

The Race and Ethnicity Hub
FASS BHM Producing Curriculum

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[GLITCHY SOUNDS]

STEVE TOMBS: --to all of you for giving up an hour of your day. I appreciate it. My name's Steve Tombs. I'm professor of criminology in social policy and crim. And my work is around state and corporate crime and harm.

SAS: Thank you very much. And then moving over to Lynne.

LYNNE COPSON: Hi, everyone. I'm Lynn Copson. I'm a lecturer in criminology, Department of Social Policy and Criminology. And my research is around the concept of harm, its relationship to crime, and also utopianism.

SAS: Excellent. And Parvati?

PARVATI RAHURAM: I'm Parvati Rahguram, professor of geography and migration. My research on migration and on education, particularly international education. And I've taught at all levels in terms of production from level one to masters and also contributed to some of the postgraduate teaching materials.

And my research currently is on decolonising education in Africa. That's the major project that I work on. But I have some other projects. And I'm also working on leading on some Black Lives Matter and antiracist teaching and research across a European consortium.

SAS: Thank you very much. And I'll ask Julia-- if you don't mind starting to share Jenny's slides now. And Jenny, feel free to start introducing yourself.

DR. JENNY DOUGLAS: OK. I'm Jenny Douglas. And I'm a senior lecturer in health promotion at the Open University. I'm just finding my slides So I've been asked to say a little bit about myself.

But before I go into that, I wanted to say that we're at a really interesting moment in history. We've never seen a moment like this before. COVID-19 and the global pandemic has really shone a light on racial inequalities. And with the reinvigoration of Black Lives Matter following the unlawful killing of George Floyd, we've had a global response to anti-Black racism.

But universities for a long time have been complacent, complicit, and I would say cavalier, not just in relation to Black students but in relation to their Black and minority ethnic staff as well. I'd like to start this conversation by thinking about some of the people who are still with us thankfully, but also have gone before us, like Angela Davis.

I remember Angela Davis when I was 17 when she was actually wrongfully arrested and then acquitted. And when we have a moment like we have now, we have to think that we can change the world. And as Angela Davis says, "you have to act as if it were possible to radically transform the world. And you have to do it all the time."

So, I don't want to see in a year's time that we've forgotten about George Floyd, we've forgotten about addressing racial inequalities in all of our services, both in health and in education and in criminal justice. So, we must all remember that, that we have to work as if it's possible to transform the world. And we have to think about this all the time.

I'm going to do a quick overview of myself. I'm not going to say very much, although this slide has got a number of things on it. I've been at the University for 21 years. And I want to pick out a couple of things that are actually on this slide. And one of the things I want to pick out is that I was a Research and Development Officer for Training in Health and Race between 1982 and 1984.

And that project was set up to look at racial inequalities in health. So, the light that COVID unfortunately has shed on Black and minority ethnic communities and racial inequalities in health is not anything new. This project was set up over 35 years ago to look at racial inequality in health.

And what is really interesting is that, as I see current reports coming out, I look back at some of the reports that we've produced over 35 years ago. And the same things, the same themes are emerging. So, I just want to give you a bit of the background. I also wanted to say that some of my experiences, although I was born in the UK-- I was born in Wolverhampton, and my parents came from Jamaica, and they came in the 50s, so they were part of the Windrush generation.

And sadly, this weekend, one of my aunts passed away. And she had come to the UK worked as a nurse and then in the 60s had gone to North America. And the reason she went to North America was because-- one of the reasons was because of the way that she was treated here as a Black nurse. And unfortunately, these things continue to be experienced by Black nurses.

My experience at the OU has been varied. I've had mixed experiences. I came to the OU because I was very excited about working at the OU. The Black academics who'd been before me like Professor Stewart Hall, Professor Ann Phoenix, Dr Gail Lewis And I've had mixed experiences. Some have been good; some have been not so good. But I was passionate, and I still am passionate about public health.

And what attracted me to the OU was the opportunity to combine theory and practice in terms of the modules that we provided for public health practitioners. I'll just mention a little bit about working on module teams. And I'll say a bit more about that when I have a discussion with Parvati.

I had an expectation that module teams would be a collaborative process where I would be welcomed as an equal contributor to the process. I have to say that that has not always been the case. And in some module teams, I felt an invisibilized, silenced, not listened to, and even ignored.

And I've had experiences where, when I some suggested Black authors or Global South authors, those ideas were dismissed. And I remember specifically one module team where we were talking about global sex workers, and I suggested that we use the work of Kamala Kampedoo, who had done a lot of research on sex workers in the Caribbean. This wasn't taken on board. And I got a sense then that the research for global South was not recognized or seemed to be equal.

And it's interesting. The impact of this on me was that it made me quieter and quieter. And many of you who know me know that I'm not a very loud person in the first place. So that's some of my experience.

And more widely, the experience of Black academics at the OU-- and some of this was documented in a report that was produced six years ago in 2014. But many Black academics felt they had little support for personal development, limited opportunities to work with other colleagues on research projects-- so people never invited them to work on research projects-- and the individuals were left to develop themselves.

Many of us who've done our PhDs while working at the OU have had to do it ourselves. Often, we have such workloads that it doesn't provide us with opportunities for writing publications, which are important in being able to be promoted. So as Black academics, often we're invisible or we're hyper visible.

And nobody makes us aware of the unwritten rules. And one of the things that occurs within the Open University is white privilege and the way in which it is demonstrated and perpetuated. But often there are stereotypes of Black people so that individuals don't have to say very much. If they want to say something negative about a Black person, they just have to drop something in.

And because of the context of stereotypes of Black people, it's very easy to create an image of that Black academic against those stereotypes and having the-- and having those stereotypes so that we all-- I'm not going to rehearse the stereotypes that there are about Black people. We all know what they are. And we, as Black academics, get painted, if that's the right word, with those stereotypes.

Very quickly in terms of racial inequalities in higher education-- and we can see that this continues to persist. We have a Black awarding gap. So, the Black students are less likely to be awarded good passes in their degrees. And this affects their future employment prospects, so it affects their future lives.

For those Black scholars who want to go on to do graduate research, of all the funding councils of 20,000 studentships that were awarded, only 1.2% went to BAME students. And of that, only 30 studentships went to Black Caribbean students between 2016 and 2018. So, if we're talking about the pipeline, where are the young Black scholars going to come from to become Black academics? And within the UK, we have few Black academics. So out of 19,000 UK professors, less than 100 are Black, and only 27 are Black women.

So, if we think about the business of research, we have a real problem in terms of the BAME awarding gap, in terms of the small numbers of doctoral students, the small numbers of Black academics, small numbers of professors. And when you look at the research grants, there are very few Black academics who are principal investigators on research grants. So very few Black academics are getting research grants. And the funding councils-- there are very few Black academics on the funding councils. Therefore, we are not able to shape what research should be done or shape who gets the research funding.

We're going to talk today about developing appropriate curricula. And the curriculum must speak to and engage with the experiences of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students. It must reflect the research experiences and the expertise of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic

academics. And it must be relevant to a globalizing world. And we are trying to decolonize the curriculum but, can we decolonize the curriculum? And how can we do that?

I want to end with this slide by Alice Walker. And often we sit and think, who's going to change this? How can we change this? And really, we are the ones that we have been waiting for. We have it. We can actually start to change things. And I hope that this conversation will be one of the first steps in trying to change things at the Open University. Thank you. I hope I stuck to time.

PARVATI RAGHURAM: Great. Thanks ever so much, Jenny. Thank you. That was really great and wonderful introduction. Thanks ever so much, Jenny. That was absolutely brilliant. And it's a tough job to follow you with the lovely tone of voice and such an honest and a really well-rounded portrayal So thanks so much, Jenny, for that.

So, I'm going to speak from my position as an Asian academic in the Academy. It's a different position. And it's really important to recognize that. We share, with some Black people, some aspects of racism. We have some of our own, which can be sometimes about imputed Islamophobia. But we also share aspects of privilege, sometimes related to the history of the classed dimension of the Asians who are in the Academy not in the UK per se, but in the Academy, which is a slightly different history of how we come to be in the Academy.

But it does mean that we-- but through all of this, we also have some complicity and have to take part and to have a degree of allyship with our Black scholars but also to recognize that opposition is likely different in all of this. So, in this context, what I'm going to talk about is just aspects of the curriculum. And I'm going to talk about it in the context of, how do we end up with some forms of racism in the curriculum? How do we think about it?

So, one way of thinking about it is actually, racism is intentional. And then people will turn around and say, well I never intended to be racist. Actually, I could say in the bulk of the cases at the OU, that would probably be true. Then, how did we get here? Because I think you would agree-- at least some of you would agree-- that actually, some of our teaching is somewhat problematic in terms of both its content and its delivery.

So how did we get here then if we never intended to be racist? And so, I'd suggest that there are two things that we need to think about. One of them is the actual methodological aspects, which are important to how we think about teaching. And then we need to then review what our outcomes are. So, I'm going to be brief about this because, for me, it was much more important to hear Jenny. But this is some of my experiences in terms of the methodology and teaching.

I think there's so many documents flying around about how to decolonize teaching. How do we do this better? How do we do anti-racist teaching? But I also think that we need an OU specific one because OU teaching is different. I think it's far more co-taught It's far more-- organized differently, and it is delivered differently. So, we need a degree of sensitivity to what makes the OU teaching different.

So, one of them is governance and structures. We have leadership in terms of HODs and module teachers whose roles are very different. We have team members-- very large team members-- with multiple participants, including from the library, from LDS, from various parts of the University.

And that means that each person in the room has got to take up their role in an-- with an explicit anti-racist stance. The leadership, precisely like Jenny says, needs to take on board, what does it mean? What is the role of the HOD in this? What's the role of the curriculum leads in this?

Then, there's the question of the team members and the nature of participation. So, when a Black person speaks up, what should people do in order to support them so that they don't feel alone? And I think these also are very specific questions today because some of that general support we might have felt when we raised things-- and it was in a face-to-face meeting-- we don't see that now because teams meetings, precisely like today, lead to long chats from some people and then very few short interventions from others.

So, the nature and degree of what participation means and how do you do allyship actually online needs much more thought. And then, there's a whole question of our communication. How do you not just enable people to speak, but also invite people to lead actually, without making it their responsibility?

So actually, asking them to-- so recently, somebody said to me, I never stopped you from speaking at a module team, and therefore I'm not racist. That to me is not enabling me really enabling me to speak nor even inviting me to speak. What it is is actually saying, well, we didn't stop you, which is not the same thing.

So, then you have the content of what we teach. And here there is a lot of material online, which focuses on absences and presences. How do you describe causalities? So, for instance, when you talk about migration, how do you-- where's the starting story? It's always a story of arrival without the context of all the pre-histories which lead to that arrival and the complete erasure of different histories of different places, which have led to certain population redistributions and so on.

So very important to think about causalities and making sure that sometimes, precisely like Jenny says, race is not the primary issue. It's not a racialized problem. It might be a class problem. It might be a problem about a particular place. Or it may be an intersection of all of this. But we need a sensitivity to the appropriate causalities and to think that through.

And then there are questions about language and citation. So how do we speak about people? And how do we make sure that the content is attuned through the citation of the people who should speak to this?

And an example of this is, recently I was doing something on the Northern Ireland thing-- a time to think project, actually. And I use the word "troubles" in the bit of the chapter. I wasn't quite sure about it. But I then sent it on to a colleague who's now our head of department in geography who knows about these things. And I asked him, have I got the tone, right?

So, checking in on the content, checking in on the language. I do not know about Northern Ireland. And he said actually, "troubles" downplays the political aspect to it. I wouldn't use it. I said, aha. I had sort of sensed it, but I don't understand it. So, this is not a journey that I have been through or-- and so being confident to ask questions about the language and citations, the approach.

This is really important for all of us because none of us is on this journey alone. And then the question is, who delivers? Again, like Jenny said, this is about, how do we look at the number of AL's (Associate Lecturers) in our faculty. In the social sciences, 91% of the faculty of the AL's are white. And this is in the arts and social sciences.

So how do we look at that within our discipline? How do we ensure that our content has-- and I'm not saying that only Black people need to speak to Black voices, but how do we enable better Black representation? And how do we enable white people to actually speak about Black material? And how do we support that in an ongoing manner in the beginning of a module, through the module, through its delivery in recognition of the changing context in which this is delivered?

And then to do some kind of a review, both an ongoing review and a periodic review and, why does this matter? Because if we don't, what we'll end up is a whole series of things where we don't want to be. So, I'll begin with my don'ts, my experience of the don'ts I have gathered and the don'ts that I have gathered across, which is on the right column.

You don't want to become a case study where people can use you to teach how not to be racist. You don't want to be in a team with non-white people when you have them in the Department, and you find that the non-white people are suddenly no longer in module team meetings but can deliver materials in the sessions. You don't want to be in a module where all

UK case studies focus on white people and all Black people are on the global South. These are some of my experiences across the University in these past few years.

And my do's for all of this-- and these are my do's-- are A, to recognize my complicity in the lives of Black lives and the trauma and the discrimination that they have felt. Even as a nation, I am complicit. So to really look at this in my own life, to be humble about it, and to recognize that, actually, I need to work on myself and to be programmatic, to think that I have to try to bring about some change. I have to work with Black people to bring about change.

Those are my do's and don'ts. And I invite you to think about what yours are. Thank you.

SAS: Thank you very much, Parvati. That was fantastic. What I'm going to do is I'm going to ask if Steve and Lynne-- to jump in straightaway-- do their piece. And then if we could have a Q&A afterwards, I think that'd be a really good way to go. OK. So, Julia, if you could queue up Steve and Lynne's PowerPoint.

LYNNE COPSON: Thanks, Julia. So, leading on from the conversations that we've heard so far, Steve and I wanted to talk about a module that we've been working on. It's just started presenting on Saturday, DD311, Crime, Harm, and the State. I was the module chair, and Steve was the deputy chair.

And one thing to be really clear about when we're discussing this is, we didn't set out to decolonize the curriculum. But because it was a module that was on about crime, harm, and the state, we found it necessary touched on issues of racial inequality and injustices both within states and between them and particularly between the global North and the global South.

One of the things I should also say from the outset is that this was produced by an all-white module team. Just in response to Parvati's points, there were no non-white people in the department. But that itself raises, I think, structural questions about who gets hired and how and why. And the other thing to say is that we're not putting this out as a perfect example by any means. I think Steve and I came to this hopefully trying to reflect the humility that Parvati just mentioned about opening ourselves up to really frank and honest discussions about what we can do, what we did do, what went well, what perhaps we should be doing more to really try and produce the type of anti-racist curriculum that we're talking about.

So, I'm just going to give you a bit of a whistle stop tour of what the module was about. And then Steve's going to drill down into some of the particular issues we found. It will be a bit whistle-stop because I'd want to have time for discussion. But the module really deals with the

central question of why some events which cause harm are formally labelled and treated as crimes and others are not and how this can vary by region and over time.

And this couldn't not touch on issues of racial inequalities and injustice because so often, the harms that are recognized are harms to white people or people living in the global North, whereas harms to BME people and indigenous groups in the global South are always recognized or treated in the same way or constructed in different ways. So we focus, in the module, on constructions of harm or social harm and how they link to the state, so looking at the state's complicity as a key source of definitions of crime through law and processes of criminalization and definitions of crime, harm, and justice and how they serve the powerful and who the powerful disproportionately are.

And we also look-- we question our own complicity and the complicity of criminological theory itself and its proximity to state power. So how do the types of knowledge we introduce reflect cultural imperialism, reinforce global power relationships and inequalities between different social groups? So, we do this through a range of case studies. And I'm not going to go through all of them, but some of them are particularly relevant for Black History Month.

So in block one, we look at the theme of power. And one of the examples-- the case studies we used-- is looking at drugs. And one of the case studies we use is looking at sugar as a drug. It's a completely legal drug. And yet when you consider the harms involved in producing sugar and particularly the harms colonialism, we ask, why is it that these harms aren't recognized or criminalized and yet we criminalize other drugs such as cannabis when arguably, they don't produce the same forms of harm?

So, we ask questions in that way. And we try to-- what we've really tried not to do is just have a token week on colonialism. We've tried to build it throughout the modules. So we also look at the legacy of and the continuing forms of colonialism when we look at things like tourism and how tourism often involves the appropriation of land and resources to serve the interests of the tourists in the global North visiting countries of the global South.

And then in block three we really explore the role of the state in the complicity of academic knowledge in supporting the states. We explore the dual role of the state as being on the one hand, designed to protect citizens from harm, but also how it could cause plenty of citizens harm. And it's interesting to see who ends up being the recipient of those harms. So, we look at issues of surveillance and the fact that BME-- BAME people are more likely to be subject to surveillance than white people.

We also end up looking at academic knowledge and state power. So, we look at the legacy of scientific racism and the fact that we still have this myth of Black criminality that's used to

stereotype and label certain ethnic groups and question how and why and where we should be challenging those things. We also got a picture that looks at-- it's a map of the world that's got publications that varies the size of countries by the publications and citations to publications. And you can see that there's this dominance of knowledge from the global North. And you can see how we will become complicit in reproducing those dominant forms of knowledge.

And then in the block four we look at resistance and look and explore the ways in which the harms of the state and harms generally can and should be resisted. So, we look, for example, at deaths in custody, which is again another highly stratified issue, stratified by race. So, we try and build in recognition of racial inequalities and injustices simply because we couldn't not look at those things when we're looking at crime, harm in the state.

But it certainly hasn't been easy. It's not unproblematic. We don't think we've done a perfect job. And I think Steve is going to tell us about some of the challenges that we faced.

STEVE TOMBS: Yeah. I will do. This particular story could be much briefer about now because Lynne's covered almost everything I might have said here. So, thank you for that. So, in a sense, one of the key thematic of the module is to look at how harms are differentially distributed. And in fact, the flip side of harm is often a benefit for individuals, institutions, social groups. So, to look at those relationships between harm and benefit, harm and privilege.

And that means that we, throughout the whole of the module, play around with the relationship between the North and the South. We also tried to understand the production of harms historically and also their distribution structurally. And so inevitably, throughout-- as again, Lynne emphasized throughout the whole module, we come up against the realities of colonialism and also the different dynamics and the matrices of power involved in neocoloniality.

So, it's these the kinds of questions and issues thrown out by those concepts recur throughout the module and again is reflected in some of the coverage. Again, Lynne's talked about this bottom bullet point. I won't go through it in detail but just to say, aspects which are relevant to Black history but also to contemporary racial inequality and injustices-- They consistently recur throughout the various parts of the module.

But of course, to briefly make some observations and throw something up for discussion, I just want to recap what Lynne said at the very beginning. There's lots of material here, which is relevant for us to think about as we enter Black History Month. And it's relevant to thinking about racial injustice and racial inequality. But we didn't set out to produce-- we didn't set out

to produce a module which centered upon racial inequality or racial justice. It's not what we intended at all.

In a sense though, some of the issues around racial justice were-- not in a sense, they were unavoidable given that we were trying to look at the contemporary and historical distribution of harm across the world. And also, I would say because, as a model team, I think we set out to produce curriculum, which was socially progressive and which, in some small way, contributes social justice. So that it should have a relationship to racial justice was of course inevitable.

So that's the first set of observations. We're not claiming to have set out to do something we didn't set out to do. And also, we're not claiming to have done it perfectly. We made many, many mistakes along the way-- I'm absolutely sure about that-- and could have many things much better.

The second thing to say has been touched upon already by colleagues. And it's just to make the point that, in terms of the academics at least, we were an all-white module team from at the time-- it's not quite the case now-- from an all-white department. And that, of course, creates challenges for us. And it inevitably impacts and infects how we view the world, the kind of material that we select to represent parts of the world. And I think some of that is-- there were constraints there, some of which are beyond our ability to change or change in the short term, at least.

I will also just say having heard Jenny-- and I studied and then taught for years in Wolverhampton in what was Wolverhampton Poly. And having heard Jenny talk about being at Wolverhampton-- I then taught at the Poly Liverpool. When I came to the OU, one of the things I was actually staggered about was how white it was. So, I think there is a structural issue about higher education in terms of the academics in higher education and of all the things that Jenny talked about.

But there is a particular issue about the OU. It's not unique. But it isn't like Wolverhampton. It's not like Where Chris is in Leicester. Those institutions reflect the cities and towns in which they're located. So, I think there is a particular set of problems for the Open University. And we should just be-- we should just say that out loud and recognize that.

A third thing to say is I think that we were aware, as we were producing the material, that we were raising issues that might prove uncomfortable for diverse student cohorts. And of course, again, here is an issue for the OU because teaching at a distance obviously raises particular issues in this context. But in one of the teaching weeks, for example, one of our colleagues Eleni wrote an activity which asked students to reflect on when they first became

aware of the colour of their skin or their culture and ethnic background, what they thought about their relationship to slavery, to colonialism, to empire, and how that affected them and their relationship.

These are very difficult questions to students to think about. And we didn't just blunder into. But we may not have got that right. As Lynne said, one of the issues raised in the module is epistemological questions, questions about what counts as knowledge and where and by whom knowledge claimed to get produced. And we do ask students to think critically about criminology, the emergence of criminology, particularly in relation to eugenics and scientific racism. That's material around which Lynne writes.

And we then have to raise questions about our own white privilege. And we've heard that phrase already, quite rightly-- quite rightly today. And I also say that out loud to somebody who's not just white privileged there's also agenda. So, I sit at the apex of privilege. I'm a white, middle-aged, male professor. So, in the module team, despite being a white module team, I think we all place differentially in terms of privilege and all have our own individual reflection to make about that.

And the last thing I would say in terms of some of the material that we produced, and some of the material we didn't produce, and some of the material we struggled with probably, is that-- this goes back to something that Parvati talked about or alluded to-- use this phrase, really-- but there is an issue about leadership. And there is an issue about creating a module team in the environment where we felt comfortable about going places that weren't very comfortable.

And that-- I will say it in front of her. I've said it to her face ten times before that was an effect of Lynne's leadership in terms of the way in which the module team was inclusive, people were given a voice. And often that's done in very, very small ways. But I think we should all be-- we should all, as members of teams, be attuned to those small things all of the time.

So, I'm not claiming that we got everything right. Of course, we didn't. We got loads of things wrong. I am claiming we made an effort. And again, to echo some of the others have said, I think I'm not part of the solution. But I don't want to be part of the problem. And I think that goes to the module team. Thanks very much.

[GLITCHY SOUNDS]