

Culture & Race, UK...

I got to thinking the other day—well, you know how it is. Lockdown and all. Nothing better to do. So, yes, thinking... Well, lots of agitated agitators were outraged by a report that the UK was NOT institutionally racist. Indeed, that the UK was a world leader when it came to eradicating racism.. Now, you might have thought that was welcome news. Apparently not. Indeed, it was outrageous and disgraceful news. Hmm...delicate subject: rational approach required, anthropology-style. So...

The report agreed that there was some racist behaviour, but that the principal disparities within the population at large were down to issues like geography, poverty, culture and upbringing. These had “more significant impact” on life chances than racism. Whitewash? Oh! And the report added that the BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) acronym should be discontinued, for reasons that will become apparent.

Like many of us, I see racist behaviour around us. But it does not seem to be general, i.e. between all races. Think about it. Is it all races, or is it more of one than than another. I observe very little racism between, say, Asian Brits and Anglo-Saxon Brits. Although, I do observe racist behaviour between Scots Brits and Anglo-Saxon Brits—and that IS institutionalised. As a boy, I was taught in Scottish History lessons to hate the English for their brutal behaviour towards the poor Scots (sic). Even then, I wondered why the English would have come north of the border without cause: no-one seemed to know...although the Romans seemed to have had a clue—they built a wall to deal with it.

So, where do I observe racist behaviour today? Well, it does seem to be mainly to, from and between what-we-might-call Black Caribbean males. Not all, of course, but predominantly. Is that a fair and reasonable comment? Well, no, I don't have statistics to back me up, It's just that when racist behaviour is complained about in, say, soccer, it is generally directed towards a black footballer. And is frequently anonymous, courtesy of antisocial media.

But, it's not all black Caribbean males—that would be quite unfair. As with any group, culture, or whatever, there is evidently a wide variation. Many young black males are charming, cooperative, studious, athletic, smart, and keen to “fit in.” Much to the annoyance of others of their culture, who have been known to describe them as ‘coconuts:’ black on the outside, white on the inside. And worse. Which goes to tell you something quite interesting and revealing about their culture...and therein, it seems, may lie (part of) the problem. Coupled, perhaps, with an excess of testosterone? Or a minimal complement of Neanderthal/Denisovan DNA? Who knows...

Then there are the stop-and-search tactics of the Metropolitan Police in London. They are accused of “picking on” young black males to stop and search. Outrage! Never mind that the Jamaican drug gangs are busy peddling their damaging wares and promoting turf wars, with copious “black-on-black” killings. If the police know, both from experience and intelligence, that the criminals involved are young Black Caribbean men, then they would surely be both daft and ineffective to waste their limited resources searching everybody... that would only play into the hands of the criminals. Or am I being, somehow, naïve?

No, that is not institutionalised racism on behalf of the police. On the other hand, you might wonder if the Jamaican drug gangs in London are, perhaps, just oppressed businessmen trying to make a dishonest living.

(Jamaican drug gangs also operate in New York City and Toronto—it's a thriving international business.)

Then, of course, there were the “Black Lives Matter” protests. And, you have to acknowledge that the US police do have a colourful record when dealing with black African Americans. The flagrant killing of George Floyd caused deserved outrage. And the Black Lives Matter protest against police brutality that swept the US was entirely understandable.

But, why in Britain? Our police do not have a similar record to those in the US. Indeed, though no one seemed to notice, our police go unarmed. They do not wander about shooting black people. Or anyone else. We try our best to conduct “policing by consent.” Nonetheless, Black Lives Matter protests swept through the UK, including London, of course, and Bristol—where a gang of over-excited white thugs (judging by t.v. pictures) tore down the statue of Edward Colston (1636 – 1721), an English merchant, philanthropist and Tory Member of Parliament who was involved in the Atlantic slave trade.

So: Colston had been dead for 400 years; Bristol had evolved socially out of all recognition in that time, being the first European city to elect a black mayor (cf.) and, many of the BLM protesters had been raised and educated in a city that Edward Colston did much to develop and evolve culturally and socially for their future benefit. Ironical, or what?

Curiously, the police were not present to keep the Queen's Peace, nor to protect Colston's statue which, lacking protective shutters, was torn down, daubed with paint and rolled into the nearby harbour. Bristol's mayor, Marvin Rees, billed as black, but of mixed Jamaican and English heritage, had the statue retrieved, to be put into a museum, rather than restored to its rightful position in the city centre.

What do the lack of police presence, the lack of shutter protection of the statue, the presence of a pre-prepared gang of *white* thugs during a BLM

protest, and the mayor's disinclination to condemn the despoiling act and restore the statue, amount to? Well, you pays your money, as they say...

I find it difficult in such circumstances to decide who is racist. But, it does seem clear that some of the black Caribbean element carry a burning resentment of things that happened to their forebears some thirteen or fourteen generations ago... Bit like the Scots against the English, perhaps—some of 20,000 of whom were sent as slaves to the Americas and the Caribbean, too. Not to mention Australia and the Botany Bay penal colony... But, perhaps it is unfair to mention that, in case it dilutes the resentment...

So, I looked up the definition of racism in the Oxford dictionary:

...the belief that different races possess distinct characteristics, abilities, or qualities, especially so as to distinguish them as inferior or superior to one another.

Not quite as expected. So: if an American divorcee, say, were to go to Britain and marry into the revered British Royal Family, believing them to be of socially superior stock, and so affording her an advantageous marriage, before accompanying her celebrated husband out of Britain; would that be an example of racism on her part? That would be, as they say, a “turn up for the books.”

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It seems that we may use terms such as ‘racist’ without a proper understanding of their meaning. And the term soon takes on a new meaning, and can become insulting and accusative. While many of the things people say may simply be rude and disparaging, without being racist.

For instance, is it racist to direct imitations of a chimpanzee towards a footballer? Well, a chimpanzee is an ape, one of the Great Apes that include chimpanzee, bonobo, orang utan, gorilla and, of course, we humans. So, the footballer *is* an ape, a human ape, but he is *not* a chimp. And it is well known that chimps have very poor ball control—they can neither throw nor catch effectively. So to portray a footballer as a chimp, might be seen as very rude and disparaging of the footballer's capabilities. If the footballer is black, and the moron imitating a chimp is simply observing a physical resemblance between the footballer and the chimp, then that is also very rude, and nasty with it. But, since chimps are not humans, there seems to be no racism involved. Unless we wish to classify the other Great Apes as part of the human race. And I don't think we do.

People have been compared to animals for millennia. Aesop made a career out of it, with his fables. Disney excels in anthropomorphism today. And highly entertaining and educational, too.

Why are we all so up in arms against racism, and “stamping it out?” Well, I am not sure that so-called racism is any worse now than it has ever been, but then I am old, and we old folk are supposed to be racist, when we may be simply calling a spade a bloody shovel. And that's ageism, I do believe—ain't it fun to have your own *-ism*! Be that as it may, supposed racism certainly has become more of an issue recently. Particularly with people of West African heritage...

Peculiar, that. You might have thought that people with an Asian background would also be complaining about racist behaviour. Perhaps they experience racism, but don't complain—well, not so much, at least. Instead, we find Asian Brits fitting into our society rather well, appearing for example as leading BBC newsreaders (Rita's my favourite) with excellent neutral English that puts our home-grown, regionally-guttural, frantic arm-waving presenters and journalists to shame. The current Chancellor of the Exchequer is of Asian

extraction, as was his predecessor. And a jolly fine job he is doing, too. As a culture, they are strong on family, keen to be educated and to move into professional life, the law, medicine, teaching, etc. Which is great. At the same time, these Brits, maintain their own culture within the home and their local societies. Which is also great, enriching and extending our society at large.

So, why are the charges of racism mounting, and why are they apparently aimed more at men of West African heritage, than other ethnic or cultural groupings? You know, I can't help wondering if the problem has been brought about by that Political Correctness (PC) legislation of recent years:

Political correctness is a term used to describe language, policies, or measures that are intended to avoid offence or disadvantage to members of particular groups in society.

Now that all seems perfectly reasonable. But then, such abstract notions often do. Political Correctness, rather than help differing cultures get along, has invoked counter intuitive behaviour among the peoples it was intended to help, resulting in socio-cultural tension and widespread accusations of racism.

How could that come about? Well, it's not hard to see, in retrospect. Who decides what is offensive to them? If a person decides they don't like to be called 'chalky,' then they can easily take offence. Or 'ginge.' Or 'the N-word,' which although a Spanish word meaning black, is now considered highly offensive—unless spoken by one black man to another black man, in which case it is a friendly term of comradeship...

See what I mean? Offence, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder...or his ear, or whatever. Anyone can choose to be offended, or not. And by bringing PC notions into law, folks could claim that someone who had been called, say, Chalky¹ had been offended, and that the offender was a racist and had broken

¹ Chalky, as a nickname, generally refers to someone with the surname White. It has also been used in the past to indicate a black member of a group of otherwise white males. With no offence given or taken.

the law. Couple that with the ever-expanding use of antisocial media, and you have an outpouring of anonymous racist rhetoric. Well, more accurately, an outburst of *name-calling*... Whatever happened to “sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me”? Whatever happened to “turn the other cheek”? (Which is how we oldies were brought up to deal with offensive people. Oh yes—upbringing plays a significant role.)

Then we have a commission on racial equality. The very existence of such a commission establishes in people’s minds that races are NOT equal. Besides, how do you prove that they ARE equal, or does the commission sit for all time?

PC is not the only culprit—there’s also Human Rights:

Human rights are the basic rights and freedoms that belong to every person in the world, from birth until death. ... These basic rights are based on shared values like dignity, fairness, equality, respect and independence. These values are defined and protected by law.

Now, that is a real mishmash of vague, undefinable terms enshrined in law...so much so, that each case of supposed violation has to be examined in court to see if - in the opinion of the presiding judges - any violation has occurred. Deciding about some party’s dignity, whether it has been prejudiced or not, might prove just a tad subjective... fairness is similarly vague—what is fair to one party is almost certainly unfair to another. Respect is earned, surely not a right. What the right to independence might mean is anyone’s guess, in societies where we all depend on one another. And, ensuring equality for the seven and a half billion humans currently overrunning the planet seems a little unreal.

Indeed, Human Rights have proved to be a moveable feast, as the judges in the Court of Human Rights make decisions on such abstract values. And some of their judgments might seem to be at odds with other laws, to fly in the

face of common sense, and of human behaviour and practice, evolved over millions of years, such as marriage being between a man and a woman.

It is now deemed unfair that a man can marry a woman, but a woman cannot marry a woman, nor a man marry a man. “People must have equal rights to marry, whatever their ~~sex~~—woops! *Gender*.” (I keep forgetting that they have had to censor our English dictionaries with “new” definitions of marriage and sex: gender used to be about language, *der, die, das*, and all that. So, in German, ‘the girl’ is neuter gender—*das Mädchen*. Seems like ‘Sex Vs. Gender’ only works in English. Now there’s a thing.)

Never mind that, uniquely among the Great Apes, humans are monogamous, never mind the psychological, anatomical and physiological aspects establishing that a man complements a woman and *vice versa*, for the purpose of coupling, procreation and raising of offspring. Fundamentally, a man and a woman are not equal—things wouldn’t work if they were—they are *complementary*. Each complements the other. Simple...

I’m afraid Human Rights legislation has seriously misled the societies of humans it was supposed to aid. And none of it was necessary—existing laws generally addressed most issues. Not that such legislation was the first. Magna Carta was a human rights charter, in its way—and a lot more practical.

Besides, if we are going to have Human Rights, what about the other animals on the planet? Particularly, I suppose, the more intelligent ones, such as elephants, cetaceans, corvids and the other Great Apes, etc.

This is Shabani the Gorilla, a gentle giant, billed as Japan’s latest heartthrob. His looks have been compared to George Clooney...According to ladies in Japan, he seems destined for human status...and he certainly is a handsome fellow, and he hasn’t complained about being compared to any footballer—yet. Shouldn’t he have Human Rights?

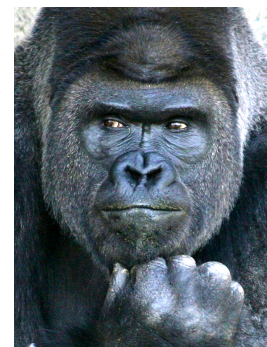


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If you are thinking that idea is nonsense, you are

undoubtedly right. But then, isn't the notion of Human Rights equally nonsense? Both PC legislation and Human Rights legislation have resulted in counter-intuitive, social engineering outcomes.

PC legislation censors free speech: instead, racist comments appear untraceably on antisocial media. PC prohibits much of previous comedy, jokes based on nationality (An Englishmen, an Irishman and a Scotsman went into a bar...), disapproves of sexual stereotyping (woman, the homemaker - man, the breadwinner; male and female parts of a carpentry joint, or a Stonehenge trilithon, or a plug and socket; etc., etc., etc.) and generally depresses and sours the national psyche. How? By shutting down service, gallows, stereotypical and intercultural humour as the psychological relief valve it unquestionably was—*and still should be*.

The change over the last 50 years is disturbing...ask any oldie. And we are supposed to be the racists? You should try living 30+ to a room, with a mix of boy apprentices from Pakistan, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), Burma (Myanmar), Zimbabwe, and the UK. You would learn, as we did, that race was not the problem, but culture can be. Particularly Scot's culture². The cultural differences (and there were plenty) melted away as we bonded into a single group of friends and comrades in the face of the enemy—better known as the senior apprentices, who enjoyed ragging us—very physically—and the drill sergeant.

Frankly, it was much better before PC (BPC?)—at least you knew who was saying or doing what, and you could either choose to ignore, laugh, respond in kind, or take to the law. And BPC was also largely before antisocial media, so offender anonymity was less assured. Indeed, it is evident that people who have an issue of some kind with you, find it easier on line, and are much less inclined to be rude to your face—it's such bad manners. Besides,

² He got discharged for violent behaviour.

they might, just might, get back rather more than they bargained for, and they know it.

And that's another issue. By making these vague PC and HR values legally enforced, everyone with a whim or a grudge feels entitled to declare their "human rights have been infringed." Someone marching against the soon-to-be new Public Order Act and consequently infringing the COVID regulations stated confidently: "It's my Human Rights to protest." Actually, it's not. But it is a normal right in a democracy, though obviously not during a pandemic lockdown.

However, the freedom to protest cannot sensibly enable you to interfere with other peoples freedoms. The proposed new public order act is alleged, for example, to outlaw pulling down or defacing statues. And some demonstrators in the past, in addition to damaging property, have tried to prevent ambulances entering and leaving hospitals. Extinction Rebellion also created gridlock in city centres, stopping people from conducting their business, from making their livelihoods, blocking emergency services, public transport, and much more.

Preventing demonstrators from doing such antisocial things is both sensible and reasonable within a democracy. That there have been such violent demonstrations against the new Public Order Act, months before it has been finalised, must suggest that the criminal fringe that seek to infiltrate legitimate demonstrations doesn't relish the prospect of having their wings clipped.

I always remember my old teacher's definition of freedom:
Freedom. The right to do whatever you want, provided
you don't interfere with other people's similar rights.

Couple that with the pure genius of:

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you..."

...and I suggest we need neither PC nor HR. Provided, of course, we could manage to curb antisocial media's worst excesses...Fat chance. Oh, well...