trade. Welcome to multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism is also at work every time you gaze at Cleopatra's Needle, listen to Ennio Morricone's music from *The Mission* or, if you are so minded, pick up a Bible and read the New Testament, in which Jewish, Greek and Roman cultures mesh. Before the first stone of Woking Mosque was laid or the first Notting Hill Carnival took place, Britain was a multicultural country (though admittedly far less of one).

To state the obvious in this way is to provoke debate about whose culture mixes well with whose, whose is more developed, whose better. But since I want to write not about when cultures meet but what governments do, I will avoid this discussion altogether. I want instead to ask a question: since multiculturalism is as much a part of life as the weather, why is David Cameron so worked up about the M-word?

And worked up he undoubtedly is. In his recent Munich speech, he said:

*Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and the mainstream. We have failed to provide a vision of society to which they feel they want to belong. We have even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run counter to our values.*

The Prime Minister was describing how separatism can lead to extremism, and extremism to terrorism. As he would doubtless agree, it ain't necessarily so. Separatist Plymouth Brethren or Jehovah's Witnesses are not extremists, in the sense of wishing to impose their religious vision on society by law. Salafi quietists who believe in an Islamist state may be extremists, but they are not terrorists.

But in suggesting that separatism, extremism and terrorism can be linked, Cameron was undoubtedly right. Furthermore, he was saying nothing new in doing so, having made the same case in opposition. However, the M-word caught the eye of lobby correspondents and news editors. And before he knew it, the Prime Minister was dealing with a carnival of reaction.

For in using the M-word, he unwittingly provoked exactly the debate which I earlier avoided. He had meant to concentrate minds on the connection between people who live in isolated groups, hating Western liberalism and British democracy, and bombs that slaughter innocents on the tube. Instead, he provoked a rambling discussion about the merits or otherwise of, say, chicken korma, Bent and the Notting Hill carnival.

This must partly be because when one objects to 'multiculturalism', what some people hear is an objection to 'multi-racialism': the listener believes that the speaker is opposed to a multiracial Britain. I would hazard a guess that many though not all such listeners are members of ethnic minorities themselves. In some cases, their suspicion is doubtless true, but not in most.

So for example, most British non-Muslims are prejudiced against Islamist hate preachers, but not against British Muslims, who share this dislike in any event.

(It is customary to write after such a sentence that ‘some of my best friends are Muslims’, which in my case happens to be true.) It is therefore tempting to say of such listeners that they are simply mistaken, and to carry on pronouncing the M-word through gritted teeth.

However, people are as they are, and just as the Almighty ‘maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust’, so politicians must communicate their views to voters in their infinite variety. The party is attracting especially low support among Scots, public sector workers... and ethnic minorities. If the M-word is a problem, should we not think about trying something else?

This is more or less the advice that Sayeeda Warsi has been doggedly offering for years. It was rejected by the powers that be. But politicians being politicians, it wasn’t rejected completely. So the adjective ‘state’ was grafted on to the front of the noun ‘multiculturalism’, like a papery fig-leaf, to differentiate between the multiculturalism the state has produced and that which people produce themselves.

I can see that there is a difference between failing to teach British history in schools, on the one hand, and a Vaisakhi parade through the streets of Leeds, on the other. But such nice distinctions miss a big point. To produce variants on the M-word to solve the problem is like trying to open a door with one key after another. But the door isn’t locked – it’s bolted. To run free, all one has to do is to raise the bolt. Which means, in this case, dropping the M-word as a boo-word. I have not built whatever reputation I have by invariably agreeing with Warsi. But on this point, she is right and I, to date, have been wrong. Multiculturalism is neutral. There is good multiculturalism, such as my cup of tea, and bad multiculturalism, such as al Qaeda, that bastard child of takfiri ideas and Western technology.

So the time has come to end the Tory war on multiculturalism. Let us repeat the three reasons why. First, because the

word covers so many sins and virtues, and means so many things to so many people, as now to be almost meaningless. Second, because it is not helping the party win votes: winning votes isn't everything in politics, of course, but it's more often an aim worth pursuing than not. Third, because the M-word has become a distraction, a diversion, a dissipation of energies better focused 'like a laser beam' on the struggle against extremism and the ideology that underpins it. Tell a group of 100 people in a mixed-ethnicity marginal that you oppose both, and most will agree. Tell them you oppose multiculturalism – state or otherwise – and you'll begin an argument that will end on judgement day.

Don't be against multiculturalism – be for integration. Be for teaching English history in schools. Be for teaching migrants English (even at this time of tight budgets). Be for cutting immigration to the tens of thousands. Be for a national holiday to celebrate the Queen's birthday. I should have seen before the Munich speech that a single word in it would compromise the effectiveness of all the others.

*Paul Goodman is a former leader writer for the Daily Telegraph. He was the Conservative MP for Wycombe between 2001 and 2010. Paul is currently the executive editor of Conservative Home.*





## 9 Colour blind or indifferent?

Dr Rob Berkeley

The ethnic diversity of Britain is a fact of modern life, one that for many has become so mundane as no longer to be worthy of comment and attention. We are British, in its myriad forms, with heritages that span the globe, living in a common political space, with a shared future. But for those who face discrimination and disadvantage as a result of their ethnic group, that political space is constricted and the notion of a shared future is put at risk.

While being born into a particular racial or ethnic group can be associated with a lack of opportunity, experience of discrimination, and barriers to engagement with our democratic structures, we are far from reaching any ideal of a meritocratic society in which all can achieve. Yet, racism and disadvantage are not inevitable; they are a function of the political and social decisions that citizens make. Racial disadvantage is a moral issue. It is an issue to which all British political parties ought to have a response. As it is over 50 years since there was significant non-white migration to the UK, we have a good handle on what works to reduce disadvantage and eliminate discrimination on the grounds of race. With the political will and judicious use of resources, we have the ability to end racism in the UK within a generation. Without concerted effort from state actors alongside the citizen, this is unlikely to happen. Ending racism would enable us to focus collectively on the serious local and global challenges that we face, and unleash the talent of the marginalised. Given the parlous state of our economy and a summer marked by serious civil unrest; this would clearly be a good thing.

That is why Runnymede has sought to engage all the major British political parties in debate and discussion about what race equality means for their political tradition.



Where issues of race equality fit into political parties' visions of the society that they are trying to create is a crucial issue. In this short paper I will set out the challenge of racism, ask whether colour-blind approaches can deliver the kind of change we want and need, and reflect on the electoral logic for the Conservatives of being more vocal in addressing racial disadvantage.

### **What is 'race'?**

Race does not exist; at least not in a biological sense. There is more variation within so-called racial groups than between them. Surely by now everyone knows that there is only one race, the human race. So why is it still relevant to talk about race or to motivate action to challenge racial inequality?

Race is a social construct, defined not by biology but by society. It is 'imagined'. Yet for something imaginary, it retains a powerful hold on modern thinking.

The challenge is that as a social construct, with no basis in fact, patterns of racism are inherently malleable and shifting, as the range of issues that Runnymede has tackled over the past 43 years highlights. It means that groups of people can be racialised in one context and not in another (Eastern Europeans are victims of race hate in the UK but not in Poland), that people do not have to be rational in their racism ('not you, you're alright; it's the others that I can't stand'), that it can shift from colour to cultural practice and back ('it's not black people it's hip-hop/reggae/youth culture'), that it is not the same thing over time (stereotypes of black men shift: they are solely suitable for manual work; they are work-shy, as convenient, to prove a racialised point). Whatever the patterns, the roots are the same – the will to deny the humanity of an individual from a particular group because they are identifiably 'different' in some way. The impacts can be devastating.

## Is racism real?

Many people from minority ethnic communities are achieving at the highest levels. There were no minority ethnic MPs in the modern era until 1983; there are now 24. In sport, arts, fashion, industry and the academy, we can point to people from minority ethnic backgrounds who are succeeding. But as anyone who has been to Glastonbury knows, just because some people have made it over the barriers, it does not mean that the barriers no longer exist.

We know that in England, the majority of children who live above the fourth floor in tower blocks are Black or Asian.<sup>1</sup> We know that black men are seven times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police than white men.<sup>2</sup> We know that Chinese pupils do extremely well at school, but that Chinese graduates can expect to learn 25 per cent less over the course of their careers than their white counterparts.<sup>3</sup> That if you have an African- or Asian-sounding name, you have to make nearly twice as many job applications before you even get an interview.<sup>4</sup> That of the nearly 300 black Caribbean students who got the grades to attend Oxford University in 2009, only one ended up studying there.<sup>5</sup> We know that ultimately being born into a minority ethnic group in the UK shortens your life span.<sup>6</sup>

In education, criminal justice, employment, health and housing, race still matters. This is true when individuals face direct discrimination, but also has an impact on whole communities. Last year there were three times as many young black men in the prison system than there were in Russell Group universities.<sup>7</sup> The knock-on effects for fatherhood, families and educational achievement for the next generation are legion. Racism limits our ability to function effectively, or to use the talents evident in all communities. It is bound up with the class and gender inequalities that make the UK one of the most unequal societies in the developed world.<sup>8</sup> There is an urgent need to address these inequalities and the barriers that remain to full participation in our society.

In recent weeks, prompted by a broad coalition of over 150 non-governmental organisations, even the United Nations

has pointed out that the UK Government is failing to meet its commitments to eliminate racial discrimination.<sup>9</sup>

### **Colour-blind or blind to racism?**

It is for this reason that the rush to declare ‘mission accomplished’ in the struggle for racial equality is such a serious mistake. It is a pattern that is too often reflected in the rhetoric and action of politicians from a Conservative tradition. While the recent riots across England were sparked by an incident reflecting the continuing mistrust between the police and many in black communities, there have been significant efforts to downplay the role that the reality and perception of racism may have had as a driver of the disturbances. Instead of talking about racism, our political leaders are keen to avoid the issues raised. The forthcoming inquiries will, I hope, shed some light on why if the riots were ‘criminal – pure and simple’, such a large proportion of those charged were from minority ethnic groups, or why in Birmingham or parts of south London we were faced with the prospect of serious racialised conflict averted only by the bravery of a grieving father and actions to halt the English Defence League’s rabble-rousing.

A post-racial or colour-blind narrative is attractive as it asserts that racism is a thing of the past. If racism is a thing of the past, then those who choose to bring it up are creating the problem and dragging us back to a grim past. A past which can often remind Conservative politicians about some of the bitter struggles that have been undertaken within the party to address the reality and perception of xenophobia and ‘Little Englandism’, typified by Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech. If we were to stop talking in race terms, they argue, then the inequalities would disappear – after all it’s all about class, anyway, isn’t it?<sup>10</sup> Pursuing race equality is perceived as difficult because the patterns of disadvantage are complex and variable (for example, the educational experiences of Chinese and black Caribbean children are very different), so racism cannot be a good explanation for any form of disadvantage.

Together, these arguments have the added bonus of excusing the party from addressing racial inequality altogether.

It is an unsurprising result of a colour-blind approach for Conservatives in government to decide not to publish a strategy to address racism; at local and central government levels, to withdraw support from race equality organisations; and for the continuing scandal of racial inequalities across education, employment, health and criminal justice to be given only passing consideration while spending cuts are made. Meanwhile, racism continues to constrict our fellow citizens' life chances.

The chances of a colour-blind approach addressing the racism that operates within our society are slim. A rising tide does not necessarily float all boats. The expansion of higher education is a good example; despite higher levels of participation for some minority ethnic groups, this has not automatically resulted in improved outcomes in the labour market. Worryingly, one in five young people are unemployed – in Pakistani groups this increases to two in five, in black groups this number soars to one in two. Not addressing the patterns of racial discrimination or, worse, simply wishing them away, will not lead us to the kind of society that we want. The silence around racism does not help those who experience racial discrimination to make sense of the challenges they face or enable them to take appropriate action to address it. The frustration of shattered dreams and the crushing of hope can lead to worse outcomes for us all; the recent violence in our streets may be an indication of this frustration.

### **Addressing the electoral logic**

David Cameron argued that adopting positive action to select a more diverse group of candidates

*Is in the best traditions of our Party, the one nation tradition of Benjamin Disraeli, and it should inspire us again today. Unless you can represent everyone in our country you cannot be a one nation party.<sup>11</sup>*

Can the Conservatives claim yet to represent ‘everyone in our country’? The number of women and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds standing for the party has increased considerably and efforts to move in this direction should be praised (though it should be noted that there remained more old Etonians than black people standing as Conservative parliamentary candidates in 2010). However this shift in the ethnic diversity of the candidates has not led to widespread support from minority ethnic communities. Preliminary analysis of the 2010 general election has highlighted that less than 8 per cent of the black electorate chose to vote Conservative – and only 14 per cent of the minority ethnic electorate as a whole did so.<sup>12</sup> Clearly the Conservative message is either not getting through to or is being rejected by a large part of the minority ethnic population. This is a problem for the Conservative party now, and our population projections suggest it is one that will not decline:

*Non-white ethnic minority groups, who made up 8.7% of the population of England and Wales in 2001, are projected to make up 16.3% of the population by 2016, 20.1% by 2026 and 29.7% by 2051. The non-white population of England and Wales is projected to increase from 4.5 million in 2001 to 9.3 million in 2016, 12.3 million in 2026 and 20.7 million by 2051.<sup>13</sup>*

Minority ethnic groups will form a significantly larger proportion of the population within a generation. This change will have serious implications, in particular for the Conservative party, if ethnic voting patterns remain the same. As a charity concerned with race equality, we understand that political and civic activity is a key space for people from different backgrounds to learn from and share with each other. It would be a problem if this interaction only took place along ethnicised lines. Further, if people who are asked to govern do not engage regularly with a diverse group of people then the decisions they make may well favour ‘people like us’ rather than Britons in all their diversity. Distance from some parts of

our society also makes it easier to blame groups for the inequalities they face rather than understand the context in which they operate or work alongside them to address the challenges. The increasingly shrill tone of politics stateside highlights some of the problems of ossified class, ethnic or religious boundaries in party politics. Finally, given the cross-party consensus that racism is a 'bad thing' for our society, it is important that all parties have a legitimate voice, informed by their members, on how we defeat it.

### **A Conservative voice on race equality?**

Given the prevalence and persistence of racism, the inadequacy of colour-blind approaches (however attractive), and the failure to engage people from minority ethnic communities with the Conservative's message, it is clear that a distinctive voice on addressing racial disadvantage from the Conservative party would be welcome. A strategy to address racial disadvantage, ensuring that decentralisation and localism do not lead to a diminution of accountability on racial equality, and a willingness to engage in discussion about race and action to eliminate racism are currently missing. The prize of a society free from racism is one worth fighting for; Conservatives are welcome to join the battle.

*Dr Rob Berkeley is the director of Runnymede Trust.*

**Notes**

- 1 D Dorling, *So You Think You Know About Britain?*, London: Constable and Robinson, 2010.
- 2 See Stop Watch, [www.stop-watch.org](http://www.stop-watch.org) (accessed 22 Sep 2011).
- 3 Y Li, F Devine and A Heath, *Inequalities in Education, Employment and Earnings Among Equality Groups: A research review and analysis of trends over time*, Manchester: Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2008.
- 4 M Wood et al, *A Test for Racial Discrimination in Recruitment Practice in British Cities*, research report 607, London: National Centre for Social Research for Department for Work and Pensions, 2009.
- 5 D Weekes-Bernard (ed), *Widening Participation and Race Equality*, London: Runnymede Trust, 2010.
- 6 P Rees and P Wohland, *Estimates of Ethnic Mortality in the UK*, Leeds: School of Geography, University of Leeds, 2008.
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