

## **Race and Equality**

### *Representing Modern Britain*

#### **Anthony Gunther and Joan Simons:**

JOAN: So, we've just finished Black History Month and there has been an amazing response to it. What do you think we should learn from Black History Month this year?

ANTHONY: I think what we should learn more than anything is that Black history is part of British history. But, you know, from African-Caribbean heritage, my parents were from Jamaica which was part of Britain. They had a British passport when they first came here.

So, my history is not separate to a white person's history or someone from Northern Ireland or Scotland or Wales. It is embedded in Britain. And therefore, that needs to be fiercely acknowledged. And if that is acknowledged, then it won't be just an add-on, but our history will be part of the mainstream understanding of how Britain came to be as it is today.

JOAN: Thank you, Anthony. That makes a lot of sense. And going back to the students, we've got a fairly low proportion of Black, Asian, and minority ethnic students. We've got a fairly challenging BAME gap, awarding gap. What do you think we need to do to address the deficit for students?

ANTHONY: I think the Open University's mission is wonderful, but I think it's just a badge. I don't think The Open University lives up to its mission. Before I entered academia, I used to work with young people. I am one of those disaffected young people myself, so I really believe more than anything that education can transform lives as it transformed my life. And The Open University, I believe, is not doing all that it should do to work with people like myself.

If I go back to myself, I would never have thought about coming to The Open University. But actually, someone who left school with no qualifications but had potential, The Open University should have been one of them institutions that said, Anthony, you're the sort of person who we are for. But it doesn't then, and it doesn't now. And I find that a bit disheartening and troubling.

So, again, coming back to Black students, The Open University doesn't attract as much Black and Asian students. And then Black students also have an awarding gap. So there's two major concerns.

And if we then look at white working-class students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, which, again, students like those are also hidden. We should as well be reaching out to those students. So, if we're going to get much more younger, much more diverse students, modern Britain will be represented at The Open University. At the moment, I don't believe that modern Britain is.