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b:RAP briefing

no. 6

From 'Anti-Racism' to 'Diversity': Revisiting the Race Equality Agenda

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Introducing b:RAP briefings

This is the sixth in a continuing series of **b:RAP briefings**. The purpose of these briefings is to examine key issues in public policy *from a clear and practical race equality perspective*.

While some briefings will cover topics that have a very clear and evident relationship to race equality others will take less obvious issues and examine them afresh, teasing out the race equality dimension.

b:RAP Briefings identify the key issues involved, highlight current trends in thinking and policy-making and recommend practical action and solutions.

Joy Warmington
Chief Executive, b:RAP
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Earlier b:RAP Briefings, short occasional papers and other reports are all available on b:RAP's website at: <http://www.brap.org.uk>

b:RAP Briefings

- No. 1 Community Consultation
- No. 2 Race Equality Schemes
- No. 3 "Do They Mean Us?": BME Community Engagement in Birmingham
- No. 4 Community Cohesion: The Emperor's New Clothes?

Occasional papers

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| We need a new politics of inclusion and equality | April 2004 |
| Equality – a prerequisite for better 'race' relations | April 2004 |

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The race equality agenda is sagging under the weight of conflicting messages. In recent months, we have seen Trevor Phillips, the chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, highlighting the “black pay gap” which exists between black and Asian workers and their white counterparts,¹ while *Strength in Diversity*, the Government’s latest consultation paper on race equality and community cohesion, claims that the UK has a long tradition of successful migration and integration, “the economic and social benefits of which are shared by all”.²

Phillips has also gone on record as saying that the concept of multiculturalism encourages ‘separateness’ rather than ‘integration’ and should be abandoned in favour of shared notions of Britishness that can unite and reinforce national character and citizenship.³ But Ted Cante, the Government’s advisor on community cohesion, warns that too little is being done to promote the kind of open public debate that that would make such shared values possible.⁴

Perhaps more surprisingly, given its central prominence in the Macpherson Report, the Government now seems to be back-peddalling on *institutional* racism, emphasising instead respect, tolerance and a better understanding of other cultures – a more personal, attitudinal agenda associated with the idea of ‘diversity’ and central to its latest consultation paper on race.⁵

In many respects, we might have expected the passage into law of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act to bring with it a greater clarity on race equality issues. But the reverse seems to be the case. We now seem less clear about what race equality seeks to address. Is ‘diversity’ the most important factor in combatting racism? Or should the focus of our efforts be on institutional racism, eradicating disadvantage and inequality in the delivery of public

¹ “Whichever class you belong to, your race is an obstacle...” Trevor Phillips, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, commenting on the Ethnic Minorities Employment Task Force annual report to Government. See *Black pay gap robs minorities of £7,000 per year*, The Observer, 21/11/04: http://observer.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,,1356111,00.html

² *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion & Race Equality Strategy*, consultation document [Home Office; June 2004]. See: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/strengthindiversity.html>

³ “Multiculturalism suggests separateness. We are in a different world from the 70s,” claims Trevor Phillips, the head of the Commission for Racial Equality. See the Guardian 08/04/04: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/religion/Story/0,2763,1188098,00.html> and also *Spiked* magazine online: <http://www.spiked-online.com/Articles/0000000CA4C4.htm>

⁴ “We need to have a widespread and open debate about race issues,” urges Ted Cante. See *Community Cohesion*, the Guardian, 11/08/04: <http://society.guardian.co.uk/thinktank/story/0,,1279989,00.html>

⁵ *Strength in Diversity*, *ibid.*

services? Or should we place the greatest value on 'cohesiveness', seeking to build and strengthen strong personal and social relationships within and between communities at a grassroots level?

b:RAP believes that none of these approaches holds the exclusive answer and that we need to choose the right 'tool' for the right job. But in order to do this, we must acknowledge that racism and inequality are not static or fixed. They morph with the times, breeding new variants of prejudice and disadvantage and require a combination of approaches if they are to be successfully challenged.

It is also crucial to acknowledge that racism does not have one single location or manifestation. We expand on this view in the next section and explain how it informs b:RAP's work and approaches to race equality.

2.0 MULTIPLE RACISMS

Racism is multiply located, with different causes and consequences and this requires us – individuals, companies, organisations – not just to ‘do’ race equality, and not just to comply with the RRAA by putting in place appropriate processes and systems, but to *think* about race equality.

In most of the contexts in which b:RAP works, we begin this process by ‘deconstructing’ the idea of race. This will be familiar territory to some, but we have also found – especially working with grassroots organisations – that this provides a powerful introductory message and can be a critical factor in helping both individuals and organisations begin the process of questioning their own assumptions about ‘race’.

2.1 Deconstructing ‘Race’

Different ‘races’ do not exist in this world in a biological sense. Human beings are made of the same ‘stuff’. The historical roots of ‘race’ – and hence of racism – have been, and continue to be, social, political and attitudinal. In this sense, ‘race’ as a means of delineating different groups is a social and political construct, as much rooted in defining who has power, authority, status and privilege as it is skin colour. ‘Race’ – the attempt to define and categorise those who are ‘other’⁶ – can therefore be described as “what happens when ethnicity is deemed essential or indelible and made hierarchical.”⁷ ‘Race’ is ethnicity on an organised and hierarchical basis.

In more recent times, then, as ‘race’ as a concept has gradually become more contested, ‘ethnicity’ has emerged as the ostensibly less charged and more neutral way of defining difference. b:RAP argues that its roots are however the same.

In addition, ethnicity as a defining part – perhaps *the* defining part – of individual identity has become increasingly problematical. For one thing, social attitudes towards personal identity have changed, placing a much greater emphasis on other factors that contribute to self-identity – such as socio-economic status, language, class, faith, culture and sexual orientation, as well as a whole range of other ‘lifestyle’ choices of varying degrees of significance.⁸ But other cultural factors – such as food, fashion, music and

⁶ For a brilliantly accessible – and funny – illustration of how ‘race’ is always about ‘the other’, see “No offence, but why are all white men so aggressive?” Gary Younge, *The Guardian*, 01/12/04: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/islam/story/0,15568,1363797,00.html>

⁷ *Racism: A Short History*, George M Fredrickson [Princeton University Press, USA; 2002].

⁸ See *Beyond Racial Identity*, b:RAP [2002]. “When they introduced themselves, respondents seemed to consider ethnicity to be just one aspect of their identity, some not mentioning it at all. Many of those respondents who did refer to ethnic background demonstrated pride in it, indicating that it was

youth movements – also play an increasingly important role in redefining identity. While it might be argued that such change is relatively shallow and most readily embraced by the young or affluent, but pressures for change thus exerted are nonetheless real and need to be factored in to any debate about personal and community identity.

But more than this, ethnicity has become a problematical concept *because* of diversity. In Birmingham, for example, over twenty different languages are spoken. Almost 20% of the populace is from an Asian background, with black groups making up about 6%. While just over two-thirds of the populace describe themselves as ‘White British’, over one-third come from different backgrounds, including of course other white backgrounds. And ‘diversity’ is itself changing. Birmingham, for example, has over 28,000 residents who have a dual heritage background – almost as many as there are Irish people in Birmingham (31,000). Ethnicity, therefore, is not just a ‘black’ issue.⁹

It has also been forecast, of course, that by 2020, Birmingham may be the UK’s first majority ‘black city’. When diversity is the prevailing condition, categorisation along ethnic lines will make even less sense.¹⁰

But ethnicity (or ‘ethnicisation’) as a key criterion in the distribution of public services and other resources (such as regeneration funding) is already deeply problematical and was acknowledged to be a contributing factor in the community disturbances in some northern towns in 2001.¹¹ The Government’s independent community cohesion panel, led by Ted Cattle, has strengthened this message in its recent final report, calling on the Government to ensure that those in the most impoverished communities do not perceive themselves to be “in competition with migrants for limited resources”.¹² (It is significant, we should note in passing, that both *Strength in Diversity* and *The End of Parallel Lives* continue to refer to both newly arrived and established BME communities as *migrants*. One might have thought, certainly following the introduction of citizenship ceremonies in February 2004, that we could now simply term them *citizens*.)

something valuable for them to lay claim to. However, the apparent need of society to categorise them by ethnicity, not once or twice, but over and over again, was an obvious problem for them.” [p.59.]

⁹ 2001 Census Fact Sheet, Birmingham City Council (Equalities Division).

¹⁰ The recent history of ethnically-based models of BME community representation in Birmingham is discussed in more detail in b:RAP Briefing No. 3, “*Do They Mean Us?*”: *BME Community Engagement in Birmingham* [b:RAP 2004].

¹¹ *Community Cohesion: Report of the Independent Review Team*, Home Office [2002]. See: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs2/pocc.html>

¹² *The End of Parallel Lives? The Report of the Community Cohesion Panel* [July 2004]. See www.homeoffice.gov.uk/docs3/end_of_parallel_lives_final.pdf

2.2 'Interculturalism' – beyond Multiculturalism

Thus multiculturalism as a concept is beginning to strain at the seams. Not only does it no longer truly describe let alone accommodate present notions of diversity, as a means of understanding and responding to communities it is increasingly part of the problem rather than part of the solution. In response to this, Comedia, the cultural and urban policy think-tank, and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation are jointly managing a project called *Intercultural City: Making the Most of Diversity*.¹³ The project, which builds on Comedia's involvement in Birmingham's Highbury 3 visioning event and similar work in Leicester, seeks to develop a new understanding of the role of diversity in the way cities grow, innovate and change.

Intercultural City argues that Britain's attempts to accommodate diversity through 'corporate multiculturalism' – addressing racial inequality on the one hand through legislative remedies and on the other by recognising distinct ethnic minority 'communities' and channelling resources to these groups through intermediary 'leaders' – was inherently flawed, reinforcing the power of unelected and unrepresentative leaders and embedding rather than reducing 'difference' and ultimately separatism.

The project is seeking nothing less than a complete reframing of the diversity agenda and central to this is the idea of 'interculturalism'.

Rather than working within a framework of what are taken to be existing cultural differences – essentially the approach of multiculturalism – interculturalism emphasises the idea that cultural boundaries are not fixed representations of ethnic communities but are in constant change and remaking. Interculturalism regards such a condition of flux to be positive and calls for public policy measures that can help accelerate and promote such 'interculturalism'. Rather than directing efforts – and often resources – within the (supposedly) well-defined boundaries of existing cultural communities (the multicultural approach), interculturalism welcomes 'hybridisation' and 'cross-fertilisation' as a source of positive creativity and change.

b:RAP is a participant in *The Intercultural City* and will be reporting on its experiences and the progress of the project in due course.

¹³ Initial papers from the *Intercultural City* project. See: www.interculturalcity.com.

2.3 Faith & 'Faith Communities'

But can interculturalism fit comfortably with faith? The events of December 2004, which saw Sikh demonstrations against Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's play *Behzti* (Dishonour) at Birmingham Rep, the theatre's reluctant termination of the play on grounds of public safety, and the playwright, a Sikh woman, in hiding, must surely cast enormous doubt on such an essentially liberal, secular/humanist approach.

We mention this here not to highlight Sikhism specifically and not even because of the rights and wrongs of the events themselves – although there clearly are huge implications for democracy, free speech and religious tolerance – but because the *Behzti* controversy illustrates in an exemplary way some of the most critical issues regarding how we think about race equality, the legislation we use to promote it and even (perhaps especially) the vocabulary and concepts we use to discuss and describe it.

The Home Office's *Strength in Diversity* consultation paper continues to highlight faith and 'faith communities' as being able "to play a key role in providing leadership and bringing together people from different faiths and cultures",¹⁴ but b:RAP, along with many other race equality practitioners, is increasingly concerned with the whole issue of faith in public policy and public life.

This is a hugely complex area and even to discuss it strains our current vocabulary and concepts to the utmost. But it is an aspect of the diversity and community cohesion debate that as a city we most urgently need to find ways to examine and understand.

2.4 A Problem of Reductionism?

We have already noted the contradictory messages inherent in current policy on race equality. The Government wants to limit immigration but celebrate diversity. It brings in tough new laws to legislate inequality out of existence without any apparent means of addressing the gross structural inequality and deep-seated poverty which perpetuate it. It wants a populace which is united in a shared view of 'Britishness' while at the same time not being able to define 'Britishness' nor its values. It wants to stamp out institutional racism, but also believes that it may just be the re-education of a few individuals that

¹⁴ *Strength in Diversity*, p.17, *ibid.*

is required rather than massive systemic change.¹⁵

Small wonder, then, that successive policy initiatives barely scratch the surface of race inequality.

2.5 Multiple Approaches

b:RAP has always believed that racism does not manifest itself in only one form and that race equality policy has to begin distinguishing much more clearly between the *kinds of racism* it seeks to address and the means used to do this. Much greater clarity about the intended outcomes of race equality policy is also required. Without this, we are condemned to an endless mismatch between policy and intention, between means and ends.

In the next section we briefly explain the different approaches b:RAP adopts to promoting race equality and how we match these to intended outcomes.

¹⁵ "... in January 2003, David Blunkett declared: 'I think the slogan created a year or two ago about institutional racism missed the point. It's not the structures created in the past; it's the processes to change structures in the future, and it is individuals at all levels who do that.'" See *New Labour's New Racism*, Institute of Race Relations, 06/10/04: <http://www.irr.org.uk/2004/october/ak000008.html>

3.0 MEETING THE MULTIPLE CHALLENGES OF RACISM & INEQUALITY

3.1 Change – the Key Driver in Equality

Race relations legislation (the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations Amendment Act) is essentially a framework for *compliance*. What it does not and perhaps cannot do is offer the listed public authorities covered by the legislation (which have a statutory duty to promote race equality and good race relations) and companies (which must comply with race relations and equal opportunities legislation) a wider *vision* for what their race equality practice is intended to achieve. Legislation, then, is not a blueprint for social change.

Three complementary approaches

b:RAP on the other hand believes social change is fundamentally important and emphasises three different but complementary kinds of change as being central drivers in race equality:

- Organisational change
- Community change
- And personal change

This is an opportune moment to restate b:RAP's various approaches to meeting the multiple challenges of racism and inequality and the different forms our work takes at each of these levels.

(i) Organisational Change

Much of b:RAP's work is focused on assisting public, private and voluntary sector organisations not just to meet the requirements of legislation – although this is a significant part of what we do – but also to develop a wider *vision* for their organisations and the kind of change which is necessary if they are to move from simply being *compliant* organisations to being *anti-racist* ones.

Viewed in isolation, there is a danger that race equality becomes a mechanistic 'tick box' exercise, achieving more on paper than it does in actuality. We believe that it is vital that organisations embed race equality practice in their mainstream management and performance processes; but more than this, race equality should permeate the wider social values and ethics that an organisation promotes and practices. It should be active and outward-looking; it should be about more than the mere achievement of

'diversity' – whether amongst the workforce or customers and service-users. Race equality should be an inextricable part of the whole value-system of the organisation.

It is this view that we bring to our work with public, private and voluntary sector organisations in order to assist with:

- Their understanding of, and responses to, race equality policy
- The mainstreaming of race equality, working especially at a senior manager level
- Their implementation of race equality strategies under the duties of the RRAA

Our work in supporting organisations includes:

■ **'Race into Action'** A structured programme of organisational and leadership development based on action learning techniques. Race into Action is designed to assist organisations in their implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, ensuring that they develop the capacity to identify, analyse and address racism as manifested in their own functions and practices.

■ **Learning networks** Our experience indicates that one of the most pressing needs is to provide 'space' – either in the form of forums, networks or 'action learning sets' – where people with a shared interest in equality issues can exchange experience, discuss current thinking and practice, broaden their own and colleagues' understanding of equality and make the links between often complex equality issues where 'joined up' responses are a necessity. We support a range of network structures, some of which are sector-specific, including:

- The Diversity Practitioners Network, specifically for personnel that have a direct responsibility for diversity issues in their organisations
- The Tertiary Education Network (TEN), specifically for workers in the tertiary education sector
- The Black Women's Network, for women workers in the voluntary and community sector
- And XNet, a new network and online community for organisations and individuals that want to help fight inequality and racism in Birmingham.

■ **Public Partnerships** Our work includes supporting public partnerships – such as Birmingham Strategic Partnership, the local strategic partnership for the city of Birmingham – where responsibilities under the RRAA are somewhat more complex and frequently require additional analysis and interpretation.

(ii) Community Change

At a community level, much of b:RAP's awareness-raising and educational work involves voluntary and community organisations. We believe the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has a fundamentally important part to play in race equality campaigning and can be a vital way of reaching out into communities. This is not to say that race equality is the preserve solely of VCOs from BME communities, nor that VCOs have a specific 'representational' role in relation to BME communities, as has all too frequently been thought to be the case in the past.¹⁶ Our approach recognises and builds on the sector's tradition of advocacy and campaigning as well as its increasingly important service delivery role and includes:

■ **'Rethinking' Seminars** Held under the auspices of Birmingham Strategic Partnership, we have now organised several 'Rethinking' seminars, bringing together key workers from a range of institutions, voluntary and community organisations and public authorities to reconsider specific race equality issues – such as faith, secularism and Islamophobia – in light of changing circumstances.

■ **Informal approaches** We have also found that less formal approaches can be beneficial and have had some success with a programme of discussions, films and meetings arranged as part of the Social Inclusion and Race Empowerment Network (SIREN). At this level – broadly amongst grassroots community organisations – we have found there to be a genuine appetite for activities that can assist a better understanding of race, racism and inequality.

■ **Community Voices** More recently, we have also become involved in working with communities in the context of Birmingham's planned devolution and localisation. At present, this work focuses on the Ladywood area and is being conducted as a pilot project called Community Voices, a unique two-year programme of support and action-based research led by b:RAP. The project is designed to help everyone who might be involved in local decision-making in Ladywood including, most importantly, those who have previously found it difficult to get involved.

¹⁶ See b:RAP Briefing No. 3, "*Do They Mean Us?*": *BME Community Engagement in Birmingham* [b:RAP 2004].

(iii) Personal change

b:RAP's approach recognises the need for both organisational change and personal, attitudinal change. While there is perhaps never an entirely clear demarcation between the work which is intended to effect organisational change and that aimed at supporting personal change – organisations, after all, are collections of people – some element of personal change is an important part of all of the following:

■ **'Equality Competencies for Managers'** Fundamental to much of b:RAP's work is the view that race equality practice can be *taught* and that people can be helped to improve their understanding of and their skills for race equality. For this reason, b:RAP has developed a race equality competencies course aimed at managers in a wide variety of settings. The course is intended to enable managers to develop the skills to identify and analyse the 'symptoms' of race inequality in their own organisations and to progress practical mainstream measures to address this. The course is pitched between NVQ Levels 3 to 5 (i.e. from A Level through to postgraduate level).

■ **Professional development and training** We also provide tailored packages of professional development and training in race equality issues for individuals and organisations, ranging from single sessions and short one- and two-day modules through to long-term professional development.

■ **Research, information and publications** Are a crucial part of b:RAP's work and in recent years we have made strenuous efforts to commission and conduct original research and publish an almost constant stream of reports, briefing papers and shorter occasional pieces on a wide range of equality-related issues. These are used widely by private, public and voluntary sector organisations as well as many individuals. A list of selected research reports and briefings is included at the end of this paper.

4.0 GET INVOLVED

We hope this brief revisiting of the race equality agenda has provided you and your organisation with food for thought. Further information on all aspects of our work is available from b:RAP and our website – at <http://brap.org.uk> – while currently under reconstruction will shortly offer an archive of articles, reports and briefing papers as well as details of all the various initiatives and projects we support.

If you are not already an active partner in the b:RAP ‘family’, you can become one. And if there are specific areas of work that you feel your organisation might want to investigate, we would of course be delighted to discuss that.

But if there is one final message that we would like you to take away from this paper it is this. The race equality agenda is a complex one. Probably no greater or more complex set of interlocking problems currently faces us. If Birmingham is to rise to this challenge, then it will be by effectively utilising the efforts of the many rather than single, individual organisations.

We want to encourage organisations to work together, to critically review what they are doing regarding race equality and to be open to learning from each other. And we want to play an instrumental part in creating the environment in which that can happen.

Being part of a collective movement for race equality and creating the kind of climate in which real and lasting change can take place is one of the most significant contributions we can make to Birmingham’s future.

b:RAP
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b:RAP – Selected Publications

Research and reports

- Health Services in Birmingham for BME Older People* [2000]
- Race, Racism and the Criminal Justice System: Issues for Birmingham* [2000]
- Attitudes Towards the Criminal Justice System* Survey Findings and Executive Summary [2001]
- Black City White Mask – Race, Racism and the Cultural Services: Issues for Birmingham* [2001]
- ‘New Policies: The Same Old Story?’ Survivors’ Perceptions of Racial Harassment* [2001]
- Racial Harassment: An Overview of the National Picture and Best Practice* [2001]
- Shattered Homelands, Scattered Dreams* Current debates regarding asylum seekers and refugees [2001]
- Beyond Racial Identity* [2002]
- Is there Black in the Union Jack?* [2002]
- Post-16 Education in Birmingham: Questions of Racial Equality* [2003]
- Trends in Ethnicity Data for Birmingham HE Institutions 1997-2001* [2003]
- Race Equality and Education in Birmingham* [2003]
- Representation of BME Communities in Birmingham’s Higher Education Institutions* [2003]
- The BME Voluntary & Community Sector in Birmingham* [2003]
- Black to the Future: Race equality and mainstream post-16 education and training provision in Birmingham & Solihull* [2004]
- Fact and Friction: Ethnicity Baseline Data Project Summary Report* [2004]
- System or Stereotype? What we can do to mainstream anti-discriminatory practice and effective teaching and learning in Birmingham schools* [2004]
- Urban Myths, Street Realities – A community debate with young people* [2004]

b:RAP Briefings

- 1: Community Consultation [Oct 2003]
- 2: Race Equality Schemes [Jan 2004]
- 3: ‘Do They Mean Us?’ – BME Community Engagement in Birmingham [Feb 2004]
- 4: Community Cohesion: The Emperor’s New Clothes? [June 2004]
5. Myth and Maxim: A myth busting report on asylum seekers and refugees (Dec 2004)

Occasional papers

- Equality – the foundation for better ‘race’ relations [April 2004]
- Community Solidarity – the first casualty when the ‘race card’ is played [April 2004]
- Ethnic Monitoring – Why Bother? [June 2004]
- A ‘Compact’ built on equality and anti-discriminatory practice – too good to be true? [June 2004]