

4 Racial economic inequality: the visible tip of an inequality iceberg?

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Introduction

When this edited collection was first conceived, after an exceptional conference, headlined by Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz, at Middlesex University in December 2019, the world was arguably a very different place. For very different reasons, two of the most dramatic events of 2020 have refreshed the debate on systemic racism in the UK. Both the death of George Floyd in the US and the global pandemic caused by Covid-19 have raised questions for social scientists about the lens through which systemic racism is investigated. These events demanded that I change the lens through which I approached this paper on economic inequality and race. They have highlighted rather complacent social attitudes towards enduring racial inequality in the media but also a recognition amongst younger activists that the problem hasn't gone away.

The shocking death of George Floyd at the hands of a police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020 triggered a surge of outrage and global support for the Black Lives Matter movement (#BLM). While research linking poverty, inequality and systemic racism has been carried out for decades (Khan, 2020), #BLM has given rise to perhaps the most vigorous debate about systemic racism since the civil rights era of the 1960s. It has given rise to conversations and analyses that might not have happened without that tragedy and pushed the issue of racial inequality further up the political agenda. After four decades of anti-discrimination laws, the actual struggle to translate that into greater equality of economic outcomes has not always kept pace with optimistic public perceptions of how much positive racial progress has been made (Mirza, 2017).

Then there has been the enduring calamity of the global coronavirus pandemic. One of the issues that arose early on, both in the UK and the US, was an over-representation of black and ethnic minority people (BAME) in Covid-19 infection and death rates (ONS, 2020; Runnymede, 2020; Race Disparities Unit, 2020b). There are several possibilities that might explain this trend. The first is a genetic pre-disposition that makes the BAME physiology

more susceptible to the virus. The second is that infection rates are determined by socio-economic and environmental factors. Thirdly, that implicit or explicit racism in the healthcare system – despite NHS claims to fairness – means BAME patients are less likely to receive support from public health professionals, less likely to go to hospital when ill, and less likely to have their symptoms taken seriously by doctors (Schiffers, 2020).

Early on, the scientific and medical communities discounted the more generalised genetic explanations, owing to the fact that there are few common genetic links between the diverse ethnicities comprising the BAME category. BAME is, after all, a statistical category, and not an ethnicity in and of itself. It bears no relation to kinship. Black (African, Afro-Caribbean or mixed); Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Caribbean, African); Asian (Chinese, Vietnamese) and other Minority Ethnic including Cypriots, Kurds, Syrians and other Middle Eastern nationalities do not form a homogenous group.

Moreover, the BAME category itself is increasingly contested by minorities themselves although it continues to be used by governments for statistical purposes. Indeed, the increasing disquiet over the BAME label is a consequence of a falsely implied homogenous characteristic that misrepresents the people it seeks to describe. The label itself may mask inequalities and be racist in its assumptions. It is worth considering that the labour market, income and wealth data we shall explore in this paper mask significant differentials within the BAME category which diminish its real value in reshaping discourse on remedies to racial inequality.

So, this leaves us with environmental factors or discrimination in medical treatment. Prima facie evidence suggests that it is, indeed, socio-economic factors driving the disproportionately high infection rates. So exactly what environmental factors have led to this outcome and why? And what about the higher death rate shown in ONS figures (ONS, 2020a, 2020c, 2020d and 2020e)? In the UK, the NHS promises emergency care to all at the point of delivery, and currently, there is little more than anecdotal evidence from patient surveys to suggest there is implicit bias in the quality of care given to BAME patients. Working backwards then, disparities in infection rates have likely arisen from differentials such as issues of housing, access to healthcare, and labour market roles (RDU, 2020a).

Britain's National Health Service is disproportionately staffed by BAME people, so, it may seem counter-intuitive to suggest that somehow there is inequality of access to NHS care which might have led to the disproportionate number of deaths recorded for Covid-19 amongst BAME groups. But that is an argument that goes to the heart of our need to be robust about how we identify and research racial inequality. The perceptions of black people of their

NHS experiences are not overwhelmingly positive, with over 60 per cent saying they do not believe their health is as equally protected by the NHS when compared to white people (Schifferes, 2020). This does not sit well with the popular view of the essential fairness of the NHS and begs the question of whether deeper issues, such as racism, are at play in UK healthcare.

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So here, we are looking through a very different lens at an age-old problem, a year into an epidemic, a year of #BLM protests, and now the election of Joe Biden as a US President who explicitly recognises the problem of systemic racism. In response, this paper looks at the socio-political challenge of racial inequality to see what insights might have come from these two dramatic and enduring debates of 2020. What do these insights offer us by way of deepening our understanding of the intersection of economic inequality and race? Is inequality appropriately mediated by journalists or are narratives of Britain's steady progress towards equality flawed? How might this help us re-evaluate policy approaches to tackling systemic racial economic inequality? Could we be seeing, through this coronavirus and #BLM long lens, focused on BAME inequality, the visual tip of the iceberg of an unjust society? First, I will focus on what we mean by racial economic inequality and how we have come to measure it. Then I will turn to how the idea is mediated in the press. Finally, I will look at the implications of this for the remedies we have chosen to tackle these inequalities, before concluding what the implications of all this are for actually identifying the nature and scale of the problem and tackling it in Britain.

What do we mean by racial economic inequality?

The relationship between the British state and its emerging ethnic minority communities and citizens was recast after the passing of the first Race Relations Act in 1965. Up until then, racial prejudice was thought of largely as something that reflected the behaviour of one individual to another or institutional prejudice against black and Asian people. There were, of course, many examples of this confrontational racism, ending in riots in Notting Hill in 1958 after persistent racial attacks by Teddy Boys on the new communities settling there. But, as numbers of immigrants from the Caribbean grew, it became clear that problems in housing, workplaces and racially motivated attacks on black people were rising and becoming more complex. Discrimination and the active monitoring of it became a theme of government. It gave rise to robust debates about the unequal status of black and Asian people in British

society and the political just cause of proceeding towards equality. To some degree, this mirrored and borrowed from the US Civil Rights Movement, and research methods deployed there to study the issues have often been replicated or amended to study the issue of race and racism in the UK. This, in fact, has proven increasingly contentious (Mirza, 2017).

Subsequent Race Relations Acts in 1968 (to tackle discrimination in housing), 1976 (to tackle discrimination in employment) and 2000 (to impose on public institutions a duty of equal treatment to those it serves), all marked stages along a reform pipeline to equip ethnic minorities with the tools to challenge unequal treatment. At least that is the earnest hope underpinning legal statute. Ensuring that these laws are translated into best socio-economic practice present a different challenge. At the root of the reality of unequal status was the inability to improve employment prospects and, as a result, income. Economic inequality fuelled levels of need deprivation and crisis in housing, healthcare, criminal justice and other walks of life, where patterns of inequality were reported in the media and discovered by the increasing numbers of researchers focused on the problem of racial inequality (Khan, 2020; ONS, 2020b).

As levels of unemployment rose in the 1970s, it became clearer that prospects for black and Asian children of migrants were often worse than their white counterparts, and this shone a light on educational inequality. Debates in public discourse about *inequality of outcomes* became linked to a growing reflection on *inequality of opportunity*. These are the fundamentals of racial inequality rooted in historical circumstance. In the development of the modern British economy, British colonialism played a crucial role in the growth of manufacturing, for example, and the accumulation of wealth. These facts are undisputed. However, the question of whether these inequalities created by structural problems of systemic racism that persist today (Fanon, 1963; Foucault, 1979) has once again become contentious. What is clear is, inequality has not gone away. In fact, there is considerable evidence (Stiglitz, 2012; Piketty, 2014) that in a general sense, levels of inequality in society have worsened in recent decades.

Measuring racial economic inequalities

Measuring inequality is not an exact science, and more complex analysis is necessary to try and identify significant factors that might explain inequality at a more granular level. Employment statistics are critical. The types of jobs people have and the sums of money they earn is, however, a crucial indicator of variations of inequality between

ethnic groups. The UK Labour Force Survey has provided important data since the 1980s illustrating significant ethnic inequalities in the labour market. While these inequalities persist, it is important to recognise that there are important variations across different ethnic minority groups. Employment rates have remained consistently worse for ethnic minorities and at least 10 per cent behind White British people in the latest available data from 2016 (Runnymede, 2020). Put another way, unemployment rates among ethnic minorities are much higher.

Whilst unemployment is clearly damaging in the short term, typically putting low-income families into the poverty bracket over longer periods, it can be corrosive along the trajectory of a working life (ESRC, 2019). There is evidence that even with a graduate education, ethnic minorities can find it disproportionately difficult to find work two and a half years after they have completed their degree course (Lessard-Phillips et al., 2014). On another measure of low-income differentiation, the National Minimum Wage, it is estimated that ethnic minorities are up to 6 times more likely to be paid below this rate in less regulated parts of the labour market (Peters, 2015). Figures also suggest that all BAME groups are more likely to be in the lowest paid work and, consequently, more likely to be living in poverty.

Unpacking the group BAME data is a complex but increasingly necessary part of getting to grips with targeting remedies to the right people (RDU, 2020b). On a broad measure of poverty, like the measure of the percentage of households below average income (see Figure 4.1), there are some minority groups within the broader BAME classification, who undoubtedly experience racism in some shape or form, but they do not necessarily have the inequality profile that makes them a potential target for government relief.

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In short, if you look for evidence of racial disparities, it is not difficult to find them. Ethnic minorities share characteristics in common with other groups who are disadvantaged in the economy. So, it is important to consider whether there are explanations other than racial discrimination which have a bearing on these disparity outcomes. In fact, the absolute numbers of disadvantaged people in those other groups are greater than the absolute numbers of minorities affected. So, the numbers may tell a partial story in inequality terms if not in racial terms. Social class remains a significant factor in determining opportunity of outcomes. Poverty, which is more closely aligned with social class, therefore, has a bearing on fundamental inequalities of income and wealth. These also statistically align with educational under-achievement, which, in turn, feeds into prospects in the labour market. Put simply, whether

white or black, people with these shared characteristics are more likely to have a lower income, lower levels of savings wealth or other assets, and within this group, BAME are disproportionately over-represented.

It should be uncontroversial to expect that migration affects patterns of stable employment. Many non-professional migrants arriving in the UK cannot be reasonably expected to seamlessly slot into the labour market. However, one piece of research on the UK-born children of these migrants suggests that there is not always a natural trajectory towards progress and equality. UK-born ethnic minority men are more likely to be unemployed than their overseas fathers (Heath and Cheung, 2006) and downward class mobility means that many children of migrants find themselves at a disadvantage when trying to enter the labour market. This, of course, raises questions on causality and pushes the explanations further back down the pipeline of lived experience to educational outcomes and opportunities.

Ironically, Covid-19 has shone a bright light on this analytical conundrum. Race and class are observably aligned on the issue of Covid-19 rates of infection and death. Socio-economic factors should not mask the fact of the matter that people of colour are disproportionately in those jobs where you are most likely to be exposed to contagion risks. There is, therefore, a correlation between Covid-19, race and class. However, from the available evidence, it would not be true that Black and Asian people are more susceptible to Covid-19 infection genetically (i.e. no known causal link) nor that they are disproportionately affected independently of their socio-economic environment (i.e. it is the socio-economic factors which create the causal link). Following the data remains more important than following our hunches.

This picture we've painted of racial inequality is clearly not exhaustive. Finding these patterns of inequality is, sometimes, more art than science. They are not static and there is a danger of becoming too racially deterministic with research observations. But, the picture is representative of the difficulties that ethnic minorities face in education, the labour market and emerging out of the impoverished circumstances that migration often imposes on families from one generation to the next. Part of the challenge in facing these tests of inequality as a society is how we react to the problem in policy terms. This, in turn, relies on how seriously the problem is perceived by politicians, policymakers and the wider public. It is easier in #BLM times to gloss over the absence historically of race in public debate and fear of discussing it. George Floyd has sparked what appears to be a rigorous set of debates and concerted efforts to change the tone of the discourse on systemic racism. We might ask, from what quarters has this anger emerged?

Arguably, the dominant narrative across the media landscape is that society is becoming fairer and more merit based; overt racially discriminatory behaviour is less prevalent now, than in 1965 when the first Race Relations Act was passed. At face value, this may be true, but diving deep into the data, social scientists regularly identify consistent patterns of enduring inequality, some of which we have briefly looked at above. One thing that can be learned from US research is how the narratives on racial progress can often ignore the facts on the ground because of what people want to believe about broader society. The fact that many white people have historically not engaged with black people outside of the work environment makes experiential learning of black people's existential condition problematic and means perceptions rely on mediated interpretations of progress. Much more research is needed on how the UK media mediate stories of racial inequality, social and economic.

Unpacking racism in the media

Let's try and unpack this point a little more. It was common in the early days of migration from New Commonwealth countries for the media to problematise those new communities. In other words, public discourse on the impact of these communities was done through a lens of the problems or conflicts that were raised. Housing, jobs and crime were a few of the areas that dominated news agendas. It was not common to see people of colour in the media space. But, it was common when you did see them, for it to be because of some social problem. Cultural studies scholars like Stuart Hall explored how these images created negative stereotypes of people of colour that reflected only part of a complex reality. If white people only experienced black people's lives through the media, Hall argued, it would be difficult for them to form an accurate portrait of the Black or Asian experience.

Psychologists believe that we form our views of the world around us when we are quite young and then resist challenges to those beliefs. These *cognitive biases* present a 'variety of ways of thinking (indeed a variety of routine ways of thinking) that constrain one's perceptions and interpretations of the world' (Stocking and LaMarca, 1989). These biases form stereotypes and can affect the way journalists interpret information. What the media produces is often viewed through the prism of personal bias and a predilection to seek out and only acknowledge views that fit with those that the journalist already has. The corollary of this is, as consumers of news, we often seek out what we know and are sceptical of alternative narratives that challenge that understanding. Some argue this *confirmation bias* affects the way we interpret the news (Christian, 2013). In short, this means that people are less willing to accept that society continues to be both unequal and unjust. The public, by way of the media, remains wilfully unaware of

racial inequality, in general, and racial economic inequality, in particular, believing that historical patterns of discrimination have been overcome through recent legislative and cultural change. Race as myth, and racism as reality, creates cognitive dissonance (Kraus et al., 2019).

The dominant story-telling paradigm in news reporting is seeing stories through the prism of individual experience. The way stories are told from the anecdotal case study to a generalised problem fail to explore implicit or structural acts behind a particular event. They favour an understanding of social interactions as determined by individual behaviour and perpetuates the dominance of the values of individualism. So, whilst social science may be trying to deepen an understanding on 'systemic' or 'structural' factors in racial inequality, journalists using case-study stories guide the news consumer towards the idea of 'personal responsibility' for that inequality of circumstance. In short, 'who's to blame' stories focus on victims and fail to report on the structural, institutional or systemic constraints which would allow that person the agency to ameliorate their situation. Individual choices are conditioned by the values, behaviours and attitudes consistent with the social milieu. Put another way, individual agency to act depends on the world you actually live in. Writing in his seminal 1903 work, *Souls of Black Folk*, WEB Du Bois talked of double-consciousness, 'measuring of one's self by means of a nation that looked back in contempt'. This structural context, a kind of psychosocial construct, for mediation is an enduring structural impediment to racial progress, in as much as it reinforces existing biases rather than challenging them. Without journalistic context, reporting inequities across race will tend to reinforce existing assumptions and biases (Banaji and Greenwald, 1995).

Race and racism are problematic subject matter for the news media, not least because there have historically been so few BAME practitioners of the journalistic craft in the UK. This has meant that disrupting the narrative of positive racial progress and economic inequality would have relied on patterns of thinking that is not very widespread in broader society. When the Office for National Statistics released data on pay differentials across ethnic groups in October 2020 headlines heralded 'the end of the ethnicity pay gap' with some media reporting that in some categories, ethnic minorities (16- to 29-year olds) were earning more than their white peers (Doughty, 2020). This is the *positive progress* narrative. It is not necessarily untrue, but it masks the fact that ethnic minorities are still twice as likely to be unemployed (you need to be in work to earn more) or working in jobs where they have less legal protections in the workplace. A willingness to avoid the racial patterns of economic inequality remains part of the reason there are such powerful prevailing narratives on racial progress across British society.

The research into racial inequality is made more difficult to interpret because of the complexity of the demographic (as discussed above) that the BAME group is describing. This has given rise to a narrative that the focus on race is misleading and disruptive to good social relations. A government Equalities Minister, Kemi Badenoch, talking about banning critical race theory from schools because it is a segregationist ideology, feeds into this perception (House of Commons, 2020). It only heightens the controversy in the debate when the Minister is herself Black British. This kind of narrative does nothing to encourage exploration of genuine racial inequality or its causes. In essence, it encourages a narrative that it doesn't really exist. Munira Mirza, who is now Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Johnson put it another way: *'By appeasing the anti-racism lobby and affirming its culture of grievance, public institutions and business leaders are not making Britain a fairer place. In fact, they are harming the very people they aspire to help'* (Mirza, 2017).

This is contested ground and the #BLM Movement in the UK has revived public discourse on this very issue. The idea that singular success stories can mitigate the effects of racism is an easy argument to make, but a difficult one to sustain just looking at the government's own Race Disparity Unit data. Black visible success is not fiction, but it does have the potential to make racial economic inequality less visible, and the data suggest that it remains a chimera.

What's to be done about racial economic inequality?

The important thing to recognise is laws, even good laws, do not necessarily change behaviour. Discrimination has consistently been recognised as leading to poorer outcomes in the labour market. Discrimination in housing and education lead to significant disadvantage and this sets access barriers to employment. It's also clear from the research evidence (Khan, 2020) that the more characteristics ethnic minorities share with other disadvantaged groups, the more likely they will be amongst those who struggle to lift themselves out of poverty. An increasingly contentious debate in the UK is about whether race is the key determinant driving these inequities.

Robust government enforcement (primarily through the Equalities & Human Rights Commission or EHRC) and employer and service provider compliance with regulations and the law would help tackle individual cases of unequal treatment. The EHRC has been mired in controversy since former Chief David Isaac complained that political interference is affecting its regulatory role (Isaac, 2021). Over the past decade, access to the law has

become more expensive and, therefore, more difficult for people to seek legal remedy to a complaint of discrimination, making individual challenges to structural impediments far harder to overcome. When the EHRC was created in 2006, it was charged with the promotion and enforcement of equality and non-discrimination laws across the board. But, it has been increasingly criticised for shying away from identifying issues of systemic racism (Runnymede, 2020). In the field of journalism, it is clear that whilst the problem of racism is recognised and reported on, within it there are serious complaints that it has not sufficiently challenged the consequences of that recognition in its own recruitment and progression processes (Henry and Ryder, 2021). Professional progression depends on the trust of your peers and that appears to have been a commodity in short supply in many professional walks of life when it comes to people of colour. It is also something that it is difficult to legislate for. Leadership on negotiating our differences and deconstructing the mythical codes of race in employment should be tackled at the cultural level of business ethics. Law sets a framework; the workplace needs to broker the change.

In 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May set up an administrative branch of the government, the Race Disparity Unit (RDU), to look at government data to identify racial disparities across society. Its job is to serve the Cabinet Office, which coordinates government business across the great offices of State. This explicitly recognised that in some areas of the economy and society disparities exist between ethnic groups in the UK. The bigger question it wanted to understand was what causes these, how significant these disparities are and what can be done about it? This was a big shift of emphasis at government level. However, since Boris Johnson became Prime Minister in 2019, there has been a subtle change in its objectives. It now is acting as the Secretariat for the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities established in July 2020. It remains unclear if the data it will continue to collect, will be used to influence policy decisions or just adorn government statements on racial disparity. A degree of scepticism has emerged as the number of those people appointed by the government to the Commission has spoken against the idea of systemic racism. Remember that while from a scientific standpoint, race is a myth, *racism* from a data standpoint remains a reality.

The Coronavirus crisis has been widely recognised to have had a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority groups (PHE, 2020). Data suggested Black people were up to two times more likely to die than white people from the disease. The PHE report, which interpreted the data, suggested a range of socio-economic and geographical factors contributed to the higher infection and mortality rates for ethnic minorities. These include occupational exposure, as care staff in nursing homes and medical staff in hospitals, population density in the localities they live in, household

composition and pre-existing health conditions (RDU, 2020a). Whilst more research is needed to clarify why this is the case, it is an example of outcomes of systemic inequality not being visible until a crisis forces the specific questions on structural racial injustice to be asked. Despite the early data findings that BAME groups are more susceptible to worse outcomes, the UK government's advisers have concluded that ethnicity is a 'proxy' for the highest risk factors associated with deprivation and that it requires a universal approach to deprivation to tackle the problem effectively.

It raises the important question of whether universal approaches are an effective remedy. There is a general presumption that universal policies will equally benefit everyone targeted by the policy. There is also evidence that some universal solutions, or those that avoid identifying race as a factor, can end up overlooking inequalities. One of the more significant challenges would be to devise targeted remedies which can benefit disadvantaged groups with the same characteristics as a particular ethnic minority group. The RDU in one of its early studies discovered significant disparities between Pakistani and Bangladeshi and White British women in the West and East Midlands areas. The Department of Work and Pensions were encouraged to devise a package of measures to target all women in those hot spot areas looking for work which potentially also benefited those ethnic minorities affected (RDU, 2017). The same RDU audit on disparities noted that ethnic minority children were being suspended and expelled from schools at significantly higher rates. This triggered a review by the Department of Education to explore the reasons for the disparity.

Tackling discriminatory practices in the workplace is arguably an important place to improve an unbiased operation of the labour market. Here, the effects of income inequality can be addressed by ensuring recruitment, development and progression processes are fair and transparent. The Race Equality Charter in the UK Higher Education sector is an example of workplace interventions to improve the equality of outcomes and opportunities for BAME staff and students. This is just one of several such initiatives, but inevitably they rely on goodwill, good leadership and only effect those in regular employment. They also take time to bed in and deliver results. Cultural shift takes time.

When it comes to wealth accumulation, BAME people have significantly lower levels of saving and assets than White British people. Wealth is tracked by the ONS Wealth and Assets Survey (ONS, 2019). The trends suggest a pattern of wealth inequality that accentuates income differentials. White British households hold the most wealth, followed by Indian households. Pakistani households have under half of the wealth of White British households with Black Caribbean having much lower levels of accumulation, and Black African and Bangladeshi even less. The

Runnymede Trust (Khan, 2020) characterised this wealth inequality by showing the proportions of the proverbial pound in your pocket each group has accumulated. If White British have a full £1, Indian households have 90–95p, Pakistani households have roughly 50p, Black Caribbean households have around 20p and Black Africans and Bangladeshis have around 10p. The cumulative effects of the labour market and recent migration are key factors, but so too are the fact that pensions and inherited homes account for much accumulated wealth. Redistribution of wealth will take time.

Other points of progress also take time. For example, well-qualified immigrants tend to catch up with British-born people in the labour market, but it can take over a decade. Measuring change needs to take advantage of advances in the real-time analysis of data. AI-generated research outcomes could offer more effective ways of understanding the scale of the problem and more accurately monitor a rapidly moving target. What the statistics tell us about Britain five years ago may not reflect reality on the ground today. We could introduce more dynamic economic modelling which uses AI algorithms to give more of a real-time picture of the patterns of employment and, therefore, the shifting patterns of inequality. If ethnic minorities genuinely began to share a more equitable status with their white peers, the debate would simply shift to the persistent challenge faced by the large numbers of people still struggling with economic disadvantage. Economic inequality is increasing, so the solutions in a society that wants more just and equitable outcomes lie in economic system change or policies with redistributive objectives. In the meantime, social science should not ignore the impact of race on patterns of inequality because doing so is likely to perpetuate some of the mistaken ideas about racial progress. Race is a myth, racism isn't. Treating economic inequality as a colour-blind issue over-simplifies the complex demographic landscape which politicians perhaps misguidedly use to fashion economic policies (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017).

Sometimes though structural or systemic inequalities for ethnic minorities arise out of hidden systemic failure only revealed after someone joins up the dots of many individual cases. The Windrush Scandal only came to light because of the government's decision to implement a 'hostile environment' strategy to make life difficult for migrants. It progressively revealed that thousands of West Indian migrants who had quite legally been in the UK for decades were being deprived of a right to stay in the country, or work, or claim benefits because of paperwork irregularities (Gentleman, 2019). A catalogue of deportations, sackings, impoverishment without access to state benefits and refused healthcare were all symptoms of systemic discrimination based on ethnicity. All the victims were ethnic minorities originally from the Caribbean. It highlights how systemic racial inequality can play out

without state intervention or, indeed, unintentionally with it. Despite an acknowledgement by government that serious errors were made and instituting a compensation scheme, that state effort has still failed to deliver correction to ethnic minorities. There can be little argument that the discrimination and remedy fall far short of equality (Gentleman, 2020).

Conclusions

Race has, over several centuries, been instrumental in the exercise of power and has become embedded in structures and institutional behaviour. We have slowly striven to dismantle these discriminatory barriers in Britain. The history of race has made us sometimes lazy, searching for explanations of discrimination in the wrong places. The reality is that discounting race as a factor in disadvantage does not help resolve the problem any more quickly. More interdisciplinary research is needed to deconstruct the complex layers of relations affecting racial economic and social inequality, its causes and impacts.

Britain is not as riven with the deeply embedded racial cleavages as the United States, which provides much of the social science evidence on racial inequality. In UK law since 1965, discrimination has been recognised as a problem that has no place in a just and fair society. But the raw data suggest that persistent racial economic inequality persists. There are divergences between ethnic groups and often these reflect class, educational attainment and levels of enduring poverty.

Racial economic inequality is also a way of shining a light on structural components of how race is perceived in society and how people experience racism in education, the workplace and health outcomes. It helps us understand how prejudice extends from individuals to the institutions that serve them and back again. Racial economic inequality sits at the tip of a very large economic inequality iceberg and finding the means to tackling it has potential consequences for all those beset by the same characteristics of inequality.

It remains very difficult to 'blame' the media in the UK for 'over-emphasising' positive narratives of racial progress. Everyone likes a good news story. Unfortunately, there remains a paucity of serious research on the link between media portrayal of inequality and the potentially inaccurate public perceptions of progress. However, given there are few means of sharing information on enduring discrimination, beyond experiencing it within the community we live in, it seems reasonable to assume that non-ethnic minority media consumers who, for example, see very positive

images of individual BAME progress would draw the conclusion that this is a positive reflection of broader societal change. Nevertheless, failing to change the way we mediate the stories of those who live in circumstances, which have structural causes at their root, will not help counterbalance dominant narratives of positive racial progress. We will continue to believe we live in a country that is becoming more equal and that the arc of history bends towards justice, as President Obama put it. That might be the hope, but this cannot be achieved without creating policies which move us towards more just outcomes.

Economic inequality remains a defining political challenge of our time. The more unequal we become, the more challenges there will be in preserving a system which claims to be fair, but to many citizens, it is perceived as grossly unfair. There is a very real danger that by failing to recognise the gravity and enduring nature of racial inequalities that we will not tackle the sources of the problem and instead preserve those very injustices.

Figure 4.1 Percentage of people in relative low incomes

Source: (DWP, 2020) <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/households-below-average-income-hbai--2>

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