

Race and the City: from demonstrations to data

Black History Month and the British Civil Rights Movement

For many reasons that will become clear, I was delighted to be asked to speak at Bristol's Race and Equality Conference. The timing coincides with a couple of important events as well. As you all know it's Black History Month, and it is also the 2 year anniversary of the ground-breaking, internationally renowned Race Disparity Audit, whose Advisory Group I chair.

Let me first turn to Black History Month. Of course everyone knows about Dr Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Angela Davis... the 'Heroes and Sheroes' of the US. But I also want to pay tribute to the barely acknowledged, and much less acclaimed British Civil Rights Movement which was happening at the same time.

In Britain we had our own protests and demonstrations against violent racism and discrimination, akin to those of Alabama, Georgia, Oakland and Chicago. They took place in cities such as London, Manchester, Birmingham and in Bristol itself.

Here we had our own 'Heroes' and 'Sheroes', like Sir Learie Constantine, Darcus Howe, Claudia Jones, Paul Stephenson and Bernie Grant – all of whom campaigned hard to transform our institutions. One of their biggest achievements was the 1965 Race Relations Act – which was the very first time that the Government not only formally recognised the fact that racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities existed, it took action to prevent it, and provide legal protection for those who suffered from it.

It's a tragedy, and something that I am hellbent on changing, that we haven't named this struggle in the same way. But if you stitched a golden thread through the decades... through the protests, the demonstrations, the marches on Westminster, the traumas, and sadly the deaths... you'd see that it is we in Britain who became the epicentre of Civil Rights in Europe. It was our movement that opened up the dialogue in Europe to protect the rights of ethnic minorities living there. It is because of our activism – British activism – that every country in the EU now has a Race Directive to secure equality for all their citizens. Yet these facts are not even talked about in our schools. We need to acknowledge and disseminate it. And, above all, celebrate it.

With this in mind, as I mentioned the RDA had its 2nd anniversary this week. As part of the celebration of achievements – which I will come on to – I am delighted to say that we have created a new National Award – the RDA Advisory Group's Award for Outstanding Contribution to Equalities. A tribute to honour the lifetime's work of an individual who has furthered the cause of racial

and social equality, the recipient this year is Bristol's very own superhero Paul Stephenson OBE. I'll be presenting him with it later this afternoon, right here, so you can all honour him with me.

Race and the City

We've come a long way since the 1960s. And fought many battles against racism and discrimination since, despite the legislation that existed to prevent us from having to do so. The Mangrove Nine, the Battle of Lewisham, St Paul's, the Brixton Riots... All in the pursuit of equality and social justice.

Stephen Lawrence's brutal murder over 25 years ago, and the inquiry that followed, was a watershed moment. It was during this time and in the aftermath that Doreen Lawrence and other activists came together to campaign for change once again. And then we had the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. A stunning victory that mandated every public service in the country to promote race equality. Every public service had to show that they were closing the gap. That was the high point. Civil society made so many gains through it, and we gave our children the freedom to aspire to be whoever and whatever they wanted to be.

Fast forward from then to 2011 and we witnessed the worst riots the UK has ever seen. Unleashed following the death of Mark Duggan, and catalysed by the economic crisis as austerity started to bite, the issues of racism and discrimination viciously resurfaced. Once again, demonstrations against injustice took place. Frustration, violence and destruction spread... anti-establishment feeling festered, racial divisions grew...and hope was losing ground to deep cynicism.

Whilst reflecting on events, a certain clarity came into focus: We had made gains, but the dial still hadn't moved enough to make inroads into the country's biggest institutions or into their way of thinking. The colour, class, and even the gender of power was – and overwhelmingly still is – White, privileged, and male. So there was an awful inevitability about this. And even though it was true, many in power would still doubt the disparate data available as 'unproven'.

From demonstrations to data

Many of us knew that we needed to be smarter with data, and get others to lay bare the harsh truths. At Operation Black Vote – an organisation started back in the 90s – we're used to leading from the front. So, with the support of The Guardian, we published 'The Colour of Power' – a ground-breaking piece of research which clearly showed that pathways to the very top jobs for Britain's ethnic minorities are almost non-existent. Covering a broad spectrum of public, private and democratic institutions, it demonstrated that only 3% of the 1049 top posts were held by people of colour – less than 1% of them women. This translated to Britain's most powerful elite being 97% White. Where were the ethnic minorities among the Supreme Court judges? Or in the upper echelons of the Armed Forces or the Police? Or Permanent Secretaries in Whitehall? Or leaders of the Trade Unions that represent a huge number of

ethnic minorities in lower grades across the public sector?

The Race Disparity Audit (RDA)

It was a massive wake-up call. But, fortunately, one which resonated with conversations I'd been having with Theresa May whilst she was Home Secretary. Once Prime Minister, her team informed me that the ideas we'd spoken about would now become Government policy. And so the 'Race Disparity Audit' was launched in October 2017.

For those who don't know, the purpose of the Audit is to expose disparities – differences in treatment or outcomes – which affect people from diverse ethnic or social backgrounds. The RDA's website – Ethnicity Facts and Figures – brings together all Government's own data and analyses it across 176 topics on education, healthcare, housing, criminal justice, the economy and infrastructure. Regularly updated, it constantly evolves to include new areas of public interest or concern – like unemployment rates, organ donations, hate crime and even the Honours system.

In this way the RDA helps us to demonstrate, to 'evidence', the real – and sometimes stark – inequalities that people of colour or class experience. Inequalities that can now no longer be dismissed as apocryphal. The data looks at how national policies are reflecting communities with different ethnic or social backgrounds across the country. It looks at how women are reflected. It highlights what is working and what isn't.

The RDA is run by the Cabinet Office's Race Disparity Unit and supported by the Advisory Group that I chair. Together we use the Audit's findings to highlight some worrying issues across a range of sectors and geographical regions. Through the data we give a voice to communities who didn't have one previously, and challenge – at national and local level – government, the public and the private sectors to act on the persistent inequalities that are being suffered.

It has been a game-changer. I'll give you a couple of examples to show how:

What the RDA has achieved

In education the RDA's data found that, for years, many children and young people from Black Caribbean, GRT and White working-class backgrounds have experienced high levels of school exclusions, poor grades at GCSE, lack of admissions into top universities and drop-out rates in higher education.

This led to a Government-sponsored Review into exclusions which, among its recommendations, said that schools needed new guidance to make clear when and how children can be removed; and to make them responsible for ensuring that those excluded continue to get a good education. The Office for Students was given new powers to hold Universities to account for how well their students do; and independent university league tables agreed to highlight progress made on reducing student disparities. The Sunday Times Good University Guide is now including ethnic minority attainment gaps as part of theirs. These now

give us a platform from which we can drive those further changes so urgently needed – especially for Black and GRT children who continue to be the worst affected.

In employment, the data for the private sector showed that ethnic minorities are under-represented in workforces, despite making up 14% of the working age population. The Black, Mixed and Other ethnic groups were more likely to be in the lowest skilled types of jobs. Ethnic minority staff were hardly to be found in senior leadership roles. And young people from Bangladeshi, Mixed and Pakistani ethnic groups were the least likely to be in education, employment or training.

Together with Business in The Community, a pioneering Race at Work Charter was launched to increase ethnic minority representation in all sectors. So far 196 national and global businesses – from banking to the film industry – have signed up to it. They have committed to growing a diverse workforce, unlocking its potential, and creating real and lasting career opportunities for all. Major government contractors are now required to provide reports on the work they are doing to end modern slavery, the gender pay gap and increase the representation of ethnic minorities in their workforce. And a new, independent organisation called the Youth Futures Foundation was created and given £90m specifically to address the ethnic disparities the RDA found in youth unemployment.

In the public sector the national story was not much better. Again, those from ethnic minorities were grossly under-represented. Headlines included the facts that 94% of the Senior Civil Service grade, 94% of prison officers and 93% of police officers were White.

We used this data to challenge Whitehall departments and their agencies to change their approach. The Civil Service published a Diversity and Inclusion strategy, with clear steps to increase ethnic minority representation at senior levels; the Ministry of Justice is now supporting prisons to recruit local workforces that reflect the communities they are working in; the National Police Chiefs Council launched a new strategy to increase diversity in local police forces; and the Policing Minister wrote to Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables requesting an audit of ethnic disparities of staff for each police force. This last action was particularly significant – it took the framework of the RDA to local level.

The RDA as a framework for all cities

There are many more examples of how the RDA has catalysed real change. And behind the scenes we continue to work closely with departments, agencies and businesses on other serious disparities, such as in criminal justice, housing, and mental health.

But the success of the RDA has not just been confined to Westminster. The team at the Cabinet Office has won national awards for its data, analysis and policy work. The RDA itself has also been commended cross-Party in Parliament, and it received international acclaim from the United Nations, the OECD, and the US Congress – all of whom are keen to see how they can

replicate it to act on inequalities on the world-stage.

Perhaps the greatest achievement though is the fact that cities across the country now want to apply the Audit's framework to their own communities. Local leaders have so much more power and ability to control, deliver and change things for the better. Bristol is one of them. Under the leadership of my dear friend, and OBV alumni, Mayor Marvin Rees and his brilliant Deputy – Councillor Asher Craig – an Audit has been developed to improve workforce diversity in Bristol's public services and private businesses.

I'm also delighted to say that Liverpool's Mayor, Joe Anderson, has pledged to take the RDA forward in his city. And this afternoon Marvin, Liverpool's Lord Mayor Anna Rothery and the RDA's Advisory Group will be meeting with council leaders from Nottingham, Lewisham and Southampton to discuss how they can adopt the RDA's framework in their cities.

Leadership – 'the standards we walk past are the ones we accept'

Using data to demonstrate inequalities really does work. It is one of the RDA's most compelling features. A big positive that we found from schools, universities, Ministers, public servants, and businesses has been an acceptance of most of the data, and a willingness to collaborate to put things right. It's difficult for powerful people and their institutions to say 'we got this wrong, we should change our approach, help us change it'. It takes real courage to do so.

It also takes leadership – the biggest contributing factor towards the success of the RDA.

At national level the Government showed leadership from the very top and consolidated this by putting the RDA at the heart of Whitehall policy-making. Strong support from the Centre was assured.

In the last 2 years, the data from the Audit has elevated the tackling of persistent inequalities above party politics. Because issues such as race, gender, poverty are frankly more important than that.

I am pleased that this Government has publicly said that the RDA and its team will continue its work. They are standing by what has been created – as they should. There is a real opportunity here to lead from the front and turbo-charge policy-making and initiatives to literally change foundations which have, for far too long, delivered racial and social inequality.

Not doing so would be tantamount to wilfully condemning the next and future generations from these communities to be given the crumbs once again. The crumbs in education. The crumbs in employment. The crumbs in opportunities to advance and fulfil their potential.

But Government can't do this all by itself. It takes leadership at all levels – in every sector. These leaders should also be looking at what the data says about the impact of their own policies. If it doesn't show a diverse

workforce, they need to act. If it shows that people of colour and women are being paid less than their White peers, they need to act. If it shows that children from ethnic minority or socially deprived backgrounds are less likely to do well at school, are less able to access mental health services when they need them, are less likely to live in a house that is safe, clean and warm at night, they need to act. Otherwise they are tacitly enabling inequality.

The standards we walk past are the ones we accept.

Unlock and unleash talent

At a time when tectonic plates are shifting politically, we need a stabilising approach that both improves the status quo and helps to prepare us all for what may come. The RDA provides a blueprint for that – it benefits everyone.

We also need all the talent we can muster to turbo-charge 'Britain Plc'. So every pathway to success should be opened up. In every street, in every city, in every corner of the country there is potential talent. I encourage you all to use the RDA as the framework to unlock and unleash it. Opportunities and life chances should not be dependent upon how light your skin colour is, or whether you're from the 'right' background.

At the end of the day this is about all of us. It's everyone's struggle. It's about breaking down barriers, consolidating past gains into meaningful and lasting pathways to better futures for everyone, regardless of who they are or where they come from.

I know you know that Dr King had a dream. But, more than the dream, he had a plan. As a 'disciple' of his I say to you that this is now our plan. With the data, we can make a clarion call for racial and social justice. This knowledge is a powerful tool for change. Use it to hold the organisations and companies you work in, or work with, to account. Where it shows persistent inequalities, challenge those in charge. Ask why. Be strong, but be smart. For real change we have to take people with us on this incredible journey

And remember. We're no long asking for people to be decent...to show equality...to do the right thing. In the spirit of Dr King, Bernie Grant, Rosa Parks, and Claudia Jones, we're demanding it. We owe it to them and to ourselves to do so.

Thank you.