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Heads I win, tails you lose:

anti-Black racism as fluid, relentless, individual and systemic

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Abstract

Derrick Bell's thesis, that racism is a permanent feature of society, is frequently misrepresented by detractors as signalling a view of racism as monolithic; bold, obvious and unchanging. This paper argues that critical race theory reveals a very different understanding of racism, as relentless and yet fluid and quick to morph depending on current circumstances. In this way, CRT offers a new perspective on the view that *the more things change, the more they stay the same* (the central theme for this journal special issue). This paper focuses on two key issues where the last quarter century has seen considerable superficial change, that appears progressive, but masks a deeper reality of continued racial injustice. First, the changing contours of the Black/White achievement gap in England, and second, the continuing fascination (on both sides of the Atlantic) with notions of genetics and intelligence.

Introduction

Black people will never gain full equality in this country. Even those herculean efforts we hail as successful will produce no more than temporary "peaks of progress," short-lived victories that slide into irrelevance as racial patterns adapt in ways that maintain white dominance. This is a hard-to-accept fact that all history verifies. We must acknowledge it and move on to adopt policies based on what I call: "Racial Realism." This mind-set or philosophy requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status. That acknowledgement enables us to avoid despair, and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph.

Derrick Bell, *Racial Realism* (1992, pp. 373-4, original emphasis).

The entire Alt Right is united in contempt for the idea that race is only a “social construct.” This is an idea that is so wrong and stupid that only very intelligent people can convince themselves it is true ... Why do blacks in America, Canada, and Britain—likewise with very different histories—show exactly the same patterns of crime, poverty, illegitimacy, and school failure? Why, on the other hand, are Asians ahead of whites on all these measures? Because race is real.

Jared Taylor, *Race Realism & the Alt Right* (2016).

Almost 25 years after Derrick Bell defined *racial realism* as the recognition that racism is a permanent feature of US society, the term has entered popular usage with a meaning that has switched around 180 degrees. The election of President Donald Trump brought global attention to the so-called ‘alt right’, a mish-mash of right-wing extremists seemingly unified only by their racism. The racial realism of the alt-right is a bold, even proud, restatement of the simplest and most negative view of race as a genetically rooted and permanent hierarchical system of human difference (see Weigel, 2016; Wilson, 2016). Whereas Bell called for a critical perspective that gave up the ideology that racism would be defeated through gradual incremental change, the alt right views the very idea of racial equity as an impossible dream that defies the ‘reality’ of biology and unfairly penalizes White people.

The emergence of the alt right, and this new (racist) version of racial realism, is a useful place to start this paper because it offers a striking example of the kind of faulty self-serving logic that can be imposed to turn *any* set of events into evidence that supports a racist interpretation. Just as in a rigged game of flipping a coin:

Racist: Black students achieve lower results than their white counterparts you say?

Well then, that proves that they’re deficient, why else would they fail so consistently?’ *Heads. I win!*

Antiracist: No, wait. There’s plenty of evidence to show that results are malleable under the right circumstances. According to some measures the Black/White gap has almost disappeared.

Racist: Black students' achievement has improved relative to Whites you say? Well then, obviously there's no problem with the system, they simply need to work harder – *unless* - political correctness has perverted the system and teachers are now ignoring White kids in order to unfairly privilege minorities. *Tails. You lose.*

There are many different views of critical race theory (CRT) and no single unchanging canonical statement of its tenets (Crenshaw, 2002; Delgado, 2009; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Taylor, 2016). Rather, CRT has continued to develop and expand over the decades, for example, now encompassing a range of different off-shoot movements and applied internationally (Warmington, 2014; Zamudio, Russell, Rios & Bridgeman, 2011). One essential cornerstone of the approach, however, is its view of the fundamental role of racism in contemporary society:

CRT begins with a number of basic insights. One is that racism is normal, not aberrant, in American society. Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity—rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and whites (for example) alike—can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day and that account for much misery, alienation, and despair. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi).

In this paper I examine this view of racism in more detail. Drawing on real world examples I explore the fluid and relentless nature of anti-Black racism^[1] as *both* a structural characteristic of educational systems *and* an individual element in the ways that people present themselves and their arguments in relation to the dominant tropes of race/racism that are generally accepted at a particular point in time and space. Racism cannot be understood adequately by a perspective that focuses only on the separate beliefs, actions and fears of individual social actors, but neither is racism purely a facet of a depersonalized system; *racism is remarkably resilient because it is both systemic and shaped by individual agency*. As Derrick Bell stated with such powerful clarity, racism does not go away. But neither does it remain unaltered. Antiracist resistance and campaigns for racial justice can score stunning victories but progress is never wholly secure. I return to this understanding in the paper's

conclusion, informed by the analysis laid out in the next two sections which focus, respectively, on changes in the Black/White achievement gap^[2] and the nature of public debates about intelligence and race. The analysis draws on research, funded by the Society for Educational Studies (a UK-based educational charity), which sought to gauge how – if at all – race and education in England has changed since the early 1990s (Gillborn, Rollock, Warmington & Demack, 2016).

The Black/White Achievement Gap

The more things change...

... the Black/White gap has almost disappeared

The history of race and education in England has at its heart the struggles for equity and justice led by the Black Caribbean community (Warmington, 2014). Although Black people have lived in the UK for centuries there is a common misconception that the minority ethnic population began with the Second World War, when a crucial contribution was made by soldiers from British colonial states in the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent. In the post-war reconstruction period, the state sought additional labour power from its colonies and the resulting migration led to substantial new settlements of people of colour, especially in key industrial cities (Pilkington, 2003). The Black Caribbean community, which traces its ethnic heritage directly to the islands of the West Indies, has played a vital role in driving campaigns for racial justice across society and, in particular, in education (John, 2006; Richardson, 2007; Sivanandan, 1990). The Black/White gap in educational achievement was one of the first key rallying points. Despite official inaction and disinterest, pressure from Black parents and activists (cf. Black Peoples Progressive Association and Redbridge Community Relations Council, 1978) ultimately led to the government commissioning special inquiries that produced the first-ever official breakdown of examination achievement in relation to students' ethnic origin (Rampton, 1981, Swann, 1985). School students in England do not 'graduate' in the formal sense familiar in the US; in order to judge whether a student had been successful, therefore, the committee of inquiry looked at a range of data on how young people had achieved in the formal examinations that take place in the final year of compulsory schooling. First, they considered the proportions who had attained 'higher' pass grades in English and mathematics (reflecting the greater status that these subjects have been accorded historically by employers and universities). Next they looked at the proportions who

‘obtained 5 or more higher grades’ as an indicator of ‘broad levels of achievement’ (Rampton, 1981, p. 7). The selection of ‘five’ as a suitable cut off point was guided by the historic requirement for this number of higher pass grades as a means of accessing professional training and university degree courses (Drew & Gray, 1990; Gillborn, 1990). Subsequent years saw numerous changes to the examinations that were used and the different ethnic groups that were identified for scrutiny. Two constant themes, however, were the inclusion of Black students as a group³] and a focus on those attaining at least *five* grades at a level considered to be high enough to be recognized in competition for university entry. A further constant has been the fact that, as a group, Black students have typically been less likely to attain the required levels when compared with their White counterparts. Recent years, however, have seen an apparently significant change.

Figure 1 about here

Figure 1 shows the proportion of students attaining five or more higher grade passes in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations that they sat during their final year of compulsory education. The analysis draws on official data (from the national Department for Education) and covers a twenty-five year span starting with the introduction of the GCSE in 1988. The data represent the most reliable indicator available of the educational attainments of students at a national level but there is need for caution because of the changing nature of the data source. Most importantly, the figure is constructed from material generated by two different official surveys of attainment. The period 1988 to 2003 inclusive reports findings from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS) while the data for 2004 to 2013 are derived from the National Pupil Database (NPD). The YCS has the advantage of reporting on a nationally representative sample of students including those who attend private schools. However, the YCS relies on periodic surveys that have become much less frequent and it combines material on children in two different countries (England and Wales) where education policy is controlled by different bodies, sometimes with markedly different political philosophies. The NPD focuses only on England, takes place annually, and includes all students who attend state-funded schools. This last fact, of course, means that privately-educated students are *not* counted in the data. These changes are signalled in Figure 1 by broken lines between 2003 (a nationally representative sample of England and Wales) and 2004 (a headcount of state students in England).

At first sight Figure 1 would appear to show that the Black/White gap has almost been eradicated. In 1988 there was a considerable inequity of attainment between the 30 per cent of White students who achieved five or more higher grade passes compared with 18 percent of Black students. This gap, of 12 percentage points, had shrunk to 2.3 percentage points in 2013.

the more they stay the same...

... the rules have changed and the gap has been restored (twice)

Unfortunately, the level of educational attainment measured in Figure 1 is no longer the most important sign of educational success. In fact, the most consistent narrowing of the gap in Figure 1 coincided with changes in education policy that introduced new ‘benchmark’ measures of success that tell a very different story. Twice, in 2006 and 2011, governments (of different political perspectives) introduced new headline measures of achievement and their effect was to restore the Black/White gap to historic levels. This is detailed in Figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 shows the attainment of Black and White students in relation to the dominant benchmark measure of educational success at each point in the 25 years under scrutiny. The data in Figures 1 and 2 are common until 2005, denoting the fact that five or more higher grade GCSE passes was the dominant measure of academic success during that period. The graphs begin to diverge, however, at 2006, when the New Labour government, headed by Tony Blair, adopted what it called the ‘*Gold Standard*’ measure of five or more higher grade passes *including* English and mathematics. The decision to require passes in English and mathematics reflected the historic privileging of these subjects (see above) and was consciously intended to make the benchmark measure more selective and ‘toughen the performance tables...’ (DfES, 2005b, p. 37). In 2011 a Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government declared that the Gold Standard was ‘not enough’ (DfE, 2010b, para. 61) and introduced another new measure, *the English Baccalaureate* (‘E. Bacc’). This was presented as ‘a significant raising of the bar for secondary schools’ (DfE, 2010b, para. 62) and required that among the five or more higher grade passes was included English, mathematics, double sciences, a modern or ancient foreign language and either history or geography.

Figure 2 includes a note of the dominant benchmarks, along the bottom axis, and details the attainment of Black and White students at each data point. In addition to the percentage of students attaining the relevant number and selection of higher grade passes, the figure also includes an *Odds Ratio* (OR) calculation; i.e. the odds of achieving the relevant benchmark for White British students relative to Black students.^[4] By taking account of the changing official benchmarks for attainment, Figure 2 charts the Black/White gap in relation to *the measures that mattered most at each point in time*. A pattern of inequality of attainment is clear throughout the period; White students were never less than half as likely again to reach the benchmark (the smallest OR is 1.56 in 1999).

In view of the more selective nature of each successive benchmark, it is not surprising that achievement initially fell for both Black and White students following the imposition of the Gold Standard and the E. Bacc. On both occasions, however, Black students suffered a *greater* penalty – possibly reflecting the fact that wherever access to high status subjects is policed by teachers, their lower average expectations for Black students tend to result in them having less chance of even accessing the subjects, let alone achieving success in them (Gillborn & Mirza, 2000; Gillborn, Rollock, Vincent & Ball, 2012; Tikly et al., 2006).

A clear pattern can be seen whereby, over time, Black Caribbean students begin to narrow the gap to their White peers but the introduction of a new benchmark restores the inequality to historic levels.

- The introduction of the ‘Gold Standard,’ in 2006, restored White odds of success to 1.92 (almost double the Black rate) and roughly equivalent to the rate in 2004;
- The introduction of the E. Bacc, in 2011, restored White odds of success to 2.20 (more than double the Black odds) a rate not seen since 2003. Effectively erasing seven years of progress overnight.

Although the odds of success have fluctuated over time, changes to the official benchmark measure have acted to set back consistent gains on the part of Black students relative to their White peers. At the start of the quarter century reviewed in Figure 2, White students were

almost twice as likely to attain the required benchmark level of success (OR 1.95 in 1988); by the end of the period, the odds were strikingly similar (OR 1.73 in 2013).

Race, Genetics and Intelligence

The more things change...

... public condemnation greets claims that Black people are genetically pre-determined to be less intelligent than Whites

a corruption ... has spread throughout American intellectual discourse: If you take certain positions, you will be cast into outer darkness. Whether your statements are empirically accurate is irrelevant. In academia, only the tenured can safely write on these topics. Assistant professors know that their chances of getting tenure will be close to zero if they publish politically incorrect findings on climate change, homosexuality, race differences, gender differences, or renewable energy. (Murray, 2013)

This wail against the supposed tide of political correctness destroying American cultural life was written by Charles Murray, currently W. H. Brady Scholar at the American Enterprise Institute (a right-wing think tank). In the early 1990s Murray enjoyed enormous popular success with his co-authored volume *The Bell Curve* (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994). Despite numbering more than 800 pages and initially being available only as an expensive hardback, the book made headline news across the world; it sold 400,000 copies in two months, appeared in the *New York Times* bestseller list, and featured on the cover of *Newsweek* (Banks, 1995; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Kamin, 1995; Kinchloe, et al., 1996; Montague, 1999). The book's principal claim to fame was its championing of old style racist pseudo-science;

Putting it all together, success and failure in the American economy, and all that goes with it, are increasingly a matter of the genes that people inherit. (Herrnstein & Murray 1994, p. 91, original emphasis)

the average white person tests higher than about 84 percent of the population of blacks ... job hiring and promotion procedures that are truly fair and unbiased will produce the racial disparities that public policy tries to prevent (Herrnstein & Murray, 1994, pp. 269 & 479, original emphasis)

The Bell Curve generated an avalanche of popular and scholarly criticism but re-energized those on the right who felt that ‘the truth’ about race and intelligence had been silenced for too long. One particularly notable public intervention was an article in the *Wall Street Journal* entitled ‘Mainstream Science on Intelligence’ (1994). The piece gained considerable attention, not least because it was presented as a joint work signed by 52 professors described as ‘experts in intelligence and allied fields’ (*Wall Street Journal*, 1994). In fact, the text was written by Linda S. Gottfredson (Professor of Educational Psychology at the University of Delaware) who then circulated it among 131 individuals (most of whom declined to endorse it or did not respond). She has subsequently described the article as an attempt to correct ‘the rising crescendo of misinformation on intelligence’ that surrounded discussion of Herrnstein and Murray’s book (Gottfredson, 1997, p. 17).

Murray’s 2013 attack on the ‘corruption [of] American intellectual discourse’ (above) reflected the fact that, almost twenty years after *The Bell Curve* was published, mainstream political debate no longer tolerated blatant assertions of racial intellectual superiority/inferiority. This shift first became clear in 2007 when James Watson (a joint-Nobel Prize winner for his work on the structure of DNA) was forced to abandon a book tour of the UK. Watson had been quoted in the British press saying that he was ‘inherently gloomy about the prospect of Africa’ because ‘all our social policies are based on the fact that their intelligence is the same as ours – whereas all the testing says not really’ (Hunt-Grubbe, 2007). Among those condemning Watson were a group of Members of Parliament (who described his views as ‘unscientific and unsophisticated’, *Hansard*, 2007) and the Science Museum, which cancelled an event in his honour (BBC News Online, 2007). The furor surrounding Watson made headline news on both sides of the Atlantic and seemed to echo, a few years later, in a controversy surrounding Jason Richwine (a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation – another conservative US think tank). Richwine was co-author of a Heritage report on the supposed economic costs of US immigration. Not surprisingly, the media were very excited when it emerged that his PhD dissertation, completed a few years earlier at Harvard, also focused on the supposed dangers of immigration, this time using an argument

about intelligence to state that ‘today’s immigrants are not as intelligent on average as white natives’ [sic] and that this threatens ‘substantial negative effects on the economy and on American society’ (Richwine, 2009, p. 134).

The Watson and Richwine controversies stand in stark contrast to the sensationalist, often complimentary, media attention that greeted *The Bell Curve* in the 1990s. Does this mean, therefore, that public discourse (in the US and the UK) has finally relinquished its obsession with genetic determinism and, in particular, recognised the deeply flawed and racist nature of the supposedly ‘scientific’ claims that link human intelligence to ideas about race?

the more they stay the same...

... the media and politicians remain fascinated by genetic determinism and its ‘mainstream’ advocates know better than to mention race explicitly

On either side of the Atlantic (in the US and UK) Linda S. Gottfredson and Robert Plomin, two of the signatories to the 1994 *Wall Street Journal* article that defended *The Bell Curve*, continue to make high-profile interventions on genetics and intelligence that reach large popular audiences. They have not recanted their previous statements in support of analyses claiming genetically-based differences in average intelligence between races; they simply do not mention those aspects of their work when addressing general audiences. Gottfredson, for example, has written a primer on intelligence for *New Scientist* magazine – a respected title that claims to reach ‘over 4 million highly engaged readers’ (*New Scientist*, 2016).

Gottfredson’s ‘*Instant Expert*’ guide runs to seven pages and is presented in a direct, accessible and extremely confident style. Headings include ‘what do IQ tests measure?’ ‘What is intelligence?’ ‘Nature and Nurture’, and ‘Boosting Brainpower’; despite such a broad range of topics, one notable absence is any mention of race (Gottfredson, 2011). In addition to authoring the *Wall Street Journal* article, Gottfredson has been a staunch defender of the late J. Philippe Rushton, who argued that races are hierarchically ordered according to an evolutionary principle, such that ‘people of east Asian ancestry (Mongoloids, Orientals) and people of African ancestry (Negroids, blacks) define opposite ends of the spectrum, with people of European ancestry (Caucasoids, whites) falling intermediately’ (Rushton, 1997, p. xiii). Despite authoring an entire journal article in Rushton’s honour, and attacking his critics as an example of ‘mob science’ (2013, p. 222), Gottfredson found no space for him in her

New Scientist piece. Arthur Jensen, one of Rushton's contemporaries, *does* appear and is lauded for producing 'analyses [that] transformed the study of intelligence' (Gottfredson, 2011, p. ii) and yet she does *not* mention his most cited article (Jensen, 1969) which argued that African American attainment could not match White attainment overall because of the genetics of intelligence: one of the most in/famous papers in the field (Skiba, 2012, p. 35). Elsewhere I have argued that Gottfredson's *New Scientist* primer is an example of strategic '*racial inexplicitness*';

race is rarely mentioned directly and, if it *does* appear, is positioned as an aspect of human diversity that adds to the richness of society but is by no means central to the 'scientific' debate. When race-conscious critics try to put racism on the agenda they are portrayed as trouble-makers who do not understand the science and are driven by emotion and/or ideology (Gillborn, 2016, p. 367).

Under the heading 'Nature and Nurture', for example, Gottfredson informs her readers that because 'an individual's ability to exploit a given environment is influenced by their genetic endowment ... it is not surprising that attempts to raise low IQs by enriching poor school or home environments tend to disappoint' (2011, p. v). But for those worried that this might excuse social injustice, she reassures readers that the science is robust; simultaneously acknowledging past controversy and yet avoiding any mention of race:

Democratic people value social equality above all, so they mistrust anything that might generate or justify inequality – but intelligence is no more equally distributed in human populations than height is. This tension has led to rancorous controversy over intelligence and intelligence testing but it has also benefited the science by pushing it exceedingly hard. (Gottfredson, 2011, p. iii)

This strategy, of talking up a genetic component to intelligence while studiously avoiding the question of race, has been especially successful for Robert Plomin (Professor of Behavioural Genetics at Kings College London). Plomin's recent research has been spectacularly successful at gaining popular exposure in the UK through a series of high profile media stories (in newspapers and on public radio) that assert a simplistic and erroneous notion of genetic determinism (for critiques see Gillborn, 2016; Rose, 2014): e.g. the following headlines:

Genetics, not your school, is biggest factor in exam success: DNA twice as significant as environmental factors, *Daily Mail* (Spencer, 2013)

GCSE results 'influenced by children's genes, not teaching', *Daily Telegraph* (Paton, 2013)

Revealed: how exam results owe more to genes than teaching, *The Spectator* (Wakefield, 2013)

In this way, the erroneous and twisted view of intelligence that lay at the heart of *The Bell Curve* has found new expression under the guise of 'science' in the British media and yet any relevance to race inequity and racist pseudo-science goes entirely unremarked. Indeed, proponents of genetic determinism now present themselves as *progressives* working against the forces of repression and reaction. A former special adviser at the English Department for Education, for example, recently wrote a piece for popular consumption that cited Plomin approvingly, avoided any mention of race, but stated:

Questioning the validity of IQ tests or intelligence ... is akin to climate change denial or thinking that vaccines cause autism ... Pupils should sit IQ and personality tests on entering primary and secondary ... We should allow the creation of smart fraction schools selecting the top 1-2 per cent of pupils (Martin, 2016, pp. 22-3).

Conclusions

Liberals surprised and shocked by the direction this country has taken, and by the speed at which the changes of the 1960s have been rolled back, would do well to heed the effective tactics employed by their counterparts on the other side of the political spectrum. (Stefancic & Delgado, 1996, p. 34).

'*The more things change, the more they stay the same*' is a familiar refrain that rewards critical reflection. Things *do* change; the centuries old struggles for racial justice (in the US and globally) have changed the political and social landscape in ways that are absolutely

fundamental. And yet, severe and deeply-rooted race inequities remain. Important victories have been won but, as Derrick Bell and Richard Delgado's work, in particular, repeatedly evidences, there is a constant interplay of advance and counter, whereby few changes are entirely secure (Bell, 1998; Delgado, 1995). Thompson Dorsey and Venzant Chambers (2014) characterize this process as 'a cycle of interest convergence, interest divergence, and imperialistic reclamation':

throughout history, the US continuously enters convergence-divergence-reclamation cycles where legal remedies for equity and equal opportunities for black people and other racial minorities were created and then taken away before there could be a demonstrable power shift in racial, educational, social, and economic dominance (Thompson Dorsey & Venzant Chambers, 2014, p. 82)

Although the notion of a 'convergence-divergence-reclamation' (C-D-R) cycle was developed in relation to US legal history, the broader pattern appears to have international relevance. In this paper I have looked at two relevant cases; the changing rates of Black/White educational achievement in England and transatlantic debates about the nature of intelligence. These cases are significant in their own right but also shine a light on the wider dynamics of racism in contemporary educational policy and practice.

Benchmarking educational success and failure: I noted that both changes to the 'benchmark' criteria for educational success in England (in 2006 and 2011) were presented explicitly as an attempt to make success more difficult. There is no evidence that race played any part in the policymakers' deliberations and I am certainly not suggesting that either change was *intended* to widen the Black/White gap. But intentionality is irrelevant when gauging the discriminatory *impact* of the changes. Any such 'raising of the bar' is likely to widen existing race (and class, and gender, and dis/ablest) gaps because the processes that shape attainment inequity *saturate* the system. The achievement gap is the end of a long process that develops as students move through education. The process includes differences in how students are rated from the moment they enter education; the support they receive; the resources at their disposal; their chances of disciplinary problems with school; their likelihood of being placed in lower ranked teaching groups (tracks, sets, streams, and tiers) - differences that mean Black students, on average, have less experienced teachers and cover less of the curriculum (Bradbury, 2013; Gillborn, 2008; Rausch, 2012; Tikley et al., 2006). The precise contours of

the new benchmark measures (and any future changes) are less important than the fact that any attempt to make ‘success’ more difficult will *always* tend to widen existing equity gaps if (a) the new measure reflects the same hierarchies of status and treatment that define the racialized education that students receive, and (b) no explicit race equity protections are built into the system (such as defining race-specific pass quotas).^[5]

The last 25 years of Black/White attainment in England are characterized by a pattern whereby Black students narrow the gap only to see the benchmark redefined in ways that set back progress and restore the gap to historic levels. Here we see the *relentless* and *systemic* nature of anti-Black racism in education. Despite the constant striving of Black parents, activist groups and race-conscious advocates inside and beyond education, the normal workings of the system require that the ‘benchmark’ measure of success should not be too commonly achieved, and each successive change in the measure has an immediate and direct racist impact. This happens without any policy-debate on race inequity, it is what Delgado and Stefancic (2000) describe as ‘business-as-usual’ racism operating on a system-wide scale.

Race and IQ: It is remarkable that in the twenty-first century there is still a need to seriously address the view that there might be a fixed genetically-determined reality to the idea that races (which are socially constructed) are sorted through evolution into discrete and hierarchical biological entities with distinct intellectual capacities. Advocates of this ‘hereditarian’ position constantly assert their scientific credentials but the science has overtaken them so that any claims that they are merely pursuing a dispassionate politically-neutral empirical truth now test credulity to the limit:

...it is almost universally agreed that race is a social construct. In 2005, only two years after the sequencing of the human genome, the editors of *Nature Biotechnology* put it like this: ‘Pooling people in race silos is akin to zoologists grouping raccoons, tigers, and okapis on the basis that they are all stripey.’ Perhaps, then, the better question is: Why do we continue to search for a connection between race and genetics (Silverstein, 2015).

I noted earlier that the ‘alt right’ proudly assert their belief in the crudest notion of race as a biological ‘reality’ that sets limits to human abilities. Their alternative status, *for now*, reflects the current climate of debate whereby colorblind discussions of genetics and intelligence are

eagerly consumed and popularized by the media but an explicit statement of racial inferiority (in the style of Watson and Richwine) is deemed beyond the limits of reasonable debate. It is impossible, and unnecessary, to be certain about the degree of intentionality that lies behind the *racial inexplicitness* of authors such as Gottfredson and Plomin who now leave race firmly in the background having once been so public in their support of *The Bell Curve*. We cannot know whether racial inexplicitness is a deliberate strategy, a change of writing style, or even a change of heart about the significance of race. What matters is the discriminatory impact and potential for encoding racist beliefs into the heart of future policy and practice. The alt right, like other political lobbyists, think tanks and pressure groups, do not exist for their own sake – they pursue a long-term goal of changing the nature of political and/or popular discourse (Stefancic & Delgado, 1996). The superficial absence of race from the language of popular IQism does not denote any lessening in the racist quality of such assertions. Hereditarians frequently set out their plans for highly selective IQ-based education, such as Plomin’s ‘genetically-sensitive school’ (Asbury & Plomin, 2013) and Martin’s ‘smart fraction schools’ (2016). Their prescriptions do not mention race but the racist impact against Black students would inevitably follow based on everything we know about the racialized consequences of such profiling (whether by IQ test, teacher assessment, or some combination of the two).

The recent morphing of the hereditarian argument highlights the *fluid* and *individually*-driven dimensions of anti-Black racism. In the 1990s the popular attention lavished on hereditarian claims was a direct result of their racialized nature, and yet contemporary work has achieved a similar level of public exposure with *no* explicit reference to race. Unlike the benchmarking case (above) the hereditarian case relies on the dedicated work of named individuals who provide the supposedly scientific legitimation for the approach. These individuals are often – but by no means always – bankrolled by right-wing institutes and funders, and their dedication to the task is vital (cf. Stefancic & Delgado, 1996, pp. 144-5). Their names can be listed as ‘mainstream’ experts and their ‘science’ invoked even by those who rejoice in the shock-value of the new (racist) racial realism:

Orthodoxy insists that this is “pseudo-science” that has been “discredited.” Nonsense. No one has discredited Arthur Jensen, Richard Herrnstein, Charles Murray, Linda Gottfredson, Richard Lynn, Michael Levin, Michael Woodley, Philippe Rushton, and Robert Plomin. (Taylor, 2016).

The significance of the case studies presented in this paper (on benchmarking and IQ) rests in what they reveal about the multiple dimensions of anti-Black racism in educational policy and practice. As argued by one of the core principles of CRT, racism is relentless. It does not occur only on rare occasions when ignorant bigots lose control, rather it is a deep-rooted and systemic characteristic of society. However, racism is not some unchanging monolith: it lies embedded in the business-as-usual mundane ‘normality’ of everyday schooling; in tracking decisions, disciplinary sanctions, curricular design and examination benchmarking. Racism is fleet-footed, quick to react and fluid in adapting to new conditions and opportunities. As critical scholars and activists dedicated to opposing racism, critical race theorists need to be constantly vigilant for new ways in which the old enemy disguises itself in ever-changing ways:

racial literacy emphasizes the relationship between race and power. Racial literacy reads race in its psychological, interpersonal, and structural dimensions. It acknowledges the importance of individual agency but refuses to lose sight of institutional and environmental forces that both shape and reflect that agency. It sees little to celebrate when formal equality is claimed within a racialized hierarchy. (Guinier, 2004, p. 115)

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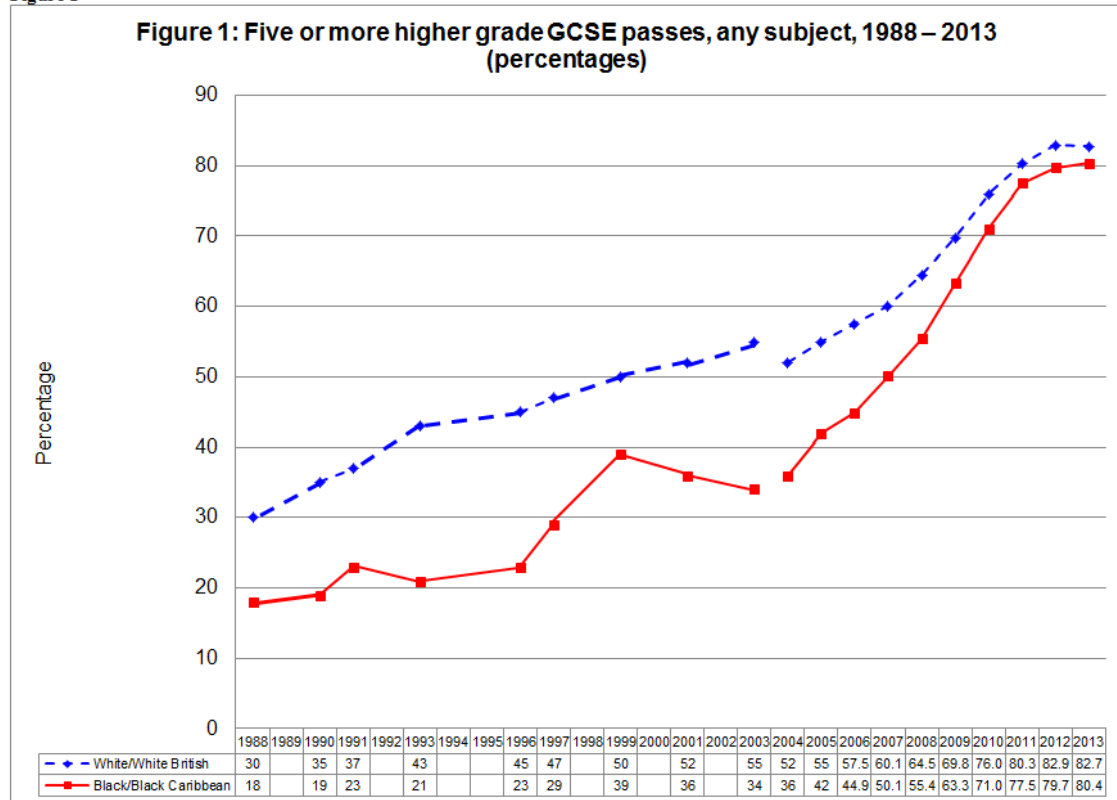
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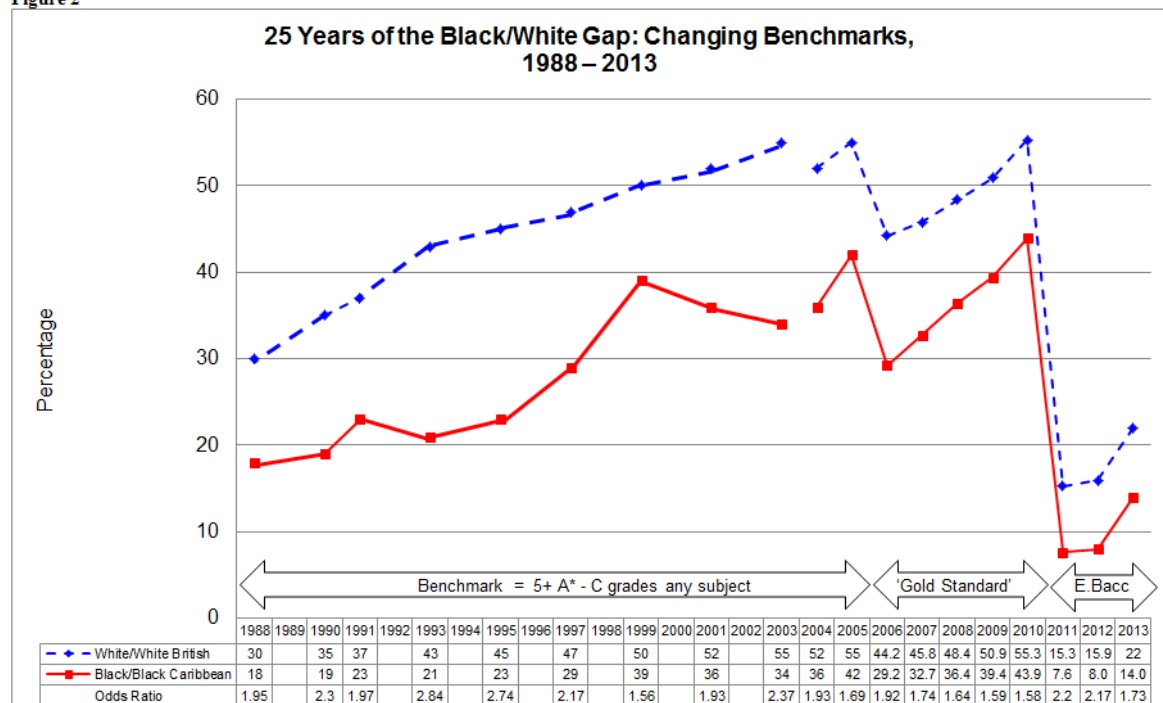
This paper draws on an analysis discussed previously in the *Journal of Education Policy* (Gillborn, 2016) and research conceived and conducted as part of a major two-year project, funded by the Society for Educational Studies, with my colleagues Sean Demack, Nicola Rollock and Paul Warmington (Gillborn et al., 2016).

Figure 1



Sources: DfES, 2005a, table a; DfES, 2006, tables 7 & 8; DfE, 2010a, table 2a; DfE, 2013, table 2a; DfE, 2014, table 2a

Figure 2



Sources: DfES, 2005a, table a; DfES, 2006, tables 7 & 8; DfE, 2010a, table 2a; DfE, 2013, table 2a; DfE, 2014, table 2a

Notes

¹ In a single paper it is not possible to address the numerous ways in which different ethnic groups are positioned in relation to racist policies and practices over time. Elsewhere, for example, I have examined the idea of ‘model minorities’ and the positioning of Indian and Chinese students in English education (Gillborn, 2008, Chapter 7). For more on the significance of anti-Black racism see Dumas & ross (2016).

² The concept of an ‘achievement gap’ has been rightly criticized for the potentially negative and stereotyping effects of a language that can seem to identify a deficit in the people experiencing the inequity rather than a deficit of social justice itself. Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) has argued for the term ‘education debt’ as a means of highlighting the historical and structural forces that lie behind attainment inequities. Alternatively, it has been argued that ‘opportunity gap’ is more appropriate (Carter & Welner, 2013; Milner, 2012). These are important criticisms but I retain the original terminology to link with the historic debates over the 25 year timespan of the analysis.

³ The accepted terminology has changed over the decades, as has the specificity of the data gathering. The first official inquiries, for example, spoke of ‘West Indian’ children but this later changed to ‘Black’, to ‘Afro-’ and ‘African-Caribbean’ and ‘Black Caribbean’.

⁴ An odds ratio of 1 would indicate that White and Black students were equally likely to achieve the benchmark; an OR greater than 1 shows that White students are *more* likely to achieve the benchmark, and an OR *less* than 1 shows that White students are less likely than their Black peers to attain the benchmark.

⁵ This may sound like an absurd suggestion but it is a little known fact that a lower pass rate was set for boys (to ensure their equal representation alongside girls) when IQ tests were widely used to select children for entry to higher-status ‘grammar’ schools in the post-WW2 period. Although such an adjustment was judged permissible in favour of boys, no such measures were taken in the interests of equity by race, class and dis/ability (see Gillborn, 2016).