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By Harry Jivenmukta

WHAT IS RACISM?

1

When a person or group of people from a particular ethnic group or of a particular colour discriminate against people who are different

The basic belief of racists and fascists is very simple. They believe that the problems which people face can be simply solved by removing some people from their country and letting other people have their homes jobs and wealth. In Nazi Germany the problems that Hitler faced was having removed one group he had to then decide which other groups to remove. He chose trade unionists, communists, Jews.... Racism needs someone to blame in order to succeed. If there is no-one to blame and people are still suffering unemployment or bad housing or poverty ordinary people would realise that racism does not work.

Racism and fascism operates by playing on the fears of ordinary people. Racists generally recruit members from the poorer areas in towns and cities. In the poorer areas where there is least hope, and most hardship, racists sell the prospect of a better standard of living and more money which gives hope to the people they target. By offering a simple 'solution' to their problems racists attract members who are receptive to solutions to their sometimes quite complicated problems.

In Britain, racist political parties have never enjoyed widespread support and they have never had enough support to elect an MP to parliament. They have occasionally threatened to win local council seats and have won one seat once.

The most recent example of racism which we have seen in the news over the last few years has been a racial tension in the former Yugoslavia. People who had lived in the same region for generations suddenly felt that they could not live together any longer. After the first world war the borders of many countries in Eastern Europe were changed and the leftover bits were brought together in the country of Yugoslavia. Although many of the people in Yugoslavia had lived together for hundreds of years some of their problems happened because they were forced to live together rather than live together through choice.

We can identify some of the reasons why people become racist. Sometimes it is for economic reasons and sometimes racism happens because of jealousy and greed.

Exercise

1. Define racism in your own words.
2. Think of examples of racism in recent years. Look for examples throughout the world.
3. What is Fascism? How does it differ from racism?

WAYS OF CLASSIFYING RACES

Many people think that races can and should be classified. Other people think that we are all human beings and classification only serves to divide people. There are some good reasons for classification, however, like sociological or geographic classifications which help in the study of people and their needs. There is an example of classification below.

The overwhelming majority of all human populations can be separated into roughly nine large groupings known as geographic races, which correspond to geographic areas of continental proportions. These are distinguished as follows, with their historical site of origin indicated in brackets:

- z European (Europe, Middle East, North Africa);
- z Asiatic (East, Southeast, and Central Asia);
- z African (sub-Saharan Africa);
- z Indian (Asian Indian subcontinent);
- z American Indian (North, South, and Central America);
- z Australian (i.e., the Aborigines of Australia);
- z Polynesian;
- z Micronesian;
- z Melanesian.

Smaller groups, known as local races, exist within most geographic races. Local races remain distinct through the influence of such factors as social custom, religious custom, geography, and population density. Even smaller groupings, known as microraces, can be discerned within local races. The origins and racial development of some peoples, such as the Ainu of Japan, however, are still unknown.

Exercise

1. Why might it be useful to classify races and people?
2. Make a list of the useful ways in which people and races can be classified. What purpose do these classifications serve?
3. Does classification always lead to conflict? Why?
4. How can classification help to overcome racism?

There has been immigration into Britain for hundreds of years, especially in Liverpool and Cardiff where black communities have lived for centuries. Immigration from other countries continued slowly until 1945. After the second world war Britain needed to rebuild and invited almost 100,000 Europeans to live and work in Britain. Some companies began to recruit workers from India and the West Indies. These included transport companies, hotels and the National Health Service. There was lots of work in Britain and everyone who came found work. By 1960 immigration was becoming very high whilst the number of jobs was levelling out. Some people in Britain began to become concerned about the level of immigration. The first major



Immigration Act was passed in 1962. The immigration figure of over 66,000 in 1960 dropped to just under 8,000 as a result of the Immigration Act. Since then there have been a number of Immigration Acts.

Today the immigration restrictions means there are very few people who can come to live in Britain. The majority of people who come to Britain now are people who are seeking political asylum because of fears for their safety in their own countries. Britain has developed closer links with Europe and the whole of Europe is adopting similar immigration restrictions. The policy has been called **Fortress Europe** because it aims to keep out as many people as possible whilst letting people within Europe travel as freely as possible between countries.

Black people make up about 6 six percent of the British population. As an economic group they generate about 10% of the national wealth. This is mainly because many immigrants have developed their own businesses. The black business sector includes clothing manufacturing, restaurants, retail shops, and taxi services. As the children of immigrants have grown up in the UK they have spread to all sectors of British industry including professional jobs. This is particularly noticeable in the health services, law, and financial sectors.

Exercise

1. What is the difference between immigration and emigration?
2. Why did black people come to the UK?
3. Make a list of black businesses in your town or city. Which types of businesses are black people most involved in?

COMPARISON - USA THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

4

A black woman, Rosa Parks, was arrested for refusing to move to the Negro section of a bus in Alabama, 1955. Blacks staged a one-day local boycott of the bus system to protest. A local Baptist minister, Martin Luther King Jr. succeeded in transforming a racial protest into a massive resistance movement. After a long boycott of the bus company it was forced to desegregate its facilities. Then picketing and boycotting spread rapidly to other communities. During the period from 1955 to 1960, some progress was made toward integrating schools and other public facilities in the upper South and the border states, but the Deep South remained determined in its opposition to most desegregation measures.

In 1960 the sit-in movement was launched when black college students insisted on service at a local segregated lunch counter. The movement spread across the nation, forcing the desegregation of department stores, supermarkets, libraries, and cinemas. In May 1961 the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) sent 'Freedom Riders' of both races through the South and elsewhere to test and break down segregated accommodations in interstate transportation. By September it was estimated that more than 70,000 students had participated in the movement, with approximately 3,600 arrested; more than 100 cities in 20 states had been affected. The movement reached its climax in August 1963 with a massive march on Washington to protest at racial discrimination and demonstrate support for major civil-rights legislation that was pending in Congress.

After President Kennedy's assassination (November 1963), Congress passed the Civil Rights Act. This was the most far-reaching civil rights bill in the nation's history forbidding discrimination in public accommodations and threatening to withhold federal funds from communities that persisted in maintaining segregated schools. It was followed in 1965 by the passage of the Voting Rights Act. This act led to drastic increases in the numbers of black registered voters in the South, with a comparable increase in the numbers of blacks holding elective offices there.

In 1966 younger blacks became impatient with the rate of change and dissatisfied with purely nonviolent methods of protest. This new militancy split the ranks of the movement's leaders and also alienated some white sympathizers, a process that was accelerated by a wave of rioting in the black ghettos of several major cities in 1965-67. After the assassination of Martin Luther King (April 1968) and further black rioting in the cities, the movement disintegrated, with a broad spectrum of leadership advocating different approaches and varying degrees of militancy.

In the years that followed, many civil rights leaders sought to achieve greater direct political power through elective office, and they sought to achieve more economic and educational gains through affirmative-action programs that compensated for past discrimination in job recruitment and college admissions. During the later 1970s and the '80s the civil rights movement became less militant.

Exercise

1. How is it useful to compare the civil rights movement in the USA with the struggle for equality by black people in the UK?
2. How did the civil rights movement in the USA affect the struggle for equality by black people in the UK?

Legislation has been passed in Britain to stop discrimination against people because of the colour of their skin. Until it became illegal people could be openly racist without fear of legal action. After the Race Relations Act was passed in the mid 1970s the nature of racism changed. Racism can be seen in two main forms. Firstly, there is an obvious racism which can be seen in racial attacks against black people, and demonstrations by extreme right wing political parties. This is called **direct racism**. Secondly, there is a more serious and hidden racism which can be seen by looking at the number of black people who are unemployed, and by looking at the lack of opportunities for black people. This is called **indirect racism**.

The number of racial attacks recorded by the police have increased steadily over the years. Despite legislation it has been difficult to challenge racism in this physical form. Many types of community-based initiatives have been tried and some police forces have employed special anti racist tactics. The financial cost of vandalism and violence is not as high as the psychological cost of suffering caused to victims. Some black communities have formed themselves into defence organisations and others have become involved in local initiatives but the problem is still there and growing.

A more subtle racism exists in employment and related areas. On average a black person has to apply for three times as many jobs before being successful as a white person. Equal opportunities legislation means that employers cannot publicly be racist but it is clear that some of them are racist during the recruitment process. The number of black people who are unemployed, live in bad housing, and who have poor educational results is higher proportionately than for white people.

Many people believe that racism can never be eradicated. But much can be done to reduce it. Measures like **positive action training**, which encourages black people to train for jobs which they might not otherwise consider, have been successful to some extent. In education, **Mentoring**, where successful black people become mentors so that young black people can see that it is possible to achieve, has also been successful.

Exercise

1. What is direct racism?
2. Define indirect racism.
3. Find out about the laws which exist to protect people from racism.
4. Why does racism still exist despite laws which are designed to end it?
5. Can racism ever be eradicated? Give reasons for your opinion.

The media is an important way in which we see and are shown how people live. In the past black people have been **stereotyped** especially in television programmes. In many programmes black people are not featured at all or featured in the **tokenistic** way. This means that they are only put in to avoid criticism and they only have a small role to play. In America some programmes are designed just for black audiences and all or almost all the actors are black. Some people think this is even worse than the British media approach.

If you look through a glossy magazine at the advertisements you may find it difficult to find a black face. Many advertisers believe that black faces do not sell products. If the product being advertised is something which is made by or represents the black community then black actors are shown in an exotic and mysterious way; for instance, curry powders, or Indian meals.

Often black presenters are seen on the news only with relation to matters which affect black people and are not as visible generally. This trend is changing, however, and more black people are appearing in the media. Many black people and anti-racist white people are concerned to make sure that black people are not just visible in the media because companies want to be seen to be anti-racist, but that it should be because the companies really believe that it makes no difference if someone is black or white.

One area where black people have dominated is in sport. As more and more sports events are televised black people have become very visible as positive and skilled people. Black people appear in most British sporting teams including football, rugby, cricket, and athletics. Many media sporting events do give substantial coverage to black people.

Exercise

1. Make a list of the black characters who appear in your favourite British soap on TV. How many black people are there? What types of roles do they have? Are these roles stereotypical or tokenistic in any way?
2. Look in your favourite magazine. How many black people appear in the advertisements? What sort of advertisements do black people appear in?
3. Make a list of British TV programmes where black people are the main actors. How does this compare to the number of leading black actors in American programmes?

From time to time unrest occurs and riots break out all over large cities and in towns. It has been seen that these occur in almost every country where minority groups live. After the 1981 riots in Britain a report concluded that the reason why riots happened was because of the feeling of **powerlessness** and **alienation**. Alienation means that people do not feel part of the main society in which they live and because of this they always feel that they are on the margins of society. Young black people find it three times more difficult to find the job than white people, and therefore the amount of unemployment and poverty in the black community is proportionately higher than in society as a whole.

When people do not feel that they are part of society then their desire to obey the law is less. There is more justification for fighting against the system which discriminates against them. One way to involve people more is to let them have a greater say in the way their local communities are run. Increasingly, since the early 1980s there has been a change for the better with black people moving into jobs across a wide spectrum of professions. But there are still areas where there is very high black unemployment.

When there is unrest and the rioting, there is also an increase in the opposite forces, in this case the right-wing political parties. They often attempt to raise the stakes by frightening people into thinking that this is the beginning of something more sinister. Newspapers often lead with headlines like '**war on the streets**', among others. There is no doubt that in riots and unrest some people take advantage of the opportunity to steal and loot. These people often undermine the genuine grievances of the people who are reacting to injustice. But it is often difficult to justify rioting although many people understand why people are so dissatisfied.

Exercise

1. What is alienation?
2. Why do people sometimes riot rather than use other methods of complaint?
3. Can rioting ever be justified? Why?

Until about the 1990 political parties were not very interested in the black vote because the Labour Party felt that it could rely on black voters to vote Labour, and the Conservative party felt that black people disliked them so much that they would never vote Conservative in any great numbers. At some point the political parties realised that it wasn't so simple. Whilst many black people were traditional Labour type voters, i.e. working-class, manual workers, there had grown up a black middle-class of people who were working in professional or semi professional jobs. Furthermore, many Asian people who were very religious and believed in traditional family values began to see the Labour Party as too radical, whilst the Conservative party seemed to be more pro family.

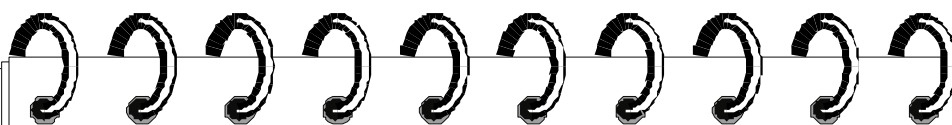
All the major political parties began to recruit more and more black voters and involved them directly in the everyday working of the parties. The effect of this was to introduce black people into the political process itself. Black people began to understand in practical terms how the political system especially in local government worked. Political parties also began to realise that they would have a greater chance of winning an election in predominantly black areas if they put forward black candidates. Today we can see that often all the major political parties field black candidates in local elections where the electorate is predominantly black. Black people sit on councils all over the country today.

Another effect of involving black people in the political process was to introduce them at the highest level as MP's. Today there are several black MP's in the House of Commons and also in the Cabinet. The feeling of powerlessness which black people had in the 1980s has been replaced with more confidence because black people can see that they are more involved in politics. But many black people still think their involvement is tokenistic and they would not be able to reach to the very top. It will be a long time before there is a black Prime Minister in Britain.



Exercise

1. Why are political parties interested in recruiting Black people?
2. Are there any Black councillors, MPs or MEPs in your area? What does this tell you about equal opportunities in your area compared to other areas?



Racism is really stupid because people hate other people for no better reason than that they are a different colour or speak a different language. There is no reason why anyone should be able to make someone else's life difficult just because they live in a different way.

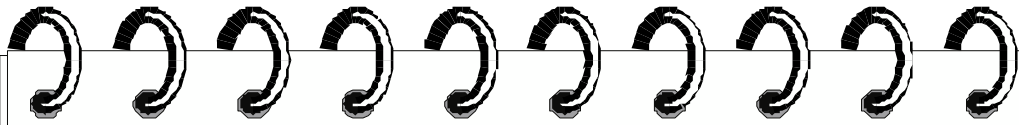
I think that the real reason why people are racist is because they are frightened of the things they do not understand. It is natural for people to be a little bit cautious when they meet someone new but they should try to find out about that person and not just put all their barriers up. I personally enjoy meeting new people and learning about new cultures. Anyone who eats Italian, Indian or Chinese food is benefiting from the cultures and ways of other people.

Most of the reasons that racists give for their attitudes are irrational. People from other countries do not want to take the jobs of indigenous people, or take anything for free. Immigrants generally work harder and contribute more to the country in which they live because they have to work hard to get the things which other people have. You just have to look at the immigrant communities in the UK to see this.

Most young black people were born in the UK and this is their country. It is no longer acceptable to say that only white people are British. In fact British people can now be any colour. In any case colour is irrelevant and should not matter any more.

Exercise

1. Why are some people racist?
2. Do racists dislike all immigrants or do they give more attention to some groups in particular?
3. Are the children of immigrants really as British as indigenous people? Give examples.



I think that people should look very closely at the issue of immigration and the position of people who are already settled in the UK. We can see from the example of the former Yugoslavia that when many people of different ethnic backgrounds live together there is always the chance that there will be conflict. I am not a racist but I do believe that we should be very careful when we allow people to settle in our country because they may not integrate properly and that can cause problems.

I am not only talking about black immigrants but also about the threat of more European integration. This country has fought two world wars which were both started in Europe and involved the same countries which are now trying to integrate. In short, every country should have its own clear independent and individual make up which should not be compromised in any way. Things can be very organised and simple and all racial problems avoided.

I am not saying that people already settled in this country should return to the country which they came from, but I do believe that no new immigration should be allowed and no further integration of this country with other countries in Europe should happen. This country is very small and there is a lot of unemployment. The health service is already stretched. We should look after our own people first, and perhaps help people in other countries through loans or aid but they should remain in their own country.

Exercise

1. What is Nationalism?
2. Is the idea of a sovereign country standing on its own out of date?
3. Is it possible to maintain a strong independent culture in the UK when it is a part of the European Community?