

CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION AS PLACEBO: 'STANDARDS', INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND EDUCATION POLICY

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Abstract

The issue of 'Institutional Racism' briefly rose to the top of the policy agenda when, in 1999, the British government was faced with a damning report into the circumstances surrounding the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence (an 18 year old Black college student). The official inquiry found evidence of institutional racism throughout the London police force and argued that all key agencies in society, including education, had a duty to identify and combat racism (including unintended and indirectly discriminatory actions). This paper examines the evidence of institutional racism in the English educational system and argues that the promotion of citizenship education, as a solution to this problem, acts as a placebo in terms of policy intentions and outcomes.

Citizenship education is now a required component of the national curriculum that must be taught by all state funded schools in England. It is constantly highlighted by policy makers as a major innovation that promotes social cohesion in general, and race equality in particular. At the same time, however, the government has continued to pursue a so-called 'standards' agenda that emphasizes a hierarchy of schools based on their students' performance in high stakes tests and promotes increased selection that is known to disadvantage Black students. Consequently, the principal education policy strategies are themselves revealed as potentially racist by the government's own definition. It is in this context that the promotion of citizenship education can be seen as a public policy placebo, i.e. a pretend treatment for institutional racism that gives the impression of action but is, in fact, without substance or effect. Meanwhile, the excesses of racialized educational inequality not only continue, but in some cases worsen.

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placebo **Med.** (See quot. 1811); *spec* a substance or procedure which a patient accepts as a medicine or therapy but which actually has no specific therapeutic activity for his [sic] condition or is prescribed in the belief that it has no such activity. ... 1811 HOOPER *Med. Dict.*, *Placebo*,... an epithet given to any medicine adapted more to please than benefit the patient
Oxford English Dictionary

The new Millennium dawned in tragic fashion in the town of Telford, in the English Midlands. Here Jason McGowan, a 20-year-old Black man, was found dead, hanging from railings just hours after he had been with his wife and friends celebrating in a local bar.¹ Six months earlier, Jason's uncle, Harold ('Errol') McGowan had been found hanged at a friend's house. Jason had been investigating the earlier death and both men had received threats from racist groups. The local police treated the deaths as suicide and refused to re-open their investigations despite pressure from family lawyers.² The deaths, and the police's reaction, were made especially shocking by the fact that Jason died at the end of a year when institutional racism, and especially its manifestations in police investigations, had been one of the dominant political and news items.³ The McGowan tragedies graphically highlight the chasm that exists between the reality of racism and the rhetoric of public policy pronouncements in contemporary Britain. This is a vital issue because the education system, like so many public institutions, is formally committed to equality of opportunity and multiculturalism, but in practice continues to act as a major producer of race inequality.

The term '*multiculturalism*' tends to be used somewhat differently in various parts of the English-speaking world. In the US, for example, the term encompasses a very wide range of approaches (see Banks 2004; Ladson-Billings 2004) whereas in Britain it has often been defined negatively in contrast to a more radical critique offered by theorists and activists under the heading of '*anti-racism*'. Such critiques portray multiculturalism as a liberal facade that deflects deeper criticism by attending to superficial matters of 'celebrating diversity' and making limited token (often patronising) curricular changes. Similar criticisms are, of course, increasingly prominent in the US literature too, where the notion of critical multiculturalism, and in particular the adoption of Critical Race Theory, has much in common with anti-racist theory in Britain (see Carrim and Soudien 1999; Figueroa 1999; Gillborn 2000 & 2004; Goldberg 1994; Ladson-Billings 1998; May 1999; Nieto 1999; Parker 1998; Tate 1997; Troyna 1993).

Until recently 'anti-racism' inhabited a role outside the political mainstream in Britain. Its proponents included prominent politicians in local authorities, educationists and community activists, but national policymakers fought shy of the term, which was popularly equated with extreme radicalism (see Gillborn 1995 & 2000; Sivanandan 1990).⁴ This changed in 1999 with the report of a public inquiry which proposed that the key institutions of British society in general, and the police in particular, were guilty of 'institutional racism'. In education, one of the most high-profile official responses was to promote compulsory 'citizenship education' for all 11 to 16 year-olds in state schools in England.⁵ This is frequently presented as a bold step to address race equality in education. In this paper, however, I argue that far from promoting anti-racism, in practice citizenship education operates as a form of *placebo*: an activity that gives the appearance of addressing the issues (racism and race equality) but which, in reality, manifestly fails to tackle the real problem. Indeed, recent developments suggest that even this analysis may be too optimistic: citizenship education is increasingly implicated in a series of policy developments that threaten to worsen an already critical situation.

Stephen Lawrence: institutional racism and public policy

As he waited for a bus at 10.30pm on 22nd April 1993, Stephen Lawrence, an 18 year old Black college student, was brutally stabbed to death. His killers, a group of white youths,

have never been brought to justice. Stephen was by no means the first young Black person to be murdered because of his race. However, after years of campaigning by Stephen's parents, Doreen and Neville Lawrence, a public inquiry was established into the circumstances surrounding the murder and the police's failure to prosecute. On its publication, in February 1999, *the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* (Macpherson 1999) sent shock waves through Britain with its meticulous account of the bungled police investigation and its conclusion that:

'racism, institutional or otherwise, is not the prerogative of the Police Service. It is clear that other agencies including for example those dealing with housing and education also suffer from the disease.' (Macpherson 1999: 33)

One of the most significant aspects of the report concerned an attempt to move beyond the superficial and extreme notion of racism that had previously characterized policy debate (in education and beyond). Pre-Lawrence public authorities and commentators tended to work with a view of racism as encompassing only the more obvious and deliberate forms of race hatred: as if 'racism is restricted to a few "rotten apples" in a basket that is basically sound' (Rizvi 1993: 7, after Henriques 1984: 62). Remarkably, for a report that began with a racist murder (surely the most crude and vicious form of racism), the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry insisted on a broad reworking of the term 'institutional racism', that explicitly included unintended and thoughtless acts that have the *effect* of discriminating (regardless of their intent).

[Institutional racism consists of the] collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.

It persists because of the failure of the organisation openly and adequately to recognise and address its existence and causes by policy, example and leadership' (*The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, Macpherson, 1999: 28)

Needless to say, this definition has been subject to endless scrutiny and debate. It is by no means a simple paraphrasing of previous approaches and it is not without its problems; nevertheless, one thing that is common to this perspective and longer established definitions, is its fundamental challenge to liberal complacency about the realities of contemporary racial politics and inequalities. As Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton observed almost 40 years ago, institutional racism:

is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of *specific* individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. [It] originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less public condemnation... (Carmichael & Hamilton 1967 original emphasis, reprinted in Cashmore & Jennings 2001: 112).

Speaking in Parliament on the day of publication, the Prime Minister Tony Blair, hailed the Lawrence inquiry as a turning point in British political life:

The publication of today's report on the killing of Stephen Lawrence is a very important moment in the life of our country. It is a moment to reflect, to learn and to change. It will certainly lead to new laws but, more than that, it must lead to new attitudes, to a new era in race relations, and to a new more tolerant and more inclusive Britain. (*Hansard* 24 February, 1999, col. 380)

Similarly, Jack Straw, the then Home Secretary (with responsibility for policing, public order, immigration etc) stated that:

I want this report to serve as a watershed in our attitudes to racism. I want it to act as a catalyst for permanent and irrevocable change, not just across our public services but across the whole of our society. The report does not place a responsibility on someone else; it places a responsibility on each of us. We must make racial equality a reality. (*Hansard* 24 February, 1999, col. 393)

These statements were repeated across the popular media where, for a brief but notable period, the question of ‘institutional racism’ headed the news and current affairs agenda. Significantly, the Department for Education lost no time in issuing a press briefing on its response to the Lawrence inquiry. Announcing that it would be ‘carefully considering’ the report, the department nevertheless confidently asserted the importance of its existing initiatives, most prominently, its plans for *citizenship education* (see figure 1):

**Ethnic Minority Pupils Must Have The Opportunity To
Fulfil Their Potential – Blunkett**

Education and Employment Secretary David Blunkett today reaffirmed the Government’s commitment to equality of opportunity in the wake of the publication of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report.

Mr Blunkett said the Department for Education and Employment would be carefully considering the Inquiry Report’s recommendations.

Mr Blunkett said: “The tragedy of Stephen Lawrence’s death shows how much more needs to be done to promote social justice in our communities. This is about how we treat each other and, importantly, how we learn to respect ourselves and one another as citizens.

“That learning comes from within the home, at school and the wider community. That is why we are promoting the teaching of citizenship at school, to help children learn how to grow up in a society that cares and to have real equality of opportunity for all”

Department for Education & Employment (1999) *Press Release 90/99*.
24 February 1999. London, Department for Education & Employment.

**Figure 1: The Department of Education’s immediate response
to the Lawrence Inquiry**

The department’s response is vitally important because its discursive construction achieves a remarkable double act: on one hand, the department presents itself as accepting the Inquiry’s analysis and sharing in its aims. Hence, its first sentence ‘*reaffirms*’ a ‘commitment to equal opportunities in the wake of the publication...’ And yet the detail of the announcement refuses the most central part of the report’s analysis, that is, the concern with *institutional racism* (as a characteristic of policy and practice that resides in the system itself). Rather, the department assumes a minimalist and crude definition of the problem, in terms of individual race hatred: ‘This is about how we treat each other and, importantly, how we learn to respect

ourselves and one another as citizens'. In this way, the institutional dimension is erased. The slogan of 'equal opportunities' is repeated in a vague fashion that appears to confirm a meaningful commitment but actually carries no weight at all. In this way, 'equality of opportunity' serves as what Barry Troyna (after Edelman 1964) called a 'condensation symbol':

Condensation symbols have a specific political purpose: to create symbolic stereotypes and metaphors which reassure supporters that their interests have been taken into account. But these symbols have a contradictory meaning so that the proposed solutions to perceived problems might also be contradictory, or ambiguously related to the way in which proponents and supporters initially viewed the issue. (Troyna 1993: 36)

The ritualistic commitment to 'equality of opportunity' acts as a marker that at once seems to accept the Lawrence Inquiry, but simultaneously offers nothing concrete in response. The only clear commitment is a re-statement of the government's already existing work on citizenship education. This position became clearly established as the government firmed up its response to the Lawrence Inquiry over the following weeks. In a debate dedicated to the Inquiry report, the Home Secretary stated:

The inquiry also made recommendations on education. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment is taking a number of steps aimed at promoting cultural diversity and preventing racism in our schools. Citizenship education, which will foster an understanding of cultural diversity in Britain, has a prominent place in the revised national curriculum. (Jack Straw, *Hansard*, 29 March 1999: col. 767)

This statement is important because it indicates how quickly citizenship education came to be invested with the official role of leading the education system's response to the charge of institutional racism.⁶ In the following section I consider the background to this move and identify its inherent problems.

Citizenship Education and Institutional Racism

Citizenship Education has traditionally offered curricular space for the discussion of social and moral issues, especially those seen as either too general or too controversial for treatment within subject specialisms (Osler 1999). There is no doubt that in some schools – where teachers have taken the opportunity to work with diverse communities and challenge conventional assumptions – citizenship education *can* provide part of the context for meaningful anti-racist work.⁷ Nevertheless, as a vehicle for addressing institutional racism, citizenship education is at best only a part of the answer: at worst, it is a fundamentally misconceived approach that can leave key aspects of the problem intact, or even more powerfully entrenched than before. In this section, I set out some of the most important problems with the current promotion of citizenship education as an answer to institutional racism. First, I briefly examine some of the evidence of institutional racism in the English educational system. Second, I consider the recent history of citizenship education. These two foci highlight a dramatic mismatch between the challenge identified by the Lawrence Inquiry and the poverty of citizenship education as a response.

Education and Institutional Racism in England: 'standards' for some

If, as a starting point, we take the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report's* definition of 'institutional racism' (above) there is compelling evidence that the English education system has a case to answer. First, there is the '*collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin*'. For the last twenty or thirty years the debates around 'race' and education have been dominated by a concern with the relatively lower attainments of some minority ethnic groups.

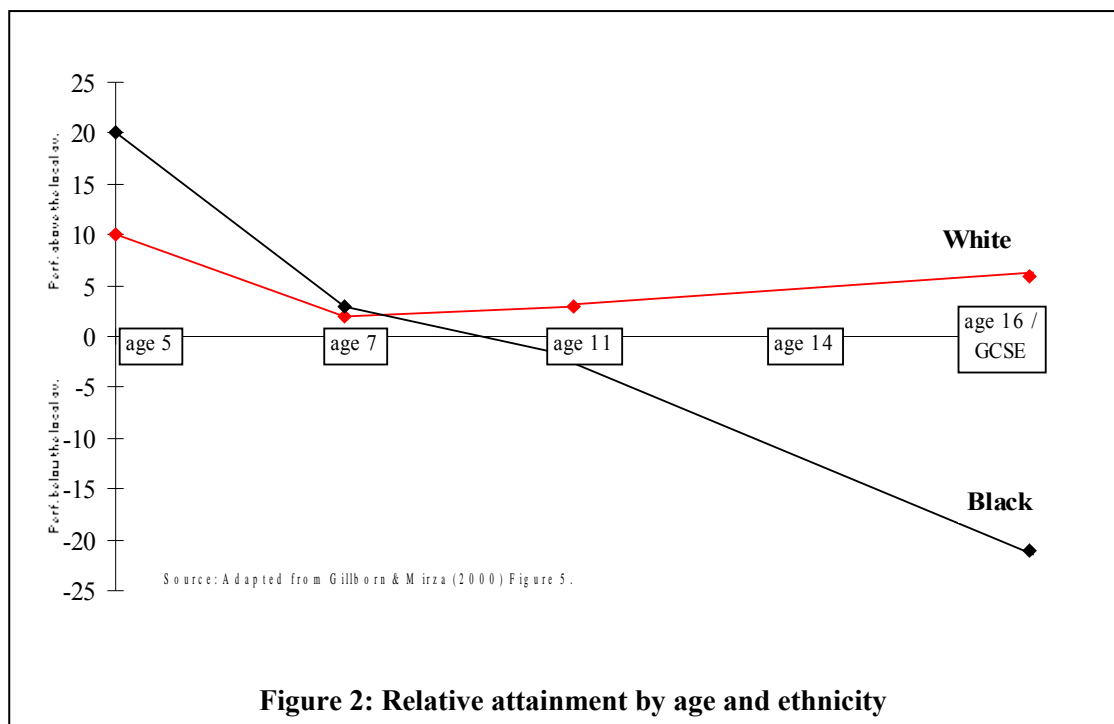
These inequalities have been documented by numerous pieces of research and are widely accepted. The latest data show that Black/African Caribbean students and their peers of Bangladeshi and Pakistani origin continue to fare less well in terms of educational certification at the end of compulsory schooling - a pattern that is true regardless of social class background (Gillborn & Mirza 2000). In 2002, for example, 52 per cent of white young people aged 16 attained five or more higher grade passes in the GCSE examinations that mark the end of compulsory schooling in England.⁸ The same was true for 41 per cent of Bangladeshi young people, 40 per cent of Pakistanis and 36 per cent of Black students (DfES 2003). Add to this the historic over-representation of Black students in expulsions from school (four times the white rate nationally; and up to fifteen times in some local authorities)⁹ and it is hard to deny the system's failure to provide *'an appropriate and professional service'*.

Next there is the element of *'attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping'*. There is considerable and growing evidence of such problems, especially from detailed school-based qualitative research conducted since the mid 1980s (e.g. Bhatti 1999; Connolly 1998; Gillborn 1990; Gillborn & Youdell 2000; Mac an Ghaill 1988; Mirza 1992; Nehaul 1996; Sewell 1997; Troyna & Hatcher 1992; Wright 1986; 1992; Youdell 2003). These studies suggest that many white teachers hold systematically lower expectations of Black and other minority ethnic students and often respond more quickly and more harshly to perceived signs of unruly behaviour or inappropriate 'attitudes'. These processes are given institutional force through the use of selective pupil grouping (through tracking, streaming, setting and the like) which have been found consistently to place disproportionate numbers of Black students in the lowest ranked teaching groups (e.g. Hallam & Toutounji 1996; Oakes 1990; Sukhnandan & Lee 1998). Such approaches have become increasingly common as schools try to deliver on the government's requirement for ever higher 'standards' and the effects are predictably destructive (Ball 2003; Hallam 2002).

Education has been one of the most prominent policy fields in British politics since wide-ranging legislation in 1988 began a period of unrelenting calls for schools to improve 'standards'. The 'standards' mantra has been repeated by all major political parties and is usually interpreted in relation to the proportion of young people attaining five or more higher grade GCSE passes at age 16 (see above). The drive to improve standards has been enforced through numerous measures, few more powerful than the annual publication of the 'school performance tables' which list the results of every school in the country. These are frequently re-arranged by the news media to list schools in the form of national and local league-tables, as if reporting the latest sports standings. In these cases the calculations are almost always based on a simple percentage of students attaining five or more higher grade passes: the distribution of those passes (between students of different ethnic groups, genders and/or social class backgrounds) is not calculated. The imperative to raise 'standards' in this crude form has led to the increased use of internal selection between different teaching groups and the impact has been particularly negative for Black students, who find themselves disproportionately placed in the lowest groups, facing a restricted curriculum and lower teacher expectations. This institutionalization of failure is at its clearest in the case of mathematics examinations where students are tested in one of three different 'tiers' of question paper (depending on their teachers' view of them). In research in London schools in the late 1990s, for example, Deborah Youdell and I found that two-thirds of African Caribbean students were entered in the 'foundation tier' (the lowest level), where the highest possible grade is a D: that is, below the C grade that is the nationally recognised minimum for further study (Gillborn & Youdell 2000).¹⁰ It is difficult to think of a clearer example of institutional racism than an examination, disproportionately taken by Black students, in which the highest possible grade is widely judged to be a failure.

The effects of these multiple forms of racialised, and racist, selection are clear. Despite a sustained period of overall gains in attainment between the late 1980s and the present day, the Black/white gap has actually worsened. According to official data, 30 per cent of white students reached the benchmark attainment of five or more higher grade GCSEs in 1989, compared with 18 per cent of Black children (i.e. an inequality of 12 percentage points). In 2002, the size of the gap had grown by a third, so that Black students were now 16 percentage points below their white counterparts (DfES 2003).¹¹

Even more revealing are data that show the growing scale of inequalities as students move through education. The obsession with crude, measurable 'standards' has led to a drive to formally test students more frequently than at any other time in the history of English education (Gillborn & Youdell 2000). One outcome has been that it is now possible to compare the relative attainments of students at different points in their formal schooling. Figure 2 presents the outcomes of such monitoring in a large metropolitan area of England.¹² The illustration shows the attainment of Black and white students in relation to the overall average for all students in the area as a whole (that is, the Local Education Authority - LEA).¹³ The data show that Black students attained 20 percentage points *ahead* of the local average when tested at age 5 but their relative attainments plummet with age, such that their 16 year-old counterparts attained 21 percentage points *below* the local average.



The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report's proposition, therefore, that institutional racism is a characteristic of the English educational system, would seem to be strongly supported by the evidence. As I have noted (above) Black students consistently finish compulsory schooling with lesser qualifications than their white counterparts. This 'Black/white gap' (Drew & Gray 1991) has widened since the late 1980s when the official drive to improve 'standards' has been at its height. It seems likely that this reflects internal practices of selection and separation, by which teachers increasingly place Black students in lower ranked teaching groups where they experience inferior curricula and may be denied even the formal possibility of the highest examination grades. One reflection of these processes would appear to be the growing inequalities of attainment between Black

children and their white counterparts as they move through schooling aged between five and 16. In the face of such evidence, it would appear that only a thorough and unreservedly anti-racist response by the education system would adequately meet the requirements of the Lawrence Inquiry. Unfortunately, citizenship education does not meet this need.

Citizenship Education in England: duties and responsibilities

Alienation is a reality in these areas. People feel themselves to be outside the 'norms' of society, detached from political activity, influence and power and from the social responsibilities which go with this. Many people do not watch the news. They do not read newspapers. They have no idea who their local councillor or MP is and little interest in finding out. Many do not vote. They lack any sense of a society beyond the narrow confines of their own lives. This has important and dangerous implications for civil society. (David Blunkett, then Secretary of State for Education, 1999: 7-8)

Despite the prominence given to citizenship education following the publication of the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report* (see above), the government's commitment to citizenship education has a much longer history. In July 1997, the same month that the Lawrence Inquiry was established, the newly elected Labour government issued its detailed proposals for education. Among their plans was an advisory group 'to discuss citizenship and the teaching of democracy in our schools' (DfEE 1997: 63). Interestingly, race equality was absent from this discussion of citizenship, which stressed the need to bind young people into a sense of their duties and responsibilities:

Schools can help to ensure that young people feel that they have a stake in our society and the community in which they live by teaching them the nature of democracy and the duties, responsibilities and rights of citizens. This forms part of schools' wider provision for personal and social education, which helps more broadly to give pupils a strong sense of personal responsibility and of their duties towards others. (DfEE 1997: 63)

The focus here is not on challenging inequality and empowering students, it is about 'personal responsibility' and 'duties towards others'. In fact, neither the idea of placing citizenship on the curriculum, nor an approach that emphasizes stability and control, were new ideas: both were established long before Blair's *New Labour Party* was elected to power. Previous Conservative administrations had long since adopted citizenship, and especially the notion of 'active citizenship' (see Kirton & Brighouse 2001), which, as Carol Vincent has noted, 'meant an emphasis on citizens' duties towards their communities, particularly where the prevention of crime was concerned' (Vincent 2000: 7). Similarly, in 1990, an inquiry into citizenship recommended that the subject be taught to all school children (Speaker's Commission on Citizenship 1990).

The Conservative Party's attempt to define a specific role for citizenship education dates back more than a decade, when it was defined through the provisions for so-called 'cross-curricular themes' (NCC 1990a). These 'themes' (five in total) were aspects of education that were identified as being of great importance but which had effectively fallen between the cracks of the recently imposed 'national curriculum'.¹⁴ The separate subject specialisms (now established in law) did not see the themes as intrinsically 'their' business and so action was taken to establish the themes across the entire span of the curriculum.¹⁵ The specific guidance for citizenship education (NCC 1990b) included a component entitled, 'A Pluralist Society', which many educators saw as the perfect opportunity to develop multicultural and/or anti-racist initiatives (Taylor 1992: 2-3). However, this was a weak and marginal place to concentrate such efforts. By 1992 only one in four schools claimed even to have a written policy on the field, compared with three-quarters of schools who could boast a policy on

‘information technology’ (Whitty *et al* 1992: 2). Furthermore, the guidance itself embodied a predictably narrow and uncritical reading of society where justice and fair-play were assumed to be the norm and ‘racial prejudice’ and ‘discrimination’ were presented as aberrations born of tensions around perceived difference. Racism, as a persistent and systematic feature of society, was notably absent (cf. Gillborn 1995: 135-6). These same criticisms can be made of the latest developments which, predictably, echo Labour’s initial thrust toward control and participation within the strict limits laid down by ‘socially acceptable behaviour’ and ‘the development of active citizenship’ (DfEE 1998: 1).

The Labour government’s Advisory Group on the Teaching of Citizenship and Democracy was established, in November 1997, under the chairmanship of Professor Bernard Crick; a long time advocate of political education and political literacy in schools. The advisory group reported in 1998 (Qualifications & Curriculum Authority 1998), before the publication of the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*. The Crick Report, as it became known, was immediately criticized by those who hoped to see citizenship education as a vehicle for anti-racist change.

First, racism was conspicuously absent from the report. As Audrey Osler has argued powerfully, although ‘ethnicity’ and diversity are present, these ‘are not addressed in relation to inequality or differences in power ... Race and racism, either institutional or interpersonal, receive no mention’ (Osler 2000: 8). Second, the report itself adopts a perspective on minority ethnic communities that is, at best patronizing, at worst racist. It treats minorities as if they were a homogenous mass and speaks of ‘the homelands of *our* minority communities’ (QCA 1998: 18, quoted in Osler 2000: 7 emphasis added) as if such groups are somehow a possession, assumed to look outside the UK for their true home, and (by default) it is clear that such groups are not the anticipated audience for the report. The report manifestly fails to appreciate the complex nature of contemporary cultural identities (there is no room here for hybridity or contestation: cf. Appiah 1999; Leonardo 2002; Osler 2000) nor that around half of Britain’s minority ethnic population was born in the UK (Office for National Statistics 1996: 12).

Worse still, the Crick Report stated that minorities ‘must learn and respect the laws, codes and conventions as much as the majority’ (QCA 1998: 17-18, quoted in Osler 2000: 7). This astonishing statement seems to presume that minority communities are somehow outside current conventions in a way that is not true for white people. Indeed, as Osler argues, it could be interpreted as supposing that minority ethnic groups represent a greater threat to law and social stability – a well established stereotype that has grown even more pronounced since the attacks in the US in September 2001 and London in July 2005.¹⁶ Undoubtedly, the statement captures, yet again, the tendency for citizenship education to become a vehicle for moralistic preaching that emphasizes conformity and control.

From September 2002, building largely upon the recommendations of the Crick Report, citizenship education became a compulsory part of the curriculum for 11 to 16 year olds in state maintained schools in England. There is considerable scope for schools to add their own ideas and directions if they wish; they can also decide to cover a bare minimum. As in the past, communities, activists and academics have attempted to produce useful tools and additions¹⁷ but it is clear that, for the most part, the anti-racist potential of citizenship education remains unrealised. A prominent publication aimed specifically at helping teachers deliver the new curriculum, for example, contained no index references to ‘race’, ‘racism’, or even the more limited notions of ‘discrimination’ and ‘prejudice’ (see Arthur & Wright 2001).

Early in 2003, as part of its response to the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*, the Qualifications & Curriculum Authority (QCA)¹⁸ established a web-site meant to promote multicultural and anti-racist work across the curriculum (www.qca.org.uk/ca/inclusion/respect_for_all). Branded ‘political correctness gone mad’ in one national daily newspaper (*Daily Mail*, 27

February 2003: 15) the site brought together examples of ‘good practice’ that were meant to ‘provide effective learning opportunities for pupils to value diversity and challenge racism’ (QCA 2003a). The aims were laudable but, as in the past, the focus was almost exclusively on addressing relations between students, and the treatment of racism lacked a wider critical understanding. For example, at launch the citizenship strand contained at least one example activity for each of the four official ‘key stages’ (age related phases of the curriculum) between 5 and 16. There was no activity on racism but the site did include an activity (aimed at students aged 12-13) entitled ‘racial discrimination’. In this model lesson, students were ‘asked to brainstorm the term “racial discrimination”’ and then given a series of incidents to consider, including the following:

A white boy starts a fight with a smaller Asian boy. Afterwards he speaks of his opponent as ‘one of them’.

In a geography lesson pupils are learning about unemployment. A girl says ‘Unemployment keeps going up because immigrants took all the best jobs’.

Subsequently the students are asked to decide which of the following labels ‘best described the event’:

- racist and serious
- serious but not racist
- racist but not too serious
- probably not racist (but need to ask more questions to be sure)

The students’ responses are used to generate a discussion about ‘types of racial discrimination’, its effects, and students’ ‘responsibility to speak out against injustice’ (QCA 2003b).

There is much that could be said about the lesson but, for the purposes of this paper, the key issue is how this treatment fails to engage with one of the central concerns of the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*. I have already noted (above) how the Lawrence report placed institutional racism centre stage. Part of this involved recommending a simple and clear definition of a racist incident: a definition that is now officially accepted by Government and enshrined in law:

‘A racist incident is any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person.’ (Home Office 2000).

This definition cuts through the mire of intentions and focuses unequivocal attention on the perceptions of those involved in an incident. It encapsulates the anti-racist analysis of the Lawrence Inquiry and attempts to shift the balance of evidence in all relevant cases. It represents a fundamental challenge to white liberal assumptions that racism can somehow be quantified or identified in any ‘objective’ sense. And yet the QCA’s exemplar activity seems to take for granted that ‘racial discrimination’ *can* be identified through the application of a reasoned and rational set of objective criteria which will arise through structured debate. In microcosm, and despite its best intentions, the model lesson stands as a further example of how citizenship education has fundamentally failed to address the real challenge laid out in the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*.

Despite the efforts of campaigners and advocates, therefore, in practice citizenship education in England has not seriously addressed institutional racism. Historically, citizenship education has been used as a force for stability and control. Where issues of racism and inequality are discussed at all, it is typically in a context that reduces racism to issues of personal prejudice

and adopts a moralizing tone that seeks to ensure compliance and passivity where resistance and protest must be held within the bounds of accepted ‘democratic’ principles, most obviously, formal Parliamentary elections. The current focus on citizenship has been paraded by the Labour Government as a cornerstone of how the education system is responding to the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*, and yet the impetus for the reforms, and indeed much of the eventual detail, was already shaped before the Lawrence Inquiry was concluded. Although there remains some scope for meaningful anti-racist work, overall the citizenship reforms remain piecemeal and wholly inadequate as a response to institutional racism. In some respects, the reforms themselves embody precisely the form of thinking that is part of the problem itself.

Conclusions: Citizenship, Struggle and Assimilationism

Marcus Wood begins his study of the Western visual representation of slavery by considering the case of Thomas Clarkson’s abolition map (Wood 2000: 1-6). Produced in 1808, the ‘map’ was an attempt to chart all the important people and events involved in bringing about abolition. As Wood states, the map ‘summed up in cartographic fantasy ... abolition as a series of tributary streams and rivers, each with the name of a supposed abolitionist attached. The waterways unite to form two mighty rivers in England and America, and these in turn unite when they flow into the open sea, presumably the sea of emancipation and spiritual renewal’ (Wood 2000: 1 & 4). Incredibly, not a single slave warrants mention in the map.

Clarkson’s map is an object lesson in the re-imagining of history to present a unified (and unifying) tale of the triumph of white civilizing values over the forces of repression. The erasure of Black people, as an active and ultimately irresistible force for change, is both obscene and significant. In a similar fashion, education policymakers tend to present education policy as evolving over time, sometimes with dramatic changes in focus, but always with the best of intentions for all ‘consumers’ (regardless of age, class and ethnicity). In this view, the role of resistance and protest is lost amid the effort to present policy as a rational procession of incremental changes each building on its predecessors in a linear and evolutionary fashion. In fact, the history of race and educational reform in England is one marked by bloodshed and destruction. Meaningful advances in race equality are typically preceded by public uprisings (usually labeled ‘riots’ by a media keen to present minority communities as hot-beds of criminality and alienation); by deaths (at the hands of police and/or other white racist groups and individuals); or, at the very least; concerted public protest by minority communities. This pattern is repeating itself in contemporary education policy in England.

the unrelenting struggle of the Lawrences has put institutional racism back on the agenda ... they changed the whole discourse on race relations and made the government and the media and the people of this country acknowledge that there is a deep, ingrained, systemic racism in the institutions and structures of this society. (Sivanandan 2000: 7)

It is difficult to describe the impact upon English popular culture of the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry*: in some respects it stands as the nearest thing yet in England to the kinds of impact felt in the US over the Rodney King affair. The inquiry offered a fundamental challenge to white liberal complacency about the essentially sound and just nature of race relations in the country; it propelled ‘race’ and white racism to the top of the popular news agenda; and it had repercussions throughout the justice system. In the field of education, however, the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* stands as an opportunity for change that is rapidly slipping away.

The report’s accusation of institutional racism in education is one that stands scrutiny in relation to both quantitative and qualitative analyses of contemporary schooling. The inequalities of attainment between Black and white are not only persisting, they are growing;

year-by-year, and from one generation of students to another. The education department consistently presents citizenship education as one of its leading initiatives in this area. As I have noted, however, citizenship education in England has historically been limited to a focus on students (leaving school structures and teachers' perspectives largely untouched) and promoting a vision of society as based on liberal universalistic principles that require all students to be aware of their particular duties and responsibilities. It is in this sense that citizenship education can be seen as a *placebo*: a fake treatment, meant to placate concern, but making no actual attempt to address the central problem. In this case, institutional racism has been diagnosed, not least by Black communities (who have protested at their children's mistreatment for decades) and by the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report*: citizenship education is the sugar coated pill meant to demonstrate the seriousness of a system that continues to systematically exclude and fail Black children. In the current political context, however, the concern with citizenship education may yet prove to be a malign factor, that actually worsens the situation.

The events of September 11th 2001 triggered a dramatic increase in anti-Islamic feeling in the West, and especially in the USA and Britain: the attacks in London during July 2005 whipped up a further storm of outrage. Even before these events, however, Britain witnessed an increasingly vociferous discourse attacking multiculturalism in general (and the *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* in particular). This was given impetus by a series of disturbances (involving conflict between police and South Asian young people) in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford (towns and cities in the north of England) in the summer of 2001.¹⁹ It was widely acknowledged at the time that each of the English disturbances had been sparked by the activities of white supremacist groups, namely the 'British National Party' and the 'National Front'. However, history suggests that blame has a strange way of shifting sides when 'race' is involved. In the late 1950s, for example, white mobs caused widespread damage and launched physical attacks on migrant communities in Nottingham and London. Although these (and later disturbances) were clearly started by whites, they formed a backdrop to immigration controls and wider policy moves that shifted the blame onto the minority communities (Ramdin 1987). Similarly, the protests in 2001 prompted David Blunkett (by this time promoted from the Education department to become the Home Secretary) to argue that minority communities must do more to foster a 'sense of belonging'²⁰. He subsequently introduced a policy of 'Integration with Diversity' which included proposals to discourage marriage outside the so-called 'settled community'; to speed up deportation; and to test the English language skills of new migrants (Home Office 2002). These developments have an unmistakably assimilationist character (cf. Banks 1994: ch 7; Mullard 1982; Tomlinson 1977). In education they have been matched by a renewed focus on English language teaching and an attack on so-called mono-cultural schools (which seem predominantly to be interpreted as those with a disproportionate number of minority ethnic, rather than a majority of white, students) (see Cantle 2001). These dimensions have become particularly heated in the context of an increasingly rabid discourse that is constructing asylum seekers as criminal 'scroungers' out to take advantage of state benefits or, worse still, as proto-terrorists ready to murder innocent Britons (see Younge 2005).

The tone of the debate was further inflamed when the Home Secretary voiced his fears that 'Asylum seekers are swamping some British schools' (BBC News 2003). The popular press took this claim to new heights when they covered the 2003 report by the official schools inspectorate for England. Although the chief inspector was quoted as saying that only around 3 per cent of schools in England have more than one in ten asylum seeker pupils, this detail was lost amid the incendiary headlines:

OFFICIAL: asylum rush causes crisis for schools

BRITISH kids are suffering as schools struggle to cope with a flood of asylum seekers' children, an official report warned yesterday. (*The Sun*, 6 February 2003, pp. 14-15).

‘Threat’ of asylum pupils

The huge influx of asylum seeker children is threatening the education of tens of thousands of pupils, a report warned yesterday. (*Daily Mail*, 6 February 2003, pp. 18-19)

In the autumn of 2005, Trevor Phillips (the head of the Commission for Racial Equality) launched a renewed campaign to promote ‘integration’ by warning that residential segregation raised the spectre of ‘fully fledged ghettos’ in Britain (Phillips 2005). The role of education was mentioned by Phillips and by many commentators who responded to his warnings: Ted Cantle, a prominent government adviser on ‘community cohesion’, was quoted as follows:

‘According to Ted Cantle, who studied the causes of the race riots in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001, schools tend to reach a tipping point when about 45% of the pupils come from ethnic minorities.

“The evidence is anecdotal,” he said, “but it seems you then get all the white families leaving.” (*Sunday Times*, 18 September 2005).

This view provides a powerful sign of how strongly contemporary policy in this area echoes the failed policies of the past. The ‘tipping point’ of 45% attributed to Cantle is disturbingly close to the view, enshrined in the dispersal policy of the mid-1960s, which argued that

‘if the proportion [of ‘immigrant children’] goes over about one third either in the school as a whole or in any one class, serious strains arise.’ Department for Education & Science Circular 7/65 (quoted in Gillborn 1990: 145)

In this context the current emphasis on citizenship education in England must be viewed with great caution. Citizenship education has the potential to open up new and controversial areas of debate and, within a critical whole-school approach, can advance anti-racist developments. In Britain, however, the dominant tradition has been for citizenship education that reinforces the status quo by binding students to a superficial and sanitised version of pluralism that is long on duties and responsibilities, but short on popular struggles against race inequality. The *Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* laid down a fundamental challenge to the institutional racism that characterizes the English educational system: unfortunately, policymakers’ readiness to invoke citizenship education as a remedy, indicates just how little has so far been learned.

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Notes

1 In common with current conventions in the United Kingdom, I use the word 'Black' as a collective
term for people who self-identify as of Black Caribbean, Black African and/or other 'Black' ethnic origins,
including 'Black British'. Although flawed in numerous respects, this usage does at least correspond to the
terms used most frequently by the people so labelled (see Mason 2000).

2 News reports of the tragedies are available at the BBC website:
news6/thdo.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/newsid_637000/637424.stm.

3 The McGowans' case is one of a growing line of injustices concerning the deaths of Black and other minority
group members that have received public and judicial attention only after long and painful battles by the
victims' families. To date, the best known concerns the murder of Stephen Lawrence, detailed later in this
article (see Sewell 1999).

4 For a consideration of differing national traditions of anti-racism see Bonnett (2000).

5 A limited form of devolution within the United Kingdom means that although a single British
Parliament resides in Westminster, certain powers (including those to determine the curriculum) are now held
separately in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. In this paper I focus specifically on the situation
in England.

6 The education service has also been affected by the consequences of the Race Relations
(Amendment) Act 2000, which arose as a result of the Lawrence Inquiry, and placed a duty on all public
authorities (including schools and universities) to proactively pursue race equality. However, the system was
largely unprepared for the consequences of the Act, despite having two years to prepare for its implementation
(Rooney 2002). In addition, there is no reliable indication that the Act has so far had any tangible effect on
most schools. Despite the formal scope of the Act, therefore, it is clear that citizenship education remained the
preferred and most public response of the education system itself.

7 Such approaches are likely to be limited unless other aspects of the school (across all of its pastoral
and academic functions) are also subject to anti-racist developments (cf. Dadzie 2000).

8 The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) is the most common examination at the end
of compulsory schooling in England. The highest pass grades (A*, A, B and C) are often required for entry
into higher education, training and the professions. Attaining these grades in at least *five* separate subjects has
become the benchmark for academic success at this age (see Gillborn & Youdell 2000).

9 Whenever figures on school expulsion have been broken down by ethnicity in England, Black
students are significantly more likely to be excluded than their white peers, denying them even basic access to
education (see Gillborn 1995; Osler 1997).

10 The equivalent figure for white students was 48 per cent.

11 In 2002, 52 per cent of white children attained the benchmark of five or more higher grade passes
compared with 36 per cent of Black students.

12 I am drawing on locally based data here because no national data are available for the entire span of 5
to 16 year old age groups.

13 For the sake of simplicity the figure presents the relative attainments of white and Black students
only, removing the other main minority ethnic groups in the area. A fuller version of the data is available in
Gillborn & Mirza (2000).

14 Legislation was passed in 1988 to impose a statutory 'National Curriculum' on all state maintained
schools in England and Wales.

15 The five themes were defined as economic and industrial understanding; careers education and
guidance; health education; citizenship; and environmental education (NCC 1990a).

16 See Gillborn (2001) for a discussion of such fears in relation to the development of UK education
policy.

17 See, for example, The Citizenship Foundation & Me Too (2002).

¹⁸ The QCA is an official body with a statutory duty to monitor and promote the formal curriculum.

¹⁹ Scotland also witnessed an increase in racist attacks (and public demonstrations), especially against asylum seekers.

²⁰ Interview with David Blunkett in the *Independent on Sunday*, 9 December 2001, p. 4.