

# A WORLD SHAPED BY RACISM



White people can struggle to perceive their own privilege as, for them, it is normality. Carlton John Turner explores the need for awareness and action when tackling issues of racism and privilege

The public killing of George Floyd in 2020 and the spread of the Black Lives Matter movement were powerful reminders of the reality of racism, racial tension, and racial inequity. The terms ‘white privilege’ and ‘allyship’ became popular. Increasingly, younger people, millennials and Gen Z were at the forefront leading demonstrations and discussions. Interestingly, not everyone adopted the viewpoints or concerns shared by the protesters. For example, a counter movement was launched in Britain called the ‘All Lives Matter’ movement which caused further tension. The topic of racism is one that is very present, complex and politically volatile.

LET’S BEGIN WITH SOME DEFINITIONS TO HELP US EXPLORE:

- **Racism is an economic, political, social, cultural, and even theological ideology, philosophy or system that holds that Black People or People of Colour are inferior to White or European persons.**
- **People born and raised as White are racialised or racially casted as normative, superior, smarter, more deserving,**

**more capable, or more trustworthy. This privilege is distinctly one that, by and large, is not afforded to non-White persons.**

● **Racism and White privilege are not individual events or experiences, they are systemic. They are central to the way in which the world has been shaped, particularly the western world and its reaches across the globe.**

Stating that racism and White privilege are systemic or institutional is not an easy thing for many to accept, especially if they identify as White, or have power within institutions. To suddenly be blamed for a system’s treatment of Black or non-White persons seems unfair. This is where a deeper awareness is necessary. Not saying racist things, doing racist things, or having Black or friends of

‘Racism as a system of advantage is persistent. It’s been perfected over centuries, and as a system its designed to create and recreate itself. Covert forms of discrimination emerge because overt forms of discrimination were increasingly frowned upon. Time has changed and so did racism.’ – Dr Jonathan Ashong-Lamprey (*Erasing the Language of Race*, podcast)

Colour, is great! However, the issue of racism lies much deeper because the very system that disempowers a Black person, historically and today, by nature privileges and empowers the White person.

This reality of racism and White privilege cannot be ignored. At the 2020 General Synod the Archbishop of Canterbury stated that the Church of England is institutionally racist. Anti-racist policies and training must be mandatory within the life of the church and the society, which might include hiring practices, curriculum design

and training practices, plus accountability structures. What is needed now is structural change and continued education.

‘We did not do justice in the past,’ continued the Most Reverend Justin Welby. ‘We do not do justice now. And unless we

are radical and decisive in this area in the future, we will still be having this conversation in 20 years’ time and still doing injustice.’ In his remarks, the Archbishop admitted that this injustice is often unconscious. Those with privilege usually fail to see

## A HISTORICAL PATTERN

Protesting the unfair treatment of Black persons and People of Colour goes all the way back to slavery, and long before that, the kind of world that dictated that Black and Brown bodies, or non-White bodies, could be beaten, punished, and even killed, easily, and brutally, without justice. We cannot talk about Black Lives Matter now, in the age of social media, without also talking about the Slave Rebellions across the Caribbean; Civil Rights Movement in the USA under Jim Crow Laws; the Windrush Scandal in the UK and its aftermath; Stephen Lawrence or the MacPherson Report (UK); Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ Speech or the Handsworth Riots in Birmingham.

What we find is a pattern, and one which the Black Lives Matter movement challenges us to think about. The pattern is expressed in a template Letter to MPs on the Amnesty International’s website, urging governments to take racial justice seriously:

- **Black and Brown protests are met with undue force by police authorities.**
- **Black and Brown people are 40 times more likely to be stopped and searched by the police.**
- **‘It has long been known that Black people in the UK also experience death disproportionately during or following police contact, especially within police custody and detention. Black people are also disproportionately subjected to taser use.’ (Amnesty International)**

their privilege. This is, of course, intrinsic to the issue. How do we make a radical change in the face of an injustice many fail to see?

We need to open our eyes and hearts to a new understanding, perceive the lenses through which we view our world and acknowledge that a profound change is needed – for individuals and for society as a whole.

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### PERSPECTIVES ON COLOUR

It is a fact that everyone has colour and those referred to as 'white' are actually not 'white', unless the person saying or using that expression is colour blind... My mother used to tell my father that in her vernacular he is not 'white' but more 'pink like a pig'. In my mother-tongue the so called 'white' person is actually referred to as 'red' in colour.

– Nasir (name has been changed)

## REFLECT FURTHER

### As individuals or in groups, ask:

- How can we learn to recognise the advantages at play in society systems? How can we seek to understand issues of privilege? What don't we understand? What needs to be done?
- *Search me, O God, and know my heart... see if there is any offensive way in me* (Psalm 139). What assumptions have we made on the issue of race (challenge yourself to look carefully!)?
- Does Galatians 3:28 – *we are all one in Christ Jesus* – help us in our discussions?
- How can we build new bridges when what was there before is so damaged and carries so much history?

Reading around the issues can help develop our understanding. Here are some books reflecting on the topic:

- Akala, *Natives: Race, Class, and the Ruins of Europe* (2018)
- Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (2019)
- A. D. A. France Williams, *Ghost Ship: Institutional Racism and the Church of England* (2020)
- Afua Hirsch, *Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging* (2018)
- Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (2020)
- Ben Lindsay, *We Need to Talk about Race* (2019)
- Chine McDonald, *God is Not a White Man: And Other Revelations* (2021)

### Racial Justice Sunday

is observed on Sunday  
12 February 2023. Liturgical  
resources can be found here:

[www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/liturgical-resources-racial-justice-sunday](http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/liturgical-resources-racial-justice-sunday)