

Engaging with History after Macpherson

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Engaging with History after Macpherson

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Engaging with History after Macpherson

We don't really debate education and its fundamental purpose in this country. Nor do we relate educational policy to the social arena. How we educate young people relates to our social vision, how we see the world and ourselves ...

Nicholas Tate, *Guardian* 8 October 1996

We should confront as a nation honestly the racism that still exists within our society. We should find within ourselves the will to overcome it ...

Tony Blair, www.telegraph.co.uk 25 February 1999

'Race equality' after Macpherson

The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, chaired by Sir William Macpherson, was set up by the Home Secretary on 31 July 1997 'to identify the lessons to be learned for the investigation and prosecution of racially motivated crime' (Macpherson 1999: 3.1). Stephen Lawrence had been murdered by white youths in April 1993. The Inquiry's findings were published on 24 February 1999 and included seventy recommendations aimed at eradicating racism from the criminal justice system and other areas of public life. It accused the Metropolitan Police and other forces of institutional racism. The report defined institutional racism as follows:

'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 (Macpherson 1999: 6.34).

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The Labour Government accepted the concept of institutional racism as a powerful and accurate summary of the injustices to be addressed in society.

The report, although predominantly about the procedures, practices and cultures of the police service, stressed that if racism was to be eliminated from society there had to be a co-ordinated effort to prevent its growth. Education had a key role here, but the English education system had first of all to face up to the problems, 'real and potential', which existed:

The evidence we had earlier heard about the racist attitudes of very young children was often confirmed during our public hearings. The consistent concern was that ... there was a divide between policy, and practice, rhetoric and reality. Local Education Authorities had anti-racist policies. But these policies were often not implemented. Even at Governor level schools were not inclined to "advertise" or make public racist problems which might adversely reflect upon the image of the schools (Macpherson 1999: 45.14).

The report made three recommendations aimed at encouraging schools to address the identified problems concerning education. First, that 'consideration be given' to 'amendment of the National Curriculum aimed at valuing cultural diversity and preventing racism, in order better to reflect the needs of a diverse society'. Second, that Local Education Authorities and school Governors have a 'duty to create and implement strategies in their schools to prevent and address racism'. Such strategies to include:

- that schools record all racist incidents;
- that all recorded incidents are reported to the pupils' parents/guardians, school Governors and LEAs;
- that the numbers of racist incidents are published annually, on a school by school basis.

Finally, and relatedly, that OFSTED inspections of schools should include examination of the implementation of such strategies (Macpherson 1999: 47.67-69). A direct legislative consequence of the Macpherson report was an amendment to race relations legislation. In April 2001 the *Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000* came into force and established a new 'legislative and administrative framework for a successful multicultural Britain' (Home Office 2001: 3). The legislation outlawed discrimination in all public services and placed a statutory duty on public authorities to promote race equality in carrying out their functions. For the Labour Government the promotion of 'race equality' was a

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'positive way of tackling the institutional problems' highlighted by the Inquiry (Home Office 2001: 15).

To offer guidance around issues of implementation the Home Office produced a consultation paper, *Race Relations (Amendment) 2000. New Laws for a Successful Multi-Racial Britain* (2001). Chapter One of the paper opens with a series of arguments about 'race equality'. It was, in the Government's view, 'essential in order to build strong, inclusive communities'. 'Race equality' was 'a basic human right' and there was a 'moral case' for striving 'for equality and fairness'. There was also an, 'economic case' as

everyone's potential can be utilised. In a diverse society such as ours, whose history has seen successive waves of migration both in and out of the country, that is all the more important [emphasis in the original].

These arguments are then followed by a series of brief statements about '40,000 years of migration to Britain', 'the significant contribution made by black and Asian people fighting for Great Britain in the two great wars' and the involvement of labour from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan in the post-war 'reconstruction effort'. Two photographs from the Ministry of Defence archives accompany these statements showing black and Asian men on active war service. More details and images of Britain's multicultural history are presented in a three-page appendix. Finally, the importance of this history is also stressed in the forward to the paper by the Home Secretary, Jack Straw, '... our great nation is built on diversity, change and immigration' (Home Office 2001: 1, 7, 36-38).

In terms of realising 'race equality' the consultation paper outlined specific duties for schools. The Home Office proposed that under the new legislation each school in England and Wales should have specific duties to:

- a. prepare a written policy on race equality
- b. assess the impact of its policies on ethnic minority pupils, staff and parents, with the emphasis on the attainment of ethnic minority pupils;
- c. monitor the levels of attainment of ethnic minority pupils, and the impact of its race equality policy on pupils, staff and parents;
- d. use existing planning systems, where possible, to make information available about their policies to promote race equality.

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Higher and further education institutions were also identified as having 'a central role to play in bringing about a fair and just society. Similar duties to those outlined for schools were proposed. The paper also outlined specific duties for key education bodies, notably, Ofsted, LEAs and the Learning and Skills Council (Home Office 2001: 23-4).

From the above it is clear that 'race equality' is central to New Labour's 'modernising ... agenda' (Home Office 2001: 15) and education is viewed as offering a critical mechanism for bringing about a fair and just society. In the remainder of this article the relationship between 'race equality' and education is explored through a case study of one curriculum subject – History. The authors first consider three educational contexts with which they are familiar in order to identify the extent of young people's current engagement with the history of 'diversity, change and immigration' which underpins the commitment to 'race equality'. This is followed by a series of reflections on the problems associated with engaging with alternative narratives of the nation.

History in English Schools 5-14

School history in the first National Curriculum 5-14 was dominated by British history and 'British achievements, values and traditions', with nearly 50 per cent of the content to be studied relating to the history of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland from Roman times to the present day. This curriculum was determined by the History Working Group's view of the role of history in a multicultural society:

An ethnically diverse population strengthens rather than weakens the argument for including a substantial element of British history within the school curriculum (DES 1990: 184)

The teaching of British history was thus held to be critical for identity formation in an ethnically diverse society. This position was reaffirmed in both the history non-statutory guidance issued to accompany the Statutory Order in 1991 and in report of the Dearing History Review Group which resulted in National Curriculum history 'Mark II' in 1995 (NCC 1991; DES 1991; DfEE 1995). However, the content identified within the study units essentially told the whiggish story of the social, political and economic improvement of Britain's indigenous white male population (Weiner 1993; Sherwood 1998, 2001; Grosvenor 2000).

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In the *Excellence in Cities* initiative launched in 1997 New Labour declared that:

A good education provides access to this country's rich and diverse culture, to its history and to an understanding of its place in the world. It offers opportunities to gain insight into the best that has been thought and said and done (DfEE 1997: 9)

This was followed in 1998-99 by a Government initiated review by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) of the national curriculum. In the review process the QCA stressed that the school curriculum should contribute to the:

development of pupils' sense of identity through knowledge and understanding of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural heritages and of the local, national, European and international dimensions ... It should pass on the enduring values of society ... It should develop [pupils'] knowledge and understanding of different beliefs and cultures (QCA 1998: 4-5).

Despite the declared commitment to 'diverse culture' and 'cultural heritages' the revised National Curriculum history introduced in 2000 reflects only minimal change. Greater emphasis has been given to key historic periods, individuals and chronology in British history. The content has been amended to include appropriate historical figures from ethnic communities. There is no commitment in the document to anti-racism. Teachers are being asked to point English children towards a future using, as Bage has succinctly stated, 'historical content still dominated, despite cosmetic disguise, by nineteenth century visions of elementary schooling and British nationalism' (Bage 2000: 69). Furthermore, this content is reinforced in the textbooks designed to support national curriculum history. The Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA) undertook a survey of National Curriculum history textbooks in use in schools and found many relating to the 'Roman Empire', 'Britain 1750-1900' and 'Victorian Britain' unsatisfactory in terms of their coverage of the presence and contributions of Black peoples to the history of Britain (Sherwood 1998).

The making of multicultural, multilingual, multifaith Britain is still an unfamiliar story. Dustmann and Preston in *Racial and Economic Factors in Attitudes towards Immigration* (2001) used serial datasets from British Social Attitudes

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and reported that two-thirds of the public are opposed to further immigration by ethnic minorities and their hostility was associated with racist views about ethnic minorities. Such antipathy, they concluded, required education to engage with the racist stereotypes that circulate in contemporary Britain. A single piece of educational research indicates the importance of such engagement. A study of predominantly White secondary schools Bedfordshire, Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk in 1998-99 found that many teachers had little or no idea of what defines an ethnic minority, what racism is or how to teach about it, and teachers admitted that their pupils left school 'ill-prepared for life in a multicultural society' (*Times Educational Supplement* 26 Feb 1999). Pupil engagement with the history of 'diversity, change and immigration' is clearly dependent upon teachers' creativity in identifying relevant material, 'seeking-out' hidden histories and incorporating them into their schemes of work.

History in UK Universities

In comparison with schools, the role of university history departments in shaping collective memory stimulates little discussion and even less controversy. It is tempting to attribute this silence to a persistent view of university history as a purely scholarly exercise, as an erudite and impartial affair associated with ageing men wearing tweed jackets who spend their days pouring over obscure papers in dusty archives. Yet even if this caricature has only a single element of truth (academic historians are overwhelmingly male) it remains a popular one that helps to conceal the deep political significance of history in the universities.

Like other disciplines in universities, History has developed an informal but clearly identifiable culture; a set of attitudes, norms and ways of working that effectively helps to define the subject. The culture of history can accurately be characterised as conservative. New subjects or methodologies are seen as a threat, popular texts dismissed as amateur or antiquarian and politically engaged tutors viewed with suspicion. The history expert, according to Nicholas Murray Butler, was 'one knows more and more about less and less' (. The late Raphael Samuel (1994) accurately summarised academic history as an 'esoteric', 'introspective' and 'autarchic' discipline with an 'enclosed character' and 'a hierarchical view of the constitution of knowledge' (Samuel, 1994, 3-5). What results is a discipline that is capable of responding with enthusiasm and vigour to debates around historical methodology and interpretation but sometimes seems either unwilling or incapable of responding to wider social and political changes in 21st century Britain. Indeed, there can be little doubt that university history

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departments have been slow to react to the issues raised by multiculturalism, let alone the Macpherson Report.

What experience of history do future teachers receive at university? In what follows, the conservative culture of academic history is briefly traced in two broad areas that critically shape the experience of students in higher education; the curriculum and teaching and research and publication.

In terms of assessing university history curricula, it should be immediately noted that detailed empirical evidence is difficult to locate. Nonetheless, what evidence is available suggests that history courses at British universities tend to ignore or marginalise issues around diversity, change and immigration. The *History Today* survey of higher education history (2000) suggests, for example, that twentieth century history was the most widely taught period and that courses on either dictators (particularly Hitler or Stalin) or on Nazi Germany continue to exert a fascination encouraged in school. Interestingly, the survey also found that a traditional approach focusing on high politics and diplomacy was a consistently favoured method (*History Today*, 2000, 54-55). These findings support recent claims that there are still many British universities that fail to offer courses which engage students with issues of 'race', ethnicity and diversity (Jordanova, 2000, 9). Moreover, not only are these issues absent from the formal curriculum of many departments, they are also absent from discussions on pedagogy.

Widely regarded as a secondary function of the academic historian, the practice of university history teaching has traditionally received little critical attention. Recently, however, Alan Booth and Paul Hyland (1996, 2000) have done much to raise the profile of history teaching by editing two books and heading a project (History 2000) that discuss a variety of pedagogical issues. Though this work is undoubtedly important, and it will certainly help to promote high quality teaching and learning, it is significant to note that there is no sustained engagement with Britain's multicultural past. In the most recent text there are two fleeting mentions of ethnicity (Booth and Hyland, 1996, 3, 202) whilst the only essay on 'race' and the history curriculum - by Lewis and Theoharis (1996) - concerns the United States. In other words, whether it is in the context of curriculum design or pedagogical practice, the importance of 'race', ethnicity and cultural diversity have barely registered in the common rooms of university history departments. In accounting for the silence on histories of immigration, change and diversity, it might be suggested that these subjects lack the prestige or intellectual integrity that is commonly associated with publications on, for example, diplomatic, military or other forms of elite history. It is certainly the case that the increasing amount of research in this area has still to make a real impact on History at

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universities. This may be because much of it is still undertaken by political activists or community groups who are not readily associated with higher education. Alternatively it may be that studies of immigration, change and diversity are seen as modish, politically correct or as simply not important enough to be a central element of study. Whatever the reason, the marginal status of this kind of history can be traced in the way that standard histories of Britain - those particularly recommended for undergraduate use - present issues relating to immigration, change and diversity. This leads to the second area for consideration; that regarding research and publication.

A brief examination of some of the standard texts produced by academic historians is illuminating for the way they introduce undergraduates to the diversity of British history. In Arthur Marwick's (2000) *A History of the Modern British Isles*, for example, the terms immigration and multiculturalism appear for the first time after 259 pages, and in the chapter dealing with the period 1955 to 1974. Such a chronology must lead new students to the inescapable conclusion that before this period, Britain was a homogeneous and harmonious place. The absence of any references to the arrival, settlement and experiences of immigrant groups before the late 1950s could certainly lead to a distorted view of British history. There are, for example, no references to Irish, Jewish or Traveller communities, no indication of the presence of refugees in Britain and no discussion of racism, xenophobia or anti-Semitism. Such peace is seemingly shattered by the arrival of immigrants from the New Commonwealth. It is in this context that Britain develops a 'race relations problem' of 'increasing tension and increasing racism' (Marwick, 2000, 259-261). The West Indians, in turn, become 'conscious that they formed an embattled minority' whilst, later on, Asians, who are described as 'generally industrious, often quite prosperous, and frequently high achievers at school', are victims of 'xenophobic Britons' (Marwick, 2000, 259, 323). Such is the story of 20th century Britain. Peace and cultural homogeneity before 1950, problems of 'multiculturalism' and tensions in 'race relations' after it. Indeed, whilst the diversity of Britain in the first half of the 20th century is never recognised, after 1950 minorities appear in racialised and stereotypical forms; as embattled communities or victims of racism. It is also worth noting that for those who are interested in moving beyond this problematic account, a section in the further reading guide entitled 'specialist works of special interest', guides them to Colin Holmes' (1988) *John Bull's Island*. In short, what is given is an inaccurate rendering of British history that either ignores cultural diversity, treats it as a specialist sub-theme or accounts for it in simplistic and distorted terms.

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There are a range of other introductory textbooks on 20th century Britain that, like Marwick's most recent book, also fail to adequately chart the diversity of British history. Examining a small number of these texts it becomes clear that not only is there this tendency to marginalize the cultural diversity of British history but a more specific representation of the black presence in Britain as a threat to the stability of the 'nation'. (Grosvenor, 1997) It is a history viewed through the prism of racism, where black people are associated only with problems and violence. In general accounts of Britain since 1945 the history of the black presence has its own individual chronology - 1948, 1958, 1962, 1981 - years associated with 'problems'. So, for example, in Arthur Marwick's *British Society Since 1945* (1982, 166-169, 220-27), Guy Arnold's *Britain Since 1945. Choice, Conflict and Change* (1989, 50-56), Kenneth Morgan's *The People's Peace: British History 1945-1989* (1990, 202-04, 283-87, 466), David Childs' *Britain since 1945* (1992, 196-203, 303-05, 353) and Peter Clarke's *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900-1990* (1996, 324-29) a history is offered in which black people appear on the page as 'immigrants', as the cause of 'race' riots in the late 1950s and as leading actors in inner city disturbances in the 1980s. Racialised stereotypes appear frequently. Childs (1992, 353) epitomises the approach when having already documented the problems of immigration, 'race relations' and inner city disturbances in post 1945 Britain, he looked to the present and wrote that Britain was faced 'with the new menace of gang warfare in south London and elsewhere among the 'crack' dealers in the West Indian community'. There were also signs that the Chinese community was in danger of being infiltrated by the Mafia-like Triad Groups. Thus, beyond racism and revolt black people were not part of Britain's history since 1945. Black experiences lay 'outside of history', that is, outside of received notions of Britain's past.

In short, the university history experience consists of too few staff with research interests that promote 'race' equality, too few courses that engage rigorously and accurately with issues surrounding ethnic diversity and a wider culture that can effectively resist change. Yet there is also room for guarded optimism.

The increasing level of external scrutiny to which universities are subjected is likely to bring some pressure for change. The Quality Assurance Agency's subject benchmarks for history includes, for example, a statement on the 'enhanced objectivity' that flows from studying 'the implications of Britain's imperial past and multicultural present' (QAA, 2000, 4). Whilst this is both vague and maybe lacking in conviction, it does suggest that there will be increasing pressures for a history that is both accurate and representative and is capable of helping students make sense of the world around them. Yet the extent to which the curriculum and the student experience of university history changes is

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dependent both on the universities in general and on the support of current staff in particular.

History and Initial Teacher Training

In the last twenty-five years there has been an enormous increase in statutory legislation relating to education. Indeed, Judd asked during a debate on the Education Act 1994 'whether there is now a constitutional requirement that there should be an annual Education Bill' (Hinds 1995: 79). The education and training of teachers, in particular, has been the focus of successive government's policy initiatives. Statutory regulations governing Initial Teaching Training (ITT) have undergone six major revisions since 1984 (Welch and Mahoney 2000: 141). Entrance to the profession is determined by the success of student teachers in achieving a mandatory set of competence statements or QTS Standards (DfEE Circular 4/98). The standards focus on achieving the subject knowledge and craft skills necessary to teach and assess the National Curriculum and are written in generic not subject-specific terms. They provide a baseline for further professional standards relating to induction and performance threshold. The current standards are due for review in 2002. The necessary subject knowledge to teach history in schools is specified in terms of the history National Curriculum. Thus, while *Excellence in the Cities* may state that 'a good education' should provide access to Britain's diverse cultural history student teachers need only to demonstrate knowledge of a narrative of the nation focusing on the white majority to realise the necessary subject knowledge for QTS. As with pupil experience in schools, student teachers' engagement with the history of 'diversity, change and immigration' which underpins the commitment to 'race equality will be dependent upon the knowledge and enthusiasm of others - their university tutors and subject mentors.

The QTS Standards were developed with the professed aim of ensuring that:

all new teachers know how to equip pupils with the experience and understanding they need to play their part in a socially just society, including through appropriate moral, cultural, social and spiritual development (Teacher Training Agency (TTA) 2000: 9).

However, where the standards do relate to equity issues they have been generally criticised as being 'minimal' and 'unsatisfactory' (Welch and Mahoney

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2000:150). In 2000 the TTA did produce guidance and resource materials for ITT entitled *Raising the Attainment of Minority Ethnic Pupils*. The focus of the materials is to inform trainee teachers of the part which schools can play in contributing to the development of a 'socially just, democratic, pluralist society'. The guidance aims to alert them to the ways in which 'intended or not, the structures, procedures, practices and culture of the education system can exclude or disadvantage some groups, including minority ethnic pupils'. (TTA 2000: 7,10). The content is informative and connects with 'diversity, change and immigration', but while the guidance draws attention to issues it offers few solutions. Further, by linking the knowledge presented to 'raising the attainment of minority ethnic pupils, the TTA effectively marginalizes this knowledge. It is *about* minority groups, it is not about mainstream society. Lastly, and perhaps more importantly, it is only guidance. The TTA categorically state: 'It does not replace the Standards for the Award of QTS, or introduce new requirements for ITT providers (TTA 2000:9)

Engaging with alternative narratives of the nation

Educational institutions do not exist in a social and political vacuum. Rather what happens in schools, colleges and universities -from the training and recruitment of staff, the design and development of the curriculum, through to styles of teaching and learning - are all related in complex ways to wider politics, culture and society. Whilst this is not the place for a detailed discussion of these relationships, accounting for the marginalisation of multicultural history from Britain's educational institutions necessarily requires some reference to prevailing attitudes in wider society. In particular there are two important and related points - one historical, the other cultural - that help to explain why it is that accurate narratives of the nation – ones that tell Britain's story of immigration, change and diversity – have failed to penetrate the history taught in schools and universities.

The first point to note is that for over two decades or more a suspect version of post-war British history was been used as the basis for political reform. The vision of the New Right that was embraced so enthusiastically by Margaret Thatcher was that the story of post-war Britain was one of decline. The foundation of the welfare state had encouraged dependency, nationalised industries promoted inefficiency and a liberal consensus attempted to excuse the problems caused by immigration, the collapse of standards in education and the alleged growth of sexual deviancy. The self-appointed task of the New Right in the 1980s and 1990s was the restoration of a sense of national vigour, decency and purpose. Central to the whole political philosophy of the New Right and the

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Thatcher project was a specific sense of national identity that, Phillip Dodd has argued, depended 'upon a sustained process of purification and exclusion. In her British story enemies were here, there and everywhere' (Dodd, 1995: 26-27).

In the imaginings of the New Right, amongst the more prominent of these enemies were liberal or left wing teacher, permissive local authorities that encouraged homosexuality and both actual and potential immigrants and asylum-seekers. As a result, the legislative programme of the Conservative Party in the 1980s and 1990s eroded the professional freedom of teachers, attacked local democracy and, as has already been indicated, restricted (non-white) immigration and the right to asylum. What these diverse areas of legislative reform share is the determination to protect and promote specific notions of morality and decency that were encapsulated in a deliberately constructed and exclusionary sense of Britishness (Smith, 1994).

More recently both major political parties have continued to invoke problematic versions of national identity. Under William Hague the Conservative Party championed a 'British Way' that, because it claimed to 'know who we are', was fearful of Britain becoming 'a foreign land' (*Guardian*, 1999; *Guardian* 2001). If Tony Blair's vision of Britain has been a little less strident, he is still not adverse to describing Britain 'as proud and independent island race' (cited in Garton Ash, 2001, 27) and is still prone to recall the 'thousand years of history' that Hugh Gaitskell originally saw threatened if Britain joined some kind of European community (*Guardian*, 1999).

This hint of Euroscepticism leads to a discussion of the second important factor that makes engagement with an alternative narrative of the past difficult. For there is a wealth of evidence to suggest that the centrality of a specific sense of Britishness to political discourse has contributed to a kind of aggressive nationalism that can quickly become both xenophobic and racist (NCSR, 2000). In its most extreme forms this sense Britishness manifests itself in football hooliganism and racist attacks on non-white citizens. More often, it is revealed in a general climate of suspicion and hostility that surrounds asylum seekers, despite the fact that Britain desperately needs further immigration to ensure future economic prosperity. However, of particular significance for this argument has been the furore in the press over the Runnymede Trust's report on *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (2000). The report attempted to explore ways in which a multi-ethnic community might successfully develop in Britain and, as part of this, included a section on the problems associated with the term British (Parekh Report, 2000, 2-26). The reaction of the press was instructive and vivid testimony to the continuing power of 'race' to unsettle the nation.

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The Guardian headlined its piece on the Runnymede's report with 'British tag is coded racism' and, in a related editorial, explained that the Commission wanted the word to be abandoned (*Guardian*, 2000). In doing so *The Guardian*, like other national newspapers, misrepresented both the content of the report and the context of the discussion. As various members of the Commission have subsequently pointed out, what it actually claimed was that the idea of Britishness is usually imagined as white and therefore had a largely unspoken but nonetheless systematic racial connotation (*Observer*, 2000; *Daily Telegraph*, 2000b; Gilroy, 1987). Not deterred by the niceties of accurate reporting however, the national press vented their fury in vitriolic fashion. An editorial in *The Daily Telegraph* (2000b) thought that it an 'outrageous lie that the history, identity and character of the British people is racist' and compared the Runnymede Trust report with that of Macpherson whose 'bigoted conclusions' were another example of the 'bullying of the anti-racists'. Similarly, *The Sun* reported on the 'Curse of the British Bashers' and then, in an indignant editorial, also misrepresented its content:

It says British history needs to be 'revised, rethought or jettisoned' in case it offends anyone. Rewriting History is what Stalin and the Soviet politiboro did. (*Sun*, 2000)

All this says much about the context in which attempts to build a society free from racism takes place. British history is seen as something written, complete and stable and attempts to challenge the widely assumed homogeneity of British history fervently resisted. Rational attempts to explore the power of the past over contemporary society are lambasted (its authors were 'worthy idiots', its conclusions 'extreme and tendentious') and practical recommendations aimed at promoting social cohesion dismissed as 'political correctness' or 'sub-Marxist gibberish' (*Daily Telegraph*, 2000a). Ironically, of course, these outraged reactions impose their own form of censorship. Attempting to understand how popular accounts of the past contribute to present inequalities becomes impossible if national history is treated as a sacred story rather than an invented tradition. What results is a singular and exclusionary 'Island Story'; increasingly outdated but clung to by politicians and commentators who want to save it from the 'politically correct', the 'anti-racists', the 'Europeans' or whoever the particular enemy maybe.

The more sober reality is that history is always based on selection. Everybody makes their selection of history differently, based on their values and what they think is important. If it is accepted that a multicultural and inclusive society is a desirable end, then it is imperative that the telling of the national past reflects that. A static and immutable sense of national identity and culture, the singular

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'island story', must give way to a more flexible, plural and accurate version of the British past. Now that the government has set out the framework for this in *the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000*, it is the responsibility of teachers to encourage students to engage with debates around diversity, change and immigration. In doing so, a successful multicultural Britain, one that promotes 'race equality' and seeks to eradicate racism, becomes at least a possibility. Ignoring this diversity and disavowing the cultural differences that have defined Britain will help to maintain a status quo where discrimination and racism is widespread. For whether we choose to recognise it or not, the past exerts power over the present. As Howard Zinn puts it, 'events are already moving in certain deadly directions and to be neutral means to accept that' (Zinn, 1994, 8).

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