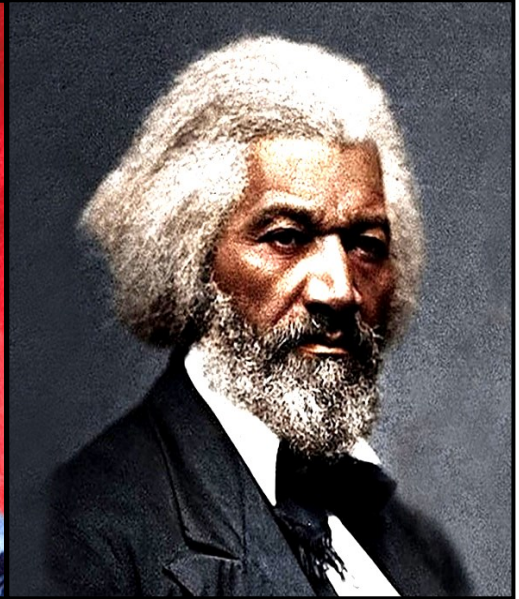


Marginal Gains

A PolSoc publication

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October 2020



October is Black History Month, an opportunity to consider the experiences of black people in the past and to reflect on their situation today. The articles in this Marginal Gains address some of these issues and encourage us all to think about how we might address them. For example, can you name the people on the cover? They are all significant figures in history - prize available if you submit their names and why they are significant to the History Department by Friday 16 October.

How the British Government betrayed its African Soldiers

By Guy Sandler

The King's African Rifles was a British Regiment manned by British officers and indigenous Africans under Imperial rule which fought for the UK during both WWI & WWII. In WWII, the African soldiers, known as Askaris, played pivotal roles in fighting Italian, Japanese and Vichy French Forces throughout Africa, the Middle East and Burma. The campaign against Italian forces in East Africa featured heavy reliance on fighters from the colonies in order to achieve eventual victory for the British.

Despite this, the British government neglected to treat its veterans from Kenya, Ghana and Nigeria with the respect, dignity, pay or privileges it had given to their European counterparts. Recent testimonies from veterans of the King's African Rifles reveal that African soldiers were paid

only a third of the wages that white soldiers received, despite the thousands of lives sacrificed for a war whose origins lay in Europe, not Africa. Many of these veterans were conscripted to fight in a war they had no stake in, simply to preserve the empire of another country. Treatment for such soldiers was equally poor: despite corporal punishment being banned in the British Army since 1881, the regular beatings of African soldiers was in fact encouraged by some commanders of the East African Forces, with one British Missionary issuing a formal complaint to the government in 1943 calling it sadistic; yet such practices continued until after the war.

The vital role many of these soldiers played in weakening Fascist power on a regional and global scale should not be understated and the treatment of such heroes remains a stain on the British victory in Africa. Unfortunately, this is not the only example of the UK mistreating international soldiers who were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice for the British army. It took a ground-breaking 2009 court case to achieve settlement rights in the UK for the Gurkhas (Nepalese soldiers who serve in



the British Army). The continued reluctance of the UK to educate students about the contribution of soldiers from the colonies in the WWII, and to compensate them for the traumas caused by forced involvement in European Imperialism, is a continued reminder that our 'British Values' of mutual respect are still not being applied, even by the government which established them.



Black Lives Matter

By Mira Higgins

BLM is a political movement that highlights the injustice and racial prejudice that people of colour face across the world. It is not a one-time news story about a black man who was murdered, it has weight and importance and is not just a post on social media. People take part in social media trends because they are 'cool'- BLM is not 'cool' it is real and it is happening. Innocent people are dying and people think that by reposting a black square they have done something. 22 million people posted on 'Blackout Tuesday' and yet the GoFundMe for Breonna Taylor's family represents a contribution of 30 cents from each post; people will willingly participate in these 'trends' and yet when it comes to making an actual difference, they are more conservative about the

subject.

This is an important movement, innocent people are dying, killed by police officers, police officers who are meant to 'protect and serve'; these people in positions of power and authority are doing the very thing they are meant to prevent.

BLM is not a social media trend; it is real life. It is wrong that people of colour are being killed for no reason other than the colour of their skin, what is worse is the fact



that the most some people do is repost a black square and claim they have helped the movement. Helping the movement means taking action - what can you do?

By Antonia Elliott

Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Walter Scott, Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, Stephon Clark, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd. These are the names of only a fraction of the black community that have been unjustly killed by the police in the

United States.

The recent murder of George Floyd sparked international uproar. The video footage released captured Derek Chauvin suffocating Floyd with his leg despite hearing his cry 'I can't breathe' multiple times. Police brutality in black neighborhood is rife and normalized. The recent protests throughout the world have created a conversation, especially with the young, using social media platforms to educate themselves and others. Research shows that black Americans are

3.5 times more likely to be killed by police than white people. In 2016 a study showed that black men aged 15-34 were nine times more likely to be killed by police officers than white men.

President Trump has consistently dismissed these statistics, stating that 'white people are [killed] too.' He also claimed that police officers were victims of violence due to the actions of his political opponents. Trump has split the country in two and gained political momentum from a violent murder. The systemic racism prevalent in the USA needs abolishing but this will not happen if the leader of the country cannot acknowledge the issues it is facing.



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Positive Discrimination works

By Lauren Webb

According to Supreme Court Chief Justice John Roberts, 'The way to stop discriminating on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race.' Easy: stop racism by just not being racist.

Whilst people not being racist is clearly an effective solution to racism, systematic racism is a multi-faceted problem that requires more than the simple prescription of telling people not to discriminate on the basis of race. Laws to this effect have existed in the UK since 1965, yet just 1% of Britain's business leaders are black.

The key flaw in these laws is that racism is in many cases not a conscious decision, but rather the product of racial biases that mean we unconsciously stereotype people based on their skin colour. Take the case of 25-year-old

barrister Alexandra Wilson, who just last month was mistaken for a defendant three times in one day because of the colour of her skin. It is unlikely the security guard, clerk and journalist who challenged her actively equated black to criminal. Instead, it was an unconscious, although still not excusable, assumption.

It is vital that we challenge and eliminate these racial stereotypes. Alexandra Wilson, as she rightly pointed out in an interview with the BBC, should not 'have to constantly justify [her] existence at work'. As a society, we must normalise the presence of any and every ethnicity within any and every occupation. This is best achieved through those from BAME

backgrounds being in visible positions within their field. With every member of the UK Supreme Court being white, the UK is currently dismally failing at this.

In order to comprehensively address racism, we must challenge our perception of race. Multiple organisations within the UK have made attempts to do so through implementing positive discrimination (reverse



Alexandra Wilson

discrimination). This policy sees those from historically under-represented backgrounds propelled in their career in order to normalise their presence there. More BAME doctors encourages another generation of BAME doctors until the traditional stereotype is completely eradicated.

Positive discrimination is a necessity. We cannot continue to purport that trying to achieve equality of opportunity through laws banning discrimination will manage to address racism that is so deeply engrained into how we think. High-profile BAME figures are vital in redressing the balance, but currently, in the words of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: 'For one of us to make it through, one hundred of us have to try.' Without positive discrimination, equality of outcome cannot be achieved.

