

# Race in Britain Today

Earlier this year an official inquiry into the murder of a black teenager in England provoked a series of discussions and arguments about the treatment of ethnic minorities by police in Britain today. A few months later, there were two bomb attacks on ethnic communities by a right-wing extremist. In general, Britain is proud of its ethnic mix. What's going on?

## Getting away with murder?

Six years ago, Stephen Lawrence, an 18-year-old student, was stabbed to death at a bus stop in south-east London. Five white men were suspected of the murder but were found innocent. However, after the trial, the victim's parents managed to prove that the police had not presented all the evidence in court and had not acted quickly enough in arresting the suspects in the first place. They had even ignored a video of one of the men disposing of what could have been evidence. Was this racism or plain incompetence?

The Lawrence family understandably felt that justice had not been done. These feelings were shared by many when a video recording of the accused men talking in custody was shown on British television. The men were using incredibly racist language and discussing 'the best way to stab a black man.' Although the video still didn't provide concrete proof of the men's guilt, it showed their undeniable racism and disposition to violence. Despite fresh evidence and strong indications of police malpractice, a retrial was out of the question. According to the British 'double jeopardy' law, someone cannot be put on trial for the same crime twice. There was outrage. If

the five accused men were guilty, they were walking free. If they were innocent, then why hadn't the police found any other suspects?

## The Macpherson Report

The official report known as the Macpherson Report claimed that although in most cases the police were not overtly racist, their discriminatory behaviour and attitudes put minorities at a disadvantage by stereotyping them and subjecting them to unfair treatment. Blacks are more likely to be charged than whites (when both have truly committed a crime); are more likely to be jailed if found guilty; more likely to be refused bail

and more likely to be randomly stopped on the streets by the police. In response to the report, the police have introduced much harsher penalties for officers found to be acting in a racist way and have increased racial-awareness training to all staff. They have also set up special racist crimes units around the country which they hope will make racist crimes easier to report.

One of the most obvious ways of increasing racial awareness in the police force would be to recruit more ethnic minorities - a solution that is easier said than done, as hardly any ever apply (there are currently only 900 ethnic minority police officers in London's Metropolitan police). To try and remedy this, the police have commissioned a video featuring a rapper but there are concerns about how well this will go down. Although it is being made with good intentions, it could be seen as stereotyping.

## The action of a brainless coward

In April both black and Asian communities of London were the targets of vicious bomb attacks by a right-wing extremist. The public's outrage and disgust at these attacks showed just how used to living in relative harmony with different races Britain had become. It is exactly this situation that racist groups feel threatened by - Asians and blacks doing well.

THERE ARE LOTS OF PLACES IN BRITAIN WHERE RACISM DOESN'T EXIST.



Racists know that they can't get at them politically so they have had to use intimidation.

## Ethnic minorities in Britain

In terms of professions, it seems Britain has made a conscious effort to implement 'equal opportunity' policies. Additionally, although it has been the subject of controversy, companies and government departments have also operated positive discrimination policies. (If a person from an ethnic minority and a white person are equally well-suited to the job, it is given to the person from the ethnic minority.)

The percentage of unemployed blacks is almost double the whites. However, things are improving. Young black men are more likely to stay in education after the age of 16 than their white peers are. They recognise education as a way of escaping poverty and becoming more powerful against racism.