Dear Stephen:

Race and Belonging
30 Years On
Dear Stephen

Racism has always been a matter of life and death. This was never more true than for Stephen Lawrence, a bright young man who dreamed of becoming an architect.

Stephen was murdered by racist strangers as he made his way home with a friend in South East London, 30 years ago. It was not only his killers who targeted Stephen with racism. The behaviour of the police - from those first on the scene, to those who handled the disastrous investigation into his murder and dealt closely with his family - was characterised at every stage by racist treatment and bias in the system. Significant questions were raised on accountability in the criminal justice system and whether Black and minority ethnic communities and families were treated fairly.

The fight for justice that followed, led by Stephen’s grieving parents, has brought us all to know Stephen's name, and carry forward his legacy.

The seminal 1999 Macpherson Report, published in direct response to the manner in which the police handled Stephen’s case, recognised unequivocally that the Metropolitan Police Force was ‘institutionally racist,’ an unprecedented finding at the time. Many events in the wake of Stephen’s murder, including race equality legislation, still inform and influence racial justice work today.

However, as Stephen’s mother Baroness Doreen Lawrence has said on several occasions, the many positive strides towards race equality in the wake of his death cannot ever compensate for the loss of her beloved son.

Although it can feel as though progress towards racial equity has stalled, through this report we hope to remind one another that the vast majority of people in the UK support the path to racial justice, and that we can and will get there together. We offer this piece of work in that sentiment of hope, and of course in memory and honour of Stephen Lawrence.

Rest in Eternal Power,
Dear Stephen.

I am honoured to introduce “Dear Stephen: Race and Belonging 30 Years On”, a report produced in partnership by the Runnymede Trust and Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation, in honour of the life and legacy of my son, Stephen Lawrence.

The power of coalition in the fight for social justice cannot be underestimated, and this project is a demonstration of what can happen if organisations resist the structures that encourage competition and instead join forces in the pursuit of change.

This important contribution to Stephen’s legacy at the 30th anniversary of his death reveals the points of hope and connection in our communities, particularly for young people who, like Stephen, have ambitions to become the architects of a more equitable future. Their resilience and determination to create change underscore the importance of fostering a sense of belonging and understanding. Through their collective strength, they are actively reshaping the world for the better.

As we reflect on the past 30 years, we must acknowledge both the progress that has been made and the work that remains to be done. Stephen’s story serves as a potent reminder that our commitment to racial justice must be constantly renewed, while his legacy reinforces the potential of coalition-building in advancing the cause.

Data is crucial to tackling discrimination. By examining who is and isn’t represented in the numbers that define our lives, we can identify and address discrimination and bias. This report provides a detailed analysis of the progress that has been made in our society over the past 30 years in relation to attitudes towards race, ethnicity, and identity, as well as highlighting the persistent problems that still exist.

It is with a sense of hope and unity that we offer this report, as a testament to the power of ordinary people coming together to drive extraordinary change, and in tribute to the life and legacy of my son, Stephen Lawrence. We hope that it will inspire hope and encourage positive engagement with the ongoing work of both the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation and the Runnymede Trust, to create a fairer and more equitable society for all. Thank you for supporting us to honour Stephen, and work towards a better future for the next generation.

Baroness Doreen Lawrence OBE
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Trends In Social Attitudes And Young People’s Experiences
Overall trends in social attitudes

We often hear that the fractures in society are growing, that our social fabric is tearing, and that communal relations are generally getting worse. And this is a view that people tend to share.

Today, people are less trustful of each other than they were 25 years ago, and they think society is growing more hateful. In 2019, half of people (49%) said there was more racial prejudice in Britain than there was 5 years ago. This was up from just a fifth of people (19%) in 1998.

In the same year, close to half of people (44%) predicted that there would be still more racial prejudice in 5 years time, compared to around a quarter of people (23%) in 1998.¹

Although it often feels as though much has remained the same, since Stephen’s passing, a huge amount has changed in the way we relate to each other.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, a mass consensus seemed to emerge around the unacceptability of discrimination on any terms.

Today, increasing political polarisation and a resurgent far right, facilitated by this era of mass communication, forces us to confront the possibility that any such consensus was at best fragile and, at worst, illusory.

Yet, as this report shows, there is good reason to maintain faith in the ties that bind us. In providing some context for this optimistic claim, this chapter analyses data from the British Social Attitudes Survey and Understanding Society to explore long-term trends in people’s attitudes towards their multicultural communities, and how they relate to them. It begins by examining some broad trends in social attitudes, before turning specifically to young people’s (aged 10-15) classroom experiences, career aspirations, and views on the communities in which they live.

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all data in this section is based on original Runnymede Trust analysis of data from the British Social Attitudes survey. See the references page for a full list of citations.
There is arguably good reason to be pessimistic. From COVID-19 to the cost of living crisis, racial inequality continues to shape our society.

But is it possible that we’ve come to believe that we have more problems within our communities than we actually do? Might it be that people are not becoming more hateful, but rather shifts in other areas, such as technology, are increasing our exposure to otherwise increasingly unpopular ideas?

The evidence suggests that this could be the case. Indeed, people’s outlooks tend to be more positive when describing their own views, rather than their views of what’s happening in society more broadly.

For instance, in contrast to their views of others, British people are somewhat less likely to describe themselves as very or a little prejudiced, and more likely to view themselves as not at all prejudiced. And this perspective is borne out in the huge reversal in people’s attitudes towards migrants. In 2011, around a quarter of people thought that migration was good for both the economy (21%) and for cultural life (26%). By 2019, this had risen to almost half in both instances. Conversely, the proportion of people who think immigration has had a negative impact in these areas more than halved, from around two in five in 2011, to less than one in five in 2019.
Since 2019, some sections of society have targeted this issue with increased intensity.

However, while the data for 2021 shows that the proportion of those with a negative view of migration is rising, the same is true for those who support it. This most recent data shows that attitudes towards Britain and Britishness have become more inclusive. Less than one-fifth of people now think that it is very important for being truly British that someone was born in Britain, down from almost half in 1995. And 45% said that equal opportunities for Black and Asian people had not gone far enough, up from 25% in 2000, and further rising to a huge 71% among people with ‘socially liberal’ outlooks. ²

These long-term trends show that, despite growing pessimism and increased polarisation around issues like these in recent years, people’s personal beliefs have become far more inclusive. But what does this mean for the outlooks and outcomes of young people from minority ethnic backgrounds in our society?

Overall, the data suggests that classroom experiences have worsened slightly over time.

Between 2010-11 and 2020-21, all young people came to feel slightly less happy about their school and schoolwork. In 2020-21, 79% were happy with the school they went to, down from 86% in 2010-11. Likewise, 74% were happy with their schoolwork, down from 83%.

Notably, these changes are quite small and, as the data shows, the vast majority (around three quarters) of young people are still happy at school. And this remains true for young people from minority ethnic backgrounds. In 2020-21, around three-quarters of minority ethnic young people were happy with both the school they go to (76%) and their schoolwork (73%).

Positively, this relatively sustained sense of satisfaction seems to have translated into improved educational outcomes for many minority ethnic young people over recent years. For instance, a landmark IFS report from 2022, exploring racial and ethnic inequalities in the United Kingdom, shows that, for attainment at GCSE level, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black African young people either closed or reversed large attainment gaps with their White British peers between 2004 and 2019.

Meanwhile, Indian and Chinese students maintained their large advantages over everybody. It is important to note, though, that this isn’t true for all groups, with young people from Black Caribbean and Other White backgrounds falling further behind over time. Among minority ethnic young people, the desire to pursue higher education has also remained consistently high — declining from a high of 98% in 2011-12, but remaining strong at 93% in 2020-21.

This is in contrast to just 87% of White British young people. And indeed, a higher percentage of minority ethnic young people do go on to attend university, compared to their White British peers.

Again, however, there are differences in outcomes here between minority ethnic groups. According to the IFS, Chinese and Indian pupils are most likely to both stay in education and choose courses with high earnings potential, while mixed race and Other White young people are least likely to stay in education.
Given the strong appetite for further education among young people, it should come as no surprise that they are increasingly ambitious in the careers they hope to pursue.

In 2020-21, over a third (36%) wanted to pursue a career in a higher management or higher professional role — up from just over a quarter (27%) in 2009-10.

Among minority ethnic young people, the 2020-21 figure rises to over half (54%), compared to just one third (32%) of their White British peers.

Again, however, it must be noted that these aspirations lead to different outcomes across ethnicity groups. Returning to the IFS report, we see stark divides in the types of work people from different ethnicity groups go on to take up. Indian and Chinese men are the most likely to hold managerial positions, while Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black Caribbean men are notably underrepresented here.

Likewise, women in general are less likely to occupy these managerial roles. And while ethnicity differences by job type are less pronounced for women, it’s important to note that Bangladeshi and Pakistani women are far less likely to be in employment at all.7

Supporting these findings, previous research by the Runnymede Trust and the Centre for Longitudinal Studies has found that high occupational aspirations among minority ethnic young people do not necessarily translate into higher wages as they move into adulthood (and moreover that this is not due simply to job choice).8
In large part, the solution should come from the institutions tasked with supporting the development of our young people. But their success and happiness will also depend on the strength of the communities they live in.

In other words, while aspiration is part of the picture, more must be done to ensure that everybody can achieve their goals.
If we believe that strong and secure communities are essential for young people to thrive, then we may find cause for concern in their persistent lack of community engagement over the years.

Young people are as unlikely as ever to attend political meetings.

In 2010-11, 9 in 10 young people never or almost never did so, and the same was true in 2020-21.

They are also now less likely to attend youth clubs. This is especially true for minority ethnic young people, with less than a quarter (23%) regularly attending in 2020-21, down from around a third (35%) in 2010-11.

This is compared to over a third (35%) of White British young people who attended youth clubs in 2020-21, down from around half (49%) in 2010-11.

Young people further remain unlikely to volunteer or do community work. In 2020-21, less than a fifth (19%) of young people regularly did voluntary or community work, matching the figure for 2010-11.

Interestingly, however, participation by minority ethnic young people has actually seen a rise over the years, with those who volunteer or do community work regularly rising from a fifth (19%) in 2010-11 to over a quarter (27%) in 2020-21.

Despite these low rates of community participation, however, young people nonetheless seem to be happy within their communities. In 2020-21, the vast majority of young people felt happy with their current group of friends and liked living in their neighbourhood.

This was true for about 9 in 10 young people, including those of both White British and minority ethnic backgrounds. In fact, in this regard, young people may be faring better than the rest of the population.

According to data from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, only two-thirds of people aged 16 and over felt that they belonged to their neighbourhood in 2020. This was true for people from Asian, Black, Mixed, and White ethnicity backgrounds. And it fell to 44% for people from the “Other” ethnicity group.

In other words, while traditional markers of community engagement paint a picture of an increasingly alienated youth, it may simply be that we’re looking in the wrong places. In the next chapter, we dig into this generational disjuncture in more depth, speaking to young people based in Eltham today. In doing so, we explore the case that not only do young people around Stephen’s age have a clearer grasp than most on the issues our communities face, but that they have also developed powerful bonds and strategies within these communities for navigating a society that has simultaneously changed a lot and all too little, thirty years on.

Chart 5 Participation in voluntary or community work by minority ethnic young people has risen slightly over time

Source: Understanding Society Notes: Respondents are young people aged 10-15. Respondents were asked “how often do you do voluntary or community work (including doing this as part of school)?”

Catching up: Young People in Eltham in 2023
Eltham is located in the Royal London Borough of Greenwich, which is ‘average’ in most key indicators like housing, work and living standards.

What this average represents is that around 40% of children live in households with an income of less than 60% the UK median, nearly 20% of residents work in low paid jobs, and nearly 25% live in poverty.\textsuperscript{10} The 2021 census indicates an ethnicity profile of the borough that has shifted only a little in the last decade, with around 56% of people in Greenwich identifying their ethnicity group within the “White” category, 21% identifying their ethnicity group within the “Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African” category, and nearly 12% describing themselves as “Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh”. The age profile of the borough has shifted a little in the last decade, with a decrease in the numbers of children and young people and an increase in the numbers of people in the over 50 age range.\textsuperscript{11}

Eltham itself has experienced greater levels of gentrification than some of its surrounding neighbourhoods.\textsuperscript{12}

For our research we conducted focus groups in two sixth form centres close to where Stephen was murdered, and spoke with 25 young people from mixed ethnicity backgrounds, aged between 16-18.\textsuperscript{13} Many of these students did not live in Eltham but came from neighbouring areas like Woolwich, Lewisham and Deptford to attend school there.

All of them knew about what had happened to Stephen and were able to give detailed explanations of the murder, the family’s campaign for justice, Nelson Mandela’s intervention and the failures of the police investigation that eventually led to the Macpherson Report. One student described the events as a ‘collective trauma’ that the wider community carried. Others made links between the term institutional racism that emerged from those events and their own experience of other institutions like healthcare, which they felt operated to give them unfair access and outcomes.

We used the focus groups as an opportunity to ask young people, the same age as Stephen was when he was killed, about their experiences of classrooms, careers and their communities.

\textsuperscript{10} Trust for London London’s Poverty Profile: Greenwich, 2021.
\textsuperscript{11} Office for National Statistics. How life has changed in Greenwich: Census 2021.
\textsuperscript{12} Runnymede Trust & CLASS. Pushed to the Margins: A quantitative analysis of gentrification in London in the 2010s. 2021.
\textsuperscript{13} All young people who contributed have been given pseudonyms.
Young people had a sophisticated understanding of both the limitations and potential for change within their schools and classrooms.

There was a common understanding that the curriculum they were taught was still rooted in a partial view of the world that didn’t fully incorporate their lived experience or wider knowledge of it.

Many shared examples of racist incidents in class and their frustration at the lack of proper intervention. Despite this, most of the young people we spoke to were ambitious and optimistic for change and, in most cases, were far ahead of their school institutions in terms of their racial literacy and sensitivity.

One area in which students expressed common frustration was with their mono-cultural curriculum, or their sense that where minority ethnic people did appear, those representations reproduced narrow and tired narratives around victimhood:

‘in traditional subjects, like History or English, the curriculum just isn’t diverse. And if you do learn about black people it’s usually just about slavery, or just something that kind of is about putting us down.’

– Nikita*

(names have been changed)
For young women, the disciplining of their hair colour and styles was a common experience. They also noted that their schools liked to disperse them if they gathered as big groups, but that this did not apply to groups where students were mainly white.

Others talked about more direct racism in the classroom, whether in the way teachers had picked out students and made comments, or more generally in the racialised and gendered expectations they believed some teachers had of them.

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They were also attentive to the differing expectations teachers sometimes had of them:

'[teachers] like to stereotype, for example, 'boys are more likely to mess around in a classroom' and same thing with race - you get stereotyped. And once you get that stereotype, a lot of the time, people end up acting up to it, because they're put in that box and subconsciously they then fall into it and then it just makes the cycle worse.'

– Yusuf*

Others located the problem within the curriculum itself and appreciated those teachers that reached beyond to enrich their lessons with material that felt more inclusive and representative:

‘...some teachers take time, like teachers in Sociology, they go beyond the curriculum, and try and find things...to give us more like a wide and broad outlook and to tell us it’s not just about white sociologists - that makes it more engaging.’

– Christina*

The most striking thing about the young people was their appetite for change and their energy to pursue it themselves when their school offered resistance.

In one school, students talked about advocating for a ‘culture day’, referring to a TikTok trend that had apparently caught their attention and which the school was initially reluctant to host:

'I just feel like some of the reasons they gave for not wanting to do it is that they were avoiding problems and discussions, and instead of tackling them and trying to educate students through them, they were just avoiding them... They were worried about cultural appropriation and so we offered to make a slideshow to educate people about it. And they were like, no.... So they were avoiding the education side of it and the chance to help people to become more embracing of other cultures, they would rather downsize our event and contain it...’

– Nia*
In a second school, students appreciated their teachers efforts around Black Lives Matter and LGBTQ+ issues, but also spoke about teachers relying on the same reproduced annual ‘diversity’ assemblies that were just a stand-alone part of the school assembly programme, while emergent issues that they wanted to talk about outside of that went unsupported:

‘whenever there is something new that comes up in society, I feel like the students have to really kind of push for it to be heard in school. And, even if we do get it, it’s mostly - we have to do the PowerPoints and not the teachers doing it, it has to be student-led.’

– Shanniah*
There was a striking gap between students’ appetite to discuss complex questions around race and identity, and their schools’ confidence to support them through those debates.

Students talked about ‘racialised trauma’, intersectionality and the shallowness of performative solidarity and care, but felt that these discussions were shied away from by the schools and forced outside of them. Equally noteworthy was how students navigated the nervousness of their schools with thoughtful persuasion, accepting, as one student described it, the need to take ‘baby steps to convince them.’ (HAF 45.23) COVID-19, Black Lives Matter and climate justice all came up at various points, and seemed to contribute to the energy that students brought into their schools and how powerful they felt:

‘teachers in a school definitely have so much [room for] improvement, but I’m glad that our generation are coming together and actually making it a better place. I’m excited for when we all get older and the way that we can all teach our kids and put into them our beliefs and forget the way the old generations were’.

– Nasrin*

There was a clear sense that schools needed to catch-up with the intellectual curiosity and appetite of their students, and that the school environment needed to grow and learn quickly if it was to keep pace with them.
Discussions about employment and career ambitions were familiar terrain for students and conversations here were animated.

Most of them rested their ideas about work on their parents and family experiences and many of them recounted challenges their parents had faced in the labour market:

‘when my dad came here, even though he had high qualifications, he still found it really hard to get a job. And it could be because of name bias, but also because of his race, and also the way he talks as well, because he had an accent. Yeah, people thought he was less capable, or not as smart just because of that.’

– Christty*
Students were articulate about this direct and more nuanced form of discrimination they knew to exist in the labour market. One student described for instance how her mum would avoid speaking in their mother tongue if she was called at work, her mum explaining, ‘I’m around white people, and they’re gonna think I’m talking about them’. Another explained that:

‘My parents were born and bred in Nigeria, so they have thick Nigerian accents. So I’ve noticed that whenever my parents are talking on the phone to someone from the workplace or something, they change the[ir] accent because they think they’re not going to be accepted.’

– Fayola*
They talked about these moments as micro-aggressions and reflected on their parents’ experiences with both kindness and resistance. There was consensus that their parents had been subjected to levels of discrimination that had made them adopt these modifications of themselves to fit into the workplace, but there was also a strong rejection that these accommodations were something that they would entertain themselves. They described, for instance, refusing to conceal or feel ‘ashamed’ of their language:

’It’s impressive to be bilingual! I remember in secondary school, me and my friends – we were speaking our language and three teachers had to come to our table and tell us to stop, because someone said it was making them uncomfortable, because they didn’t know what we were talking about. But if it was someone speaking Spanish, it would have been completely different. It was really weird. Like, being bilingual is very impressive. And I am very happy to speak multiple languages!’

– Fayola*

But others felt less optimistic about their ability to circumvent some of those prejudices:

’I don’t have the accent and I know all about British culture, so I think it might be a bit different for me. But maybe there’s still going to be some new biases. And there still might be some prejudice against my race, I feel like it’s more covert – like it’s harder to be overtly racist to someone nowadays.’

– Christty*

Many minority ethnic students reflected on their parents’ counsel that they would need to ‘strive ten times harder’ than their white peers, and recognised their class, race and gender as intersecting in the kind of challenges they might face, including in the choice of jobs they had open to them.

The students were clearly career-wise; they understood workplace discrimination was nuanced and whilst they were hopeful that education and work was the key to ‘social mobility’, they were also sober about the obstacles they might encounter. They also reflected for instance that jobs that minority ethnic people often did were often ‘fundamental’ but were also ‘underpaid’ and ‘hard work’. All students felt it was important to ‘be rich’ so that they could ‘have the basics’ and ‘be comfortable’ and be able to buy extras.

The ambitions in the groups varied from being psychotherapists to professional stunt actors. However, when asked whether they believed they could achieve their career and professional ambitions, most students clearly carried the burden of family experiences and were uncertain that the world of work was fair enough for them to tread it successfully.

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Students understood their ‘community’ to exist at multiple levels and viewed their ‘school community’, ‘cultural community’ and the geographies of Eltham and their home locations through a critical lens.

‘Black History Month in schools, it’s just like a custom - you have to do it, you get a presentation and a slideshow, maybe spoken to by a black teacher, and it’s always the same people like Martin Luther King or Rosa Parks. But with culture day, we’re actually celebrated. And we’re actually having fun, we get to show off…’

– Alex*
This was important to them because they recognised that the demographics of the area and school community had shifted. In one school, the sixth-formers all recognised that, over recent years, the school’s catchment area had shrunk. As a result, the younger school community was less mixed compared to the older years. The school was becoming ‘predominantly white’ and many students reflected that this created the need ‘to show that we are people of colour, and people from different backgrounds in this area’ and that as their numbers dwindled they needed to create conditions in which they could retain a sense of pride in their wider cultural identities:

‘It was really important and special to share our way of life from our different backgrounds, languages we may speak, our different customs. It’s really important and allows us to know each other better.

We understand our own life, our life difficulties, and the trauma we have faced as well. So I think it’s really important. I’m happy that we’re able to do it.’

– Nasrin*

Many minority ethnic students pointed out that this was important because they had not always felt this sense of pride, particularly around their physical appearance.

One student described having to ‘whitewash’ herself in her previous secondary school in order to ‘fit in’, others talked about changing their hair, applying products to change skin colour, and feeling inferior because of the size of their lips and noses – struggling with the popular aesthetics of beauty that stripped them of confidence and pride. Another student talked about hiding her middle name because it was ‘long and had difficult pronunciations’ and that she hated when her mum would come to parents’ evenings in her African clothes, saying:

‘I used to feel so embarrassed, but now when we go out, I’m fine with her wearing African clothes, because I’m embracing my background.’

Most of the sixth formers at one school in particular lived outside of Eltham and some described how travelling through the local area to reach their school was often a challenging experience. One female student, who wears a jilbab, described how people would react to her appearance with ‘shock’ and the discomfort that she felt in those situations. Students recognised that there was a sense that Eltham was the ‘really nice, posh, gentrified area’ (EH2 19.31), but they preferred and felt safer when inside their school community and in the more mixed communities, outside of Eltham, where they lived.

‘I consider Lewisham, Deptford my community and you know, I love it. It’s such a vibe – you go there and you just know you just accept that, someone’s gonna come up to you and talk about Jesus, and someone’s gonna try and convert you to Islam.

There’s always gonna be some crazy stuff happening. And I love it for that. I love it.’

– Christty*
They had many stories to share of what they described as discriminatory policing.

Students recognised that their communities were often pathologised for being in areas of deprivation and high crime.

But the young people also defended their local community as spaces that were ‘vibrant’ and ‘welcoming’. They were not ignorant of the deprivation and many, when talking about their future professional ambitions, treated these as an investment they would bring back to their community.

They talked about working hard and being successful, but the wealth that they aspired to was about giving their parents an ‘easier life’ and also about improving the material conditions of their community. Strikingly, none talked about wanting to succeed in order to move out and away, all talked about staying and improving their communities.

They talked about wanting ‘more funding’ but ‘keeping the same vibes’, alluding to ideas about how ‘regeneration’ can lead to gentrification that in turn displaces some communities from the places they call home.

One student recalled how, walking home from church one Sunday afternoon as a family, her teenage brothers who were dressed in formal attire were searched by police officers.
Asked to reflect 30 years forward, the young people we spoke to offered a mixed assessment of whether some of the issues that they found challenging now would have changed.

‘There’s just so many issues in the last years that I think people are really overwhelmed. I think our generation, because they’ve grown up on the internet, where they don’t really get a break from the local bad news and stuff like that. I think a lot of people just feel really burnt out.’

– Alina*
This sense of being powerful seemed to emanate from the way that many of these young people had engaged with their school communities and been able to realise some change. Those victories made some weary, feeling they had spent too much time at school, schooling their teachers. Others however had clearly been nourished by these victories, and felt powerful:

‘Our generation are coming together and actually making it a better place, and I’m excited for when we all get older…I feel like the world will be such a better place.’

– Nasrin*

Others, though, were more hopeful. They recognised the need for political change and that they had to lead some of that, arguing ‘the more voices, the more likely they are to change’. Just like their schools, the young people felt that the political system lagged behind the social values of young people and that the system had considerable catching up to do. They talked about needing ‘legal enforcement’ and ‘policies’ that supported the kind of communities of comfort and understanding that they felt they had contributed to growing in their schools, but which were still absent in wider society. Some students reflected both on the progress they had made in building more culturally safe school communities and the way that social media interacted to support that process, and felt that progress wasn’t just desirable, but inevitable:

‘When I was in Year 7 it used to be bad to be African, everyone lied and said they were Jamaican or Caribbean. As time goes on and especially in the music industry, for example, how Burna Boy is global now, and everyone wants to be Nigerian, and we’re singing in Yoruba! So I’m actually just really thrilled and really positive and, with our generation as we grow up, we’re gonna further amplify that.’

– Yusuf*
Creating futures: classrooms, careers and communities for change
As the younger generation forge their way forwards, there are many who have been working to make that path smoother.

The last 30 years has seen movement back and forth and we know progress is never a linear journey, but there are many individuals and organisations that have been working to shape Britain into a fair, racially just and inclusive country.

Baroness Lawrence and the wider family’s campaign for justice is obviously one example of that powerful and persistent demand for change.

This section highlights the important work that many others are doing: the work being pursued by people who see the classroom as a site for building a progressive future, for those who through their career choices and the activities they pursue through them, are challenging the exclusion and marginalisation of our voices and presence, and finally those who are working with our communities, nurturing and nourishing hopeful narratives, capacity and action for change.
Classrooms

Jeffrey Boakye

I was 11 years old when Stephen Lawrence was murdered. At that age, barely out of primary school, I knew that something terribly wrong had happened. I didn’t quite have the words for it back then but I knew, instinctively, that this was symptomatic of a society that was broken in terms of its ability to accommodate racially diverse communities.

Simply put, it was one of the first times that I remember seeing the true extent of racism in the UK, exposed to the full extent of the cruelty it could reach.

I’ve grown up in the shadow of Stephen’s murder. In 1999, I was about the age he was killed when the Macpherson Report was published, highlighting the Metropolitan Police Service as institutionally racist. It was a term I’d never heard before, but understood immediately. In a sense, this tragic event was a constant reference point for my ongoing understanding of racism in the UK.

As the years progressed, as I’m sure is the case with so many others, I watched the system fail to make amends, and the wounds failed to heal.

Now, I feel a responsibility to highlight the injustice of what happened and the work that has been carried out by Baroness Lawrence, the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation and others, as part of continued efforts to address the reality of what happened.

This is the work of legacy, and a huge part of our personal and shared histories.
Education is key to this legacy. As an educator with a particular focus on race, politics, equity and social justice, I’ve been surprised by how little many (if not most) people know about the history of racism in the UK. This stuff is in the shared narrative of anyone who subscribes to the nationality ‘British’, but the stories aren’t always told and the lived experiences aren’t always shared.

By remembering what happened to Stephen, we can keep the passion for social justice alive. This isn’t just about reliving pain; it’s about acknowledging trauma in order to hold a mirror up to society, to better understand the reality of what happened.

It’s impossible to understand modern Britain without first understanding how we arrived at this point. How society has been shaped. The breadth and depth of white supremacist ideology. The many different forms that racism can take, be it horrendous interpersonal acts of violence or a system that failed to find justice for a grieving black family.

For me, this is why sharing stories is so vital. We can learn from them, accept the truth, heal, and then forge a way forward.

Classrooms are the perfect place to start these conversations, in that they are places where truths can be shared among future generations who need to know what happened in the past.

Without ever really planning to, I realise that I have discussed Stephen Lawrence in nearly every book I have written so far. It’s a story that I feel to be so important that I return to it whenever I’m trying to inspire change and nudge towards social justice. I’ve written two books about music, and the legacy of Stephen is held in both of these. My book about education has a whole section dedicated to this legacy and the need to keep the conversation alive for successive generations. Even my fiction series, whilst not making explicit reference to what happened, contains a family that is very much raising children in a context of racial inequality.
Elsewhere, I spend a lot of time travelling the country visiting schools, talking to staff and students about racism, equality and social justice. I’m proud to report that from audiences as young as 5 all the way up to adults older than me, I have made a point of highlighting Stephen Lawrence Day. There’s a reason that Musical Truth, my book about Black British history (told through a selection of songs) pauses halfway through with a silent interlude devoted to the memory and legacy of Stephen and his family, I literally hit pause on the music, to reflect. It’s a powerful moment, and one which, rightly so, underlines the need to stop, remember and act.

‘Diverse’ is what humans are and the human family is full of diverse communities, not least of all in the UK, which comes from an Empire that thrived upon the diversity of its colonised subjects. Once you accept this fact, the mission becomes about developing empathy with so-called ‘diverse’, ‘different’ or ‘other’ groups.

The idea of marginalisation can sometimes work against equity. It reinforces a power imbalance whereby some identities are dominant and centred while others are always on the periphery. From whose perspective? It’s more useful to accept that everyone is at the centre of their own lived and historic experiences. Do this, and then it’s all about acknowledging those experiences and recognising the traumas that various communities have been through. Only then can members of these communities be accepted, or included, as a whole.

It’s simple: we first need to stop thinking about diversity as a social aim and realise that it is actually a fact of human existence.
In all of this, a celebratory spirit is key. One of the many things I love and admire about Baroness Lawrence and the Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation is how their work leans optimistically into the future.

There is so much to celebrate across many communities, so many stories of inspiration to draw from, remarkable achievements to highlight and, always, hope and scope for transformation ahead. We can draw from joy whilst also respecting the truth and pain of the past.

I try to do this in my own work and ultimately, it’s both of these things - joy and truth - that will set us free.

To everyone still reading, please remember that our various spheres of influence represent huge areas of change. We don’t need to be prime ministers or business leaders or published authors in order to make a difference. We just need to be willing to effect change in and around the people we interact with on a daily basis.

There is no such thing as small, and the ripples we create now will lead to waves of change in the future. Believe that.

Jeffrey Boakye is an author, broadcaster, educator and writer whose work centres education, race, masculinity and popular culture. Jeffrey was a secondary and sixth form teacher for over 15 years, and uses his experience from the classroom to frame much of his thinking and work. Jeffrey has authored five books to date, the most recent being the critically acclaimed I Heard What You Said. He is due to publish two books this year, 2023.
Careers

Gary Young

I was still studying when I first heard Stephen Lawrence’s name, and about how he died. There were a number of young people who were being killed at that time. But Stephen’s name became more and more insistent. Doreen and Neville kept going.

There was Derrick Beacon’s victory for the far-right British National Party (BNP) when he won a council seat in the Isle of Dogs, and so Stephen’s was one of those names that wouldn’t go away. Rolan Adams, a 15-year-old boy who was fatally stabbed in another racist attack in south-east London, just 20 months before Stephen, was the other.

This was of course pre social media and regular access to the internet, so people got their news from the TV. And I don’t remember it being a national news story in the beginning. It was of course news in London, or you heard it word of mouth, and from there it grew and grew.

Stephen’s legacy has been primarily a transformational one in terms of how we understand the police and policing. It has been embodied and amplified through his parents so that it didn’t become just an incidence of a young man who was killed, but of an ongoing campaign for greater justice.

Doreen and Neville both continue this work in [their] different ways, and their campaign is no longer just for their son, they’re campaigning for other people’s children as well. My daughter knows Stephen’s story, she’s 10. And she knows his story because they learnt a bit about Doreen’s story, which is obviously intertwined, that’s how legacy works.

You can’t win if you don’t fight.

I am the product of campaigns for racial justice, in a sense we all are. I can trace mine directly; there were uprisings in 1987 and a product of that was a bursary scheme to encourage more non white people to go into journalism. I was one of the first recipients of that bursary. Then there was the Macpherson report. So there’s a way in which it is always important to acknowledge how things from the ‘outside’ world shape us and our lives as individuals. There will be a raft of opportunities for black people that will emerge, have emerged, as a result of 2020 and global calls that Black Lives Matter.

Particularly in my industry, it’s not just a case of there being more Black journalists, writers or columnists in particular, but editors, photographers, schedulers, and so on. But then, once they’re there, they have to be allowed to make a difference.

There’s no point in these institutions looking different but acting the same.

So then, clearly, we need the media to act differently. Regardless of how many Black people work in it, we need it to act differently. The presence of Black people, in itself, only means that their hiring practices are different, it doesn’t mean that journalistic practices are different.

We need less symbols and more substance. We need to have the individual Black columnist, Muslim Mayor, Asian Prime Minister, Muslim First Minister - all of that is fine. But there is little to celebrate in a handful of people breaking through the glass ceiling, if most people are still in the basement and the lifts don’t work.
I think there is a tendency to gorge on the symbolism and to mistake it for substance. It’s not that symbols aren’t important, but they shouldn’t be mistaken for substance.

Gary Younge is an award-winning author, journalist, broadcaster and a professor of sociology at the University of Manchester.

Formerly a columnist at The Guardian he is an editorial board member of the Nation magazine and the Alfred Knobler Fellow for Type Media.

He has written five books: Another Day in the Death of America, A Chronicle of Ten Short Lives; The Speech, The Story Behind Martin Luther King’s Dream; Who Are We?, And Should it Matter in the 21st century; Stranger in a Strange Land, Travels in the Disunited States and No Place Like Home, A Black Briton’s Journey Through the Deep South. He has also written for The New York Review of Books, Granta, GQ, The Financial Times and The New Statesman and made several radio and television documentaries on subjects ranging from gay marriage to Brexit.
**Savannah Williams**

Stephen Lawrence's murder is a tragic British story, and one that the Black community does not forget as time goes by. As some forms of justice for Stephen and his family took such a long time, it is unfortunate that I became aware of his story and legacy from my surroundings: the news, school and my community.

As a young girl, I went to school in South London, where one of my teachers was Stephen's brother, which meant I learnt more than many about the events that had occurred and how Stephen's family had tried to turn their nightmare into a positive tool for change; the Stephen Lawrence Foundation.

Stephen's legacy allows the British to understand where we came from, how we are changing as a nation, and that even though we have improved in terms of racism, diversity and inclusion of all ethnicities, we must keep fighting the good fight for equality. The work is not yet done.

Savannah Williams is an architect and designer with passions for socially driven and innovative architecture. She is a graduate of the University of Liverpool, University of Westminster and completed the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Part 3 in 2022 at RIBA North. Savannah is the founder of POC in Architecture CIC, an organisation that works to create opportunities for Black students pursuing a career in architecture.
Communities

Nadine White

The fabric of my formative years is partly comprised of Stephen’s story.

As a Black south Londoner, who was born just before Stephen’s murder, I grew up hearing his name mostly in passing conversations among members of my local community and through news bulletins on television. So, before I developed the wherewithal to proactively access more information about this man’s identity, there was an acute awareness of his existence and an increasing understanding that something terrible had befallen him.

Many people, particularly those in the inner-city capital area, navigated the 1990s against the backdrop of Stephen’s plight and following events. Along with hearing Stephen’s name, I grew accustomed to seeing photographs of him including that famous image where he’s wearing a blue and white striped jumper while clenching his fist upward. That gesture, a symbol of resilience, made it seem as though he represented a cause bigger than himself, but what was the cause? As a child, I didn’t know. It all made sense in years to come.

Stephen’s legacy is complicated, representing hope and tragedy. Stephen, a teenage A-level student who aspired to become an architect, was struck down in his prime by a gang of racists. Yet, through his parents’ relentless pursuit of justice for their son, Doreen and Neville Lawrence challenged the institutionally racist policing and democratic systems of Britain, holding a mirror up to who we are as a nation and triggering much-needed political reform in the process. Therefore, Stephen’s legacy also represents change.

The Stephen Lawrence case, and associated learning, should be implemented in the national curriculum along with other aspects of British history while workplace training should draw upon relevant legislative points.

Moreover, community initiatives should spotlight key cultural information in the spirit of the aspiring architect’s legacy, that’s one of the many reasons why the newly-launched Stephen Lawrence Day is so significant. It provides an opportunity for these things to be prioritised on the corporate and community agendas.

It is a fact that the UK is fraught with racism. Growing up as a Black person in this country has presented its challenges. Therefore I can attest to the importance of highlighting racial justice in my line of work.

In an industry where less than 1% of journalists are Black and representation is sorely lacking, numerous Black journalists - including myself - feel a moral obligation to amplify the lived experiences from within these communities.

As Britain’s first dedicated Race Correspondent, my personal experiences as a Black woman inform my professional conviction. News images of Stephen’s Black parents, Baroness Doreen and Mr Neville Lawrence, campaigning for their son’s killers to be imprisoned, have been etched in my mind since the 1990s. Moreover, their plight felt all the more immediate to me, of course.

While authoritative figures within the British establishment would have sooner looked the other way, the Lawrences - along with Black communities around the country - propelled issues of racial injustice into mainstream conversation and transformed the face of this country, even if the rotten underbelly of discrimination persists in every aspect of life.
Continuing to have open and honest conversations around racial inequality and racial justice has to be a part of the wider strategy for building empathy between people from different communities. It is also important to factor into these conversations information about the nuances between marginalised communities. By doing this, perspectives will be shared and understanding enhanced. Knowledge is power.

Nadine White is an award winning journalist, the UK’s first dedicated race correspondent at the Independent.

The media must address its own chronic diversity deficit which shows no sign of improving at an appropriate rate. Moreover, newsrooms must consistently prioritise reporting on racial discrimination, above and beyond incidents around the loss of life like George Floyd’s murder or Stephen Lawrence’s.

It is important, too, that the ongoing quest for fairness in Stephen’s name is not abandoned; after all, other people linked to his murder still walk among us and Doreen Lawrence is currently battling the Daily Mail in court following claims that they hired investigators to hack her phone after Stephen’s murder. Just last month, the Casey Review confirmed something many have feared for some time: the Metropolitan Police is still institutionally racist. This comes two decades after the Macpherson Report drew the same conclusion.

Her work is centred on amplifying issues and events relating to race and ethnicity, often focusing on areas which matter to Black communities in particular.

Nadine has been included in Forbes’ 30 Under 30 list and BBC Radio 1Xtra Future Figures list as one of 29 individuals, groups and organisations across the country who are “making Black history now”.

Nasra Ayub

I remember feeling emotional when I first heard Stephen’s story, it felt personal because this was the first time I learned that people can be killed just for the colour of their skin. The fact that the life of an innocent person could be taken so viciously was gut-wrenching. It hit home at such a young age that our lives as Black people are disposable, and created a lot of anxiety for my own identity without having the language to express what this felt like at the time. Stephen Lawrence’s case brought what institutional racism looks like in the UK to the spotlight, evident in the incompetent manner in which the police handled it. The police force and judicial system failed Stephen and his family. Who’s to say the recent inquiry into the Metropolitan police force would have even happened if it wasn’t for the events that occurred after Stephen’s murder, leading to the infamous Macpherson report? Stephen’s legacy laid the foundation for the fight against institutional racism, which continues to this day.

In schools, remembering this is important for young people. Not only remembering the tragedy but celebrating his life. In a case where the police and criminal justice system failed Stephen and his family, behind the headlines there is a young man who was talented, intelligent and full of life. Especially for young children, it is important to remember the human aspect of Stephen Lawrence as he was more than his death. In an appropriate manner, it is important for young people to learn about how institutional racism disproportionately impacts marginalised groups in today’s society, and how they can be allies to those who are impacted by this.

There is also an opportunity in the classroom to have discussions in safe spaces about what race equity looks like today. Meaning, how do we view race? How can we ensure we do not perpetuate racism and why is it important to promote racial equity? Having these conversations with school-aged children is vital because Black children especially have to be aware of how their race affects them in society from a young age. Parents have to have conversations with their children as to why they may be treated differently as they go through the journey of life. Some children never have to have this conversation. That’s why these conversations need to happen in schools from a young age, to promote a positive outlook on diversity and inclusion. The importance of campaigning for racial justice has always been about the next generation for me. The people that come after me. Having lived experience of racism, having disclosures of other young people coming forward about the racism they have experienced and that of the generations before me – it becomes personal.

The Lawrence's activism impressed upon me the importance of fighting inequality and harnessing righteous anger in furtherance of the greater good. As a journalist, I do this in the public interest as opposed to solely to benefit the marginalised. After all, injustice anywhere it thrives, is a threat to justice everywhere.

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I envision a society where young Black children get to exist and live freely without their race being a barrier. I remember vividly seeing a young girl speaking at a Black Lives Matter protest in 2020 and at first thinking it was so inspirational. But it then dawned on me that this shouldn’t be her reality. She shouldn’t have to be an activist or protest for her rights. Shouldn’t all children have the right to BE children?

I have been a campaigner since I was a teenager and spoken at many events, schools and institutions on racism, particularly racism inflicted on Black people. I have written about it and spoke at the 2020 Black Lives Matter protest most notably. I have campaigned for curriculum change, decolonised academia, and marginalised voices to be heard. In my campaigning, my most important aspect has been to uplift other young Black people - whether through mentoring, providing them with opportunities or empowering them to be the best version of themselves.

Building empathy and understanding between people from different communities is a complex and ongoing process that requires sustained effort and commitment from individuals, communities, and institutions.

Education is a powerful tool for promoting empathy and understanding between people from different communities. Schools and community organisations can teach about the history, culture, and experiences of different communities to foster understanding and respect.

This can be done through diversity and inclusion training, workshops, and educational programs. It is important to create safe spaces where people from different communities can come together and engage in constructive dialogue. This can be done through community events, educational institutions such as schools and colleges, and other initiatives that bring people from diverse backgrounds together to share their experiences and perspectives.

We must empower marginalised communities by giving them a voice and helping them to participate in decision-making processes. Often, polarisation is born out of frustration of not feeling heard or valued in communities. A way to address this can be done by supporting community organisations, creating opportunities for leadership and advocacy, and providing access to resources and services.

Building empathy and understanding between people from different communities and reducing polarisation requires a multi-faceted and sustained effort that involves education, dialogue, active listening, empowerment, addressing systemic inequalities, and practising empathy and compassion in our daily lives.

Nasra Ayub is a multi-award winning gender equality campaigner, TEDx speaker and writer. Her work explores racial injustice and gender inequality. In 2020, Nasra was awarded the prestigious Diana Award for her work tackling violence against women and girls.

Nasra works in participatory grant-making at Global Fund for Children and delivers training and peer education regarding safeguarding against FGM, honour based violence and violent extremism nationally and internationally.
We would like to thank and acknowledge the work of Baroness Doreen Lawrence OBE and the Stephen Lawrence Day campaign for their unfettered fight for justice and commitment to racial equity in the UK.

We would like to thank all of the schools and teachers that responded to our call out for focus group participants, and for the incredibly inspirational students who took part and shared their thoughts on Stephen’s legacy, being part of a multicultural community, their career aspirations and experiences in the classroom. We would also like to thank Jeffrey Boakye, Gary Younge, Nadine White, Savannah Williams and Nasra Ayub for their fantastic contributions to this report, and for their ongoing work in their respective fields. Combined, the contributions of our focus group participants and case study reflections have shaped this report and truly captured a sense of community and hope.

We would like to thank Paul Hamlyn Foundation for funding and partnering with us on this project. We would also like to thank our design agency, ChillCreate, for presenting this work so beautifully.

Finally, we would like to thank the incredible staff teams at the Runnymede Trust and Stephen Lawrence Day Foundation; Dr. Shabna Begum, Maxwell Williams, Hannah Francis, Carol Sidney, Sophia Purdy-Moore, Laurence Jay, Rohini Kahrs, Jessica Neil, Narissa Williams and Charlotte King.

Without you, none of this would have been possible.

We hope this report builds on the legacy of Stephen’s life and his family’s campaign for justice, 30 years on.
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport. “Feeling of belonging to a neighbourhood,” Gov.uk, 2020. View Link


