

1 Systemic Racism

Britain Now and Then

Introduction

While many whites in Britain and elsewhere seemed shocked by the announcement that the Duke and Duchess of Sussex—Prince Harry and Meghan Markle—were stepping down as senior royals, black Britons seemed far less surprised. “Thank God they are free. . . . All of this is about her race. I know it because as a Caribbean woman who did not grow up here, I have experienced it myself,” said one Londoner. A *New York Times* headline read, “Black Britons Wonder What Took Harry and Meghan So Long,” and quoted a former president of Cambridge University’s Black and Minority Ethnic campaign.

Most of the media is ignoring the whole racism factor that has clearly played a big role in the couple’s decision. . . . Racism issues are spoken about more in the popular discourse in the United States. . . . People are more conscious of it, whereas here the black community is a lot smaller and it’s not really raised as a significant issue regularly.¹

A black student at the London School of Economics (LSE) said of the couple’s decision: “The history of the royal family is built around the British Empire, so it was almost like it was coming full circle. . . . [N]o matter how much we think we are accepted into society, we really aren’t.”² NBC reported on a group of black female teenagers in the UK who talked about the racist “angry black woman” image that they and Markle must endure. NBC noted that the group laughed at the notion that “Meghan’s treatment was fair.” “Of course, no one is going to call her an f----- N-word in a headline,” the teenaged Peace Ogbuani said, censoring herself. “Maybe in America they would write that, but in Britain they are more subtly racist. Instead, you can see it in their mannerisms and the way they treat people.”³ These black teenagers, like the LSE student, plainly called out systemic racism in British institutions and the white Britons who implemented that racist action.

In the midst of the Black Lives Matter protests on both sides of the Atlantic in 2020, Labour Member of Parliament (MP) Dawn Butler

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remarked: “until we dismantle the systemic racism that exists in society, we are never going to make the progress that we need to see. ... [W]e have to have ... difficult and sometimes uncomfortable conversations to bring about the change we want to see.” A daughter of Jamaican immigrant parents, this Member of Parliament was forced to close her office due to racist abuse she faced. “Ending this poisonous and dangerous political environment will help save our democracy, which is under threat from the politics of division and hate,” she explained, “and with [Prime Minister Boris] Johnson and [his senior adviser Dominic] Cummings often implementing that exact strategy it is an uphill struggle.” Butler called on policing agencies, the criminal justice system, social media companies, Parliament, and her own party to do much more to tackle systemic racism in Britain.⁴

In striking contrast to the LSE student, the black teens, and Butler, white members of the British commentariat and polity have long denied the existence of systemic racism, including claims that Markle was driven out of the UK by racist press coverage or racist Britons. They constantly insist on white virtuousness, a central feature of old white racial framing. “It’s laughable,” claimed an editor at *The Sun* tabloid. “The criticism of Meghan has got nothing to do with her race.”⁵ The celebrated author of books on royalty, Penny Junor appeared on *CBS This Morning* to counter claims that white racism had anything to do with the media treatment Markle received, telling hosts Gayle King and Tony Dokoupil: “The British were thrilled about her marrying into the Royal Family ... because she was mixed race.” This comment prompted Dokoupil to ask: “Did you check in with any Black Brits before you made that determination?” and King added: “[T]o have your baby [Archie] portrayed as a chimp. ... That ... is, in fact, very racist.” In response, Junor faltered: “I’m not denying that. ... What I’m saying is, that I think that the overweening sentiment of the British public was to be enthusiastic about Meghan. ... [I]t made a whole lot of coloured people in our country suddenly find that the Monarchy was relevant for them.” King and Dokoupil did not respond to Junor’s use of the epithet “coloured people”; however, in the UK the term is as offensive as it is in the USA.⁶

Further demonstrating that whites and blacks walk in different worlds were the numerous twitter responses to Junor’s comments. Many people, who appear to be black, tweeted negatively in response to her use of the phrase “coloured people,” similar to this example: “Penny girl, we do not believe you. The good folks from *Buzzfeed News* put together a comparison of media coverage of Kate and Meghan, which is striking. I think that some white people believe that if they do not use the N-word they’re not racists, which is totally false.”⁷ These observers accented the recurring white racist framing in the mainstream media. Britain’s systemic racism can be seen in all its major institutions, including in the mainstream media that we repeatedly analyze throughout this book.

Markle’s experiences with white racially framed commentary and actions offer a clear lens through which to make sense of contemporary British

racism. For centuries now, Britons of color have been racially framed and considered by whites as more tolerable if they deport themselves according to white norms and framing. If they do not, they are maligned or worse. Early on, the Kensington Palace staff, at the prominent residence of numerous white royals, branded Markle “Meghan the Menace” because of her “strong will”—code similar to “angry black woman.” Markle’s friends have since shed light on what is behind that supposedly “strong will”; she often “felt she had more to prove. Being biracial and not always knowing where she fit in, there was a part of her that just wanted people to see she was great at whatever she did.”⁸ Being a person of color in mostly white spaces usually creates unique and difficult pressures. What’s more, hard work is not rewarded in a fair and colorblind manner in systematically racist societies like the UK and USA. During her lifetime, Markle has indeed had to work “twice as hard to get half as far,” as her friends suggest.⁹

Entertainment reporter Britt Stephens wrote that “Meghan Markle is Being Called ‘Difficult,’ and Black Women Can Read Between the Lines” in an op-ed, thereby capturing well how white racist framing works. Responding to reports such as Markle’s allegedly unreasonable demands for her wedding, her reprimand of a member of her sister-in-law’s staff, and her personal assistant weepily quitting after a few months, Stephens notes the institutionalized character of the racist framing.

It feels like every day there’s a new story about Meghan not quite fitting in—and with each emerging rumor, it becomes easier for black women everywhere to read between the lines. . . . Meghan’s blackness walked into the room before she did; that she was assumed to be “demanding” before she even made any demands, and she was considered to be “difficult” to work with even before anyone worked with her.¹⁰

In contradiction to Junor’s aforementioned claim that Britons were delighted that Markle married into the royal family, the UK daily newspaper *The Guardian* examined articles published about the duchess between May 2018 (the month she wed Harry) and January 2020 (the month the couple announced their stepping down as senior royals), and found that she received *twice* as many unfavorable headlines as favorable ones. Of the 843 articles in 14 print newspapers, 43 percent were unfavorable, 20 percent were favorable, and 36 percent were neutral. The data suggest that assertions that Markle receives considerably more critical treatment than her sister-in-law Kate appear to be accurate. Of the 144 articles about Kate, 8 percent were unfavorable, 45 percent were favorable, and 47 percent were neutral. The statistical difference in how the press treats the women echoes an article revealing the strikingly different media coverage they regularly receive.¹¹ To take just one example, the *Daily Mail* ran a favorable story about Kate “cradling her baby bump,” while condemning Markle for “vanity” for doing the same. *The Guardian* study also substantiates earlier research that found that of 29,000 tabloid and non-tabloid items published

online about Markle in 2019, some 72 percent were unfavorable. In contrast, 31 percent of 14,000 tabloid and non-tabloid items published online about Kate were unfavorable.¹²

In the interview with commentators King and Dokoupil, Junor exclaimed that Markle and Harry “arrived like they were a golden couple. They were sprinkling fairy dust everywhere.”¹³ By mid-2018—a mere few months after their wedding—the percentage of articles that framed her unfavorably exceeded the percentage of favorable ones. Markle received a spike in negative coverage when she and Harry decided to keep specifics surrounding their son’s birth and baptism private. Numerous articles quoted sources asserting that Markle was a “boastful” and “self-obsessed” celebrity who craved media attention, with this storyline strengthened when she guest-edited British *Vogue*. Another concentrated period of unfavorable press coverage ensued when the couple flew on private jets while sounding the alarm on climate change. Exposés concerning Markle’s relationship with her father constituted nearly one third of unfavorable articles about her, and a number of articles connected Markle and the African American side of her family to drugs and violence.¹⁴ Much of this negative media coverage barely conceals the commentators’ white racist framing of Markle.

Some British politicians have spoken out about her racist treatment. A prominent member of the Labour Party described media reporting on Markle as “intrusive and racist.”¹⁵ In this book we examine closely the white racist attacks on Markle, the recurring denial of such racist attacks by mainly white members of the British commentariat and polity, and what that tells us about systemic racism and its central white racial frame in Britain today.

Systemic Racism and the White Racial Frame

Mainstream analysts researching contemporary UK racism make common use of attitudinal concepts like bigotry, bias, prejudice, and stereotyping. Examining white racism through such optics, though often valuable, tends to privilege individualistic analyses over systemic ones. It also focuses attention on certain elements of racial thought and framing that do not get enough into the foundational and systemic realities. For instance, the authors of *Finding Freedom* do not focus on these systemic realities. They frame the racism Markle encountered as a “more subtle problem with ... attitudes,” even as they note that she and Harry believe Britain has a broader problem with racism, and that her mixed-race heritage was an issue for some in the royal family and its network.¹⁶ “When he first started seeing her, Harry, sensitive to even the slightest hint of *prejudice*, had fallouts within his own circle,” the authors explain. “When some questioned his new relationship, and whether she was suitable, he would wonder, ‘Is this about race? Is it snobbery?’”¹⁷ Note here the proviso concerning his sensitivity to even the least “hint of *prejudice*.” Contrasting the couple’s different experiences with racism, the authors write: “While it might have been new territory for Harry, *bias—both unconscious and intentional*—had always been a

part of Meghan's life."¹⁸ Describing Markle's feelings, they write: "Meghan felt like some of the commentary and tabloid stories were more than a culture clash; they were sexist and *prejudiced*."¹⁹

Such attitudinal analyses do not provide the concepts necessary to make sense out of the highly racialized society that Britain is. Systemic racism theory, an early version of what is often called critical race theory (see Preface), fills this fissure by arguing that in the UK case, prevailing racist framing, practices, and institutions are collectively constructed and have been foundational to British society for centuries. Systemic racism theory suggests that in essential ways British society has progressed far less when it comes to racial matters than some more individualistic theoretical approaches suggest.

Here we give much credit to earlier British scholars, most with ancestry in British Caribbean and South Asian colonies, who pioneered a more critical and structural approach to British racism in their important book, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in '70s Britain* (1982).²⁰ Its savvy contributors were among the first to place an analysis of whites' racist biases and ideology at the center of a critical understanding of British political (e.g., state, nationalism) and economic (e.g., capitalism, class struggle) matters. Still, for them "racism" often meant prejudice, bias, and ideology. They especially focused on white racist stereotyping and hostility directed at the many immigrants of color who arrived in Britain in the 1940s and 1970s.

Their approach was path-breaking for British racial studies. They accent white British racism and to some degree the anti-racist pushback, including from black workers and black feminists. In the preface to *Empire*, for example, the brilliant black historian Paul Gilroy—later, author of such influential books as *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack* (1987), *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), *Against Race* (2000), and *Darker Than Blue* (2010)—describes the book's conceptual and activist foundation: "It is about racial divisions within the British class struggle. Our premise is therefore the problem of relating 'race' to class, not for sociological theory, but for socialist politics." Reviewing the 1950s and 1960s, the contributors to *Empire* reveal how British nationalism had changed to an even more openly white-supremacist form following the arrival of migrant laborers from the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent. Along with this influx of people of color came a perceived threat to the purported (white) British way of life. When the white-run state asserted its power during the 1973–1975 economic recession, a perfect racist storm took form. For Gilroy, what is of considerable importance is how overt white nationalism—especially via institutions of the white working class (e.g., trade unions)—encouraged racial divisions within the country's increasingly diverse working class. The nation's popular white discourse, he writes, "operates across the formal lines of class, and has been constructed against blacks."²¹ In direct contrast, black Britons have been demanding genuine racial equality ever since large numbers of black workers emigrated from the Caribbean in the late 1940s and 1970s to help rebuild war-torn Britain.

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These immigrants are often termed the “Windrush” generation after the ship *HMT Empire Windrush* that brought many to the UK. Sadly, in 2018 they were denied their legal rights and unlawfully harassed and deported in what became known as the Windrush scandal.²²

A major influence on our thinking stems from the significant contributions of these anti-racist scholars to understanding British racism, as well as the limitations that come with their reliance on bias, prejudice, and ideology concepts when studying that racism. The concept *systemic racism* and its *white racial frame* suggest there are yet more specific dimensions to the reality and operation of that white racism than even the contributors to *Empire* suggest. As we show throughout this book, this dominant white frame has a strong white virtuousness center, one that is centuries old and hard for whites to see and understand. The dominant white frame is just one major part of the systemic racism common in the UK. That systemic racism also includes a strong racial hierarchy, great material inequalities along racial lines, and substantial patterns of *institutional* discrimination in politics, housing, employment, criminal justice, education, and culture.

While we deeply admire the early racism analyses of *Empire*, we seek here to take the next conceptual step to the “bigger picture” of an all-encompassing British elite-white-male dominance system, which has long operated mostly through its major white-racist, male-sexist, and capitalist-class subsystems. Most contemporary analysts of British racism have missed the opportunity to call out the top predatory capitalists explicitly by name and position; to emphasize that it matters that they are not just capitalistic but also mostly *white* and *male*; and to expose their actual capitalistic, racist, sexist, and other oppressive framings and actions. Rendering such realities constantly visible is, in our view, to greatly expand how well we understand contemporary oppressive societies like the UK, and how well we can do in crafting meaningful strategies for democratic societal change.

In numerous previous books we have detailed the limitations of individualistic conceptions when undertaking studies of systemic racism in the US case. We have demonstrated how concepts of systemic racism and its dominant white racial frame illuminate racial matters in the USA and other Western countries. These ideas are especially shaped by the long anti-racist tradition of analysis developed by African American scholars and activists. Here we apply this systemic racism theory, including its white frame concept, to the discourse and actions surrounding Markle and Harry, including their engagement, their wedding, the birth of their son, and their move away socially and geographically from the British royal family.

Throughout this book we argue that white-framed narratives about Markle persist because of strong racist views that have long been part of the UK’s dominant white racial frame—an overarching white worldview that encompasses at least these important elements:

- 1) a beliefs aspect (racial stereotypes and ideologies)
- 2) integrating cognitive elements (racial interpretations and narratives)
- 3) visual and auditory elements (racialized images and language accents)
- 4) a feelings aspect (racialized emotions)
- 5) an inclination to negative action (discrimination)²³

Since at least the seventeenth century this prevailing racial frame has provided the broad white-generated perspective from which whites and others in Western countries commonly view the social world. Such dominant frames are mostly created by the most powerful people at the top of a society. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels long ago underscored, “the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas: i.e., the class, which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force.”²⁴ In the British case, white, mostly male, members of the ruling class have long dominated the creation, dissemination, and implementation of this system-generating and system-rationalizing racist frame in institutional arenas such as business, the media, politics and government, education, churches, and culture. They have routinely and invariably been assisted in this effort by the mass of ordinary white citizens.

Like a complex picture frame, with much detailed edging meant to enhance a print in it, the white racial frame includes numerous elements that operate to preserve and heighten myths and misconceptions of white superiority, virtuousness, civilization, and moral goodness. In this book we demonstrate that this centuries-old white frame plays a pivotal role in mythologizing “race” matters today in Britain, and in that process propagandizing for white nationalistic and nativistic nostalgia.

Since early in British history this overarching racist framing has included a *central subframe* that assertively accents a positive view of white virtue, moral goodness, and action. For centuries the white racial framing of this ingroup superiority, together with its framing of outgroup inferiority, has been *hegemonic*—that is, it has been part of a distinctive way of life and character structure that routinely governs much of contemporary society. For most white Britons, the white racial frame is more than one interpretive frame among many. Consistently centered as a way of everyday being, this broad perspective on life is fully internalized. It provides the language and interpretations that help structure, standardize, and rationalize white society’s racialized actions, interactions, and institutions.

A key aspect of the white racial frame is its anti-others subframes. Psychological researchers who have probed the white racial mindset have shown that direct and indirect measures indicate that anti-black views and other negative racial subframes remain widespread.²⁵ Certainly, the anti-black subframe is evident in the mainstream media coverage of Markle. Not only racist bias but also racist imagery, narratives, and emotions regularly pervade this coverage. In 2016, when the *Daily Mail* titled an online story “Harry’s Girl is (Almost) Straight Outta Compton,” it duly provoked unprecedented critical remarks from Harry’s office in Kensington Palace.

The prince condemned the “racial undertones of comment pieces” and “the outright sexism and racism of social-media trolls.”²⁶

Other royals and their advisors preferred that Harry remain silent, but his forceful remarks had precedent. One year prior, a strongly worded statement issued by William and Kate, and circulated worldwide to media outlets, reproached the British press for hounding their son, Prince George. And when in 2019 the media reported that Kate had had botox treatments following the birth of her third child, a palace spokesperson refuted the claim. Proxies for the royal family did more than remain silent in the face of press attacks against Markle, however; they sometimes concealed the nature of the racist attacks. For example, after the British Fashion Council (BFC) posted and then quickly removed a photo of Markle from its Instagram account, a palace source claimed it was because the image was meant to be a personal souvenir from the British Fashion Awards. However, the BFC reported it was removed because of a flood of racist comments posted beneath it.²⁷

Racially *othering* Markle has since continued via pieces like *Tatler's* “One Year of Meghanomania.” This British magazine, targeted at the country’s upper-middle and upper classes, is commonly referred to as “the bible of British aristocracy.” Surveying Markle’s first year as a royal, *Tatler* purported that Kensington Palace staff referred to her as “Me-Gain” because of the effort and attention she demanded. The story also mentioned the “‘Marie Antoinette’ overtones of her [American] baby shower.” While comparing the backlash Markle faces to that which Sarah Ferguson, Duchess of York, faced when marrying Prince Andrew in 1986, the white-run *Tatler* downplayed the *gendered racism* visited on the Duchess of Sussex, inaccurately writing that she “has seen nothing” on par with the negative attacks that the white Sarah had confronted.²⁸

The British press regularly compares the treatment of these women. Sarah has even been dubbed “Meghan’s predecessor,” who “clearly knows what Meghan is experiencing.”²⁹ Sarah, herself, has said “I know what Meghan is going through. . . . I have been in Meghan’s shoes, and I still am. . . . I abhor bullying.”³⁰ Lost on Sarah is the distinctive gendered-racist nature of the bullying and other attacks Markle has had to endure. As a highly privileged white woman, the Duchess of York has *never* been in Markle’s shoes, and cannot possibly know what she has gone through as a biracial woman.

In early 2020, in the aftermath of Markle and Harry announcing they would be stepping down as senior royals, *Tatler* decided to reprint “One Year of Meghanomania,” retitling it “Meghanomania Lives On.” “As the country processes the Sussex Shock Statement, it occurs to *Tatler* that many of the ‘Meghanomania’ anecdotes from the May 2019 issue ring resoundingly true,” the magazine stated with considerable white emotion.³¹

Prominent white Britons in and outside the press continue to stereotype and blame a supposedly dominant Markle for the couple’s decision to leave the royal family. Stanley Johnson, father of Prime Minister Boris Johnson, referred to Markle as “the driving force behind” the decision.³² The royal biographer Angela Levin, who said immediately following the

couple's wedding that the African American preacher's sermon made her uncomfortable, has referred to Markle as a "mega-watt attention grabber" and a "fiercely ambitious woman who wants to be number one." While in his pre-Markle days Harry was "charismatic and accessible," according to Levin, he is now "a nervy, tense man who seems constantly on edge."³³ The socialite and author Lady Colin Campbell has compared Markle to Lady Macbeth, a leading character in the Shakespearean tragedy *Macbeth*, and wife of the play's ill-fated protagonist, who provokes her husband into committing regicide.³⁴ All these commentaries seem to have undertones of the old white-racist stereotype and image of assertive black women.

Markle has had much more to contend with than attacks by prominent white Britons. Very early on, she was inundated with violent threats and other hate mail arriving at various royal residences and via Kensington Palace's email and social media accounts. One white-racist note arrived in an envelope filled with innocuous white powder posing as anthrax. A security course, which she, like all royals—except the queen—was required to complete, occurred *before* her wedding because of the unprecedented number of alarming threats already against her person. The timing was highly unusual. Kate's security training, for example, took place *after* she had married William.³⁵ Routinely, Markle's black heritage has made her a target of white-racist abuse and threats.

Important in reproducing Britain's systemic racism is the regular assertion and transmission of the centuries-old pro-white and anti-others framing of people of color. A long-term historical creation, this white frame, as we have just demonstrated, is reproduced moment-to-moment within dense social networks that contextualize whites' lives, leaving them oblivious to the real costs of racism for racialized others or in denial of its existence. The scholar Maurice Halbwachs suggests that one should not seek where human understandings, images, and stereotypes are preserved just "in the brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access." Instead, an individual's understandings, images, and knowledge bits hang together because they are "part of a totality of thoughts *common to a group*."³⁶ As in these examples and those that follow, we observe that whites gain most of their racialized understandings and framing from witnessing, imbibing, and testing the comments, reactions, and behavior of other whites, including parents, peers, and the media.

Systemic and Foundational Racism

White British Denials of the White Racial Framing of Meghan Markle

Unsurprisingly, many white Britons in and outside of the mainstream media regularly perpetuate a pervasive white-racist framing of Markle, yet often deny they do so. For instance, Camilla Tominey, editor of *The Telegraph*, is unwavering in her narrative that "race" is not an element in British

press coverage of Markle. “When Meghan arrived here, she was really well received,” she told the *New Yorker*, adding that Markle soon had detractors inside Kensington Palace, who were less besotted by the same attributes that made her alluring to the media, including her showbusiness background, self-confidence, and “feminist habits of assertion.” Tominey went on to say, “This narrative of ‘the press and the public have been attacking us,’ and ‘there’s a racial undertone,’ and Prince Harry talking about ‘unconscious bias’—people are scratching their heads.” In *her* narrative she meant *white* “people are scratching their heads,” of course. Tominey even accused Markle of reverse-racism. In her white-framed column concerning Markle’s *Vogue* editorials, Tominey wrote: “I wonder whether Meghan was conscious of the bias she showed in choosing 15 ‘forces for change’ for the *Vogue* cover, all of whom were women, of which only five were white? ... If I was pale, male and stale, I’d be feeling pretty discriminated against right now.”³⁷

One US entertainment writer astutely captures how the contemporary white-racist framing, within which Tominey operates here, actually works.

Obviously, this is an inflammatory statement: Part of the “change” that Meghan (and so many others!) would like to see in the world is shifting attention away from white men, who have held the spotlight for far too long. It’s no accident or even “bias” that Meghan selected “only” five white women—it was very specifically her goal to highlight women of color who know better than anyone the need for change, and have been denied a voice for generations. ... [T]o even use the word “discrimination” to describe their exclusion from a *Vogue* cover is a painful and insulting distraction from the true discrimination running rampant every day—in Britain, and across the world.³⁸

Numerous ordinary folks on Twitter also called out Tominey, again capturing well how contemporary white-racist framing works. One example is this: “It’s so telling that when a single edition of a single publication doesn’t explicitly centre whiteness, Britain’s right wing media goes into attack mode. This is how institutional racism works.” Another person argued thus: “*The Telegraph* wants to lecture Meghan Markle about unconscious bias, as they continue their campaign against the first mixed race member of the royal family, who they’ve taken against for some mysterious reason they can’t quite put their finger on.”³⁹

Australia’s *60 Minutes* program came under criticism for a problematical segment titled “How Meghan Markle Lost Her Sparkle.” The white-framed program failed to interview even one person of color, while giving the British white nationalist and media personality Katie Hopkins a platform to vilify the biracial duchess—again capturing well how contemporary white-racist framing works across many areas of the globe. Known for far-right views on immigration and racial matters, Hopkins was asked if the vitriol she holds for Markle is supported by a racist framing. She

replied: “If I criticised Meghan, as we can hear I am, people say, ‘Well, you’re racist’. And, honestly, it’s not even a second thought to me. . . . So, this racist thing is really old and tired, but I think it’s just people’s way of sort of saying ‘You must not criticise Meghan.’” Then, when asked “Why do you hate Meghan so much?” From her unreflective white-nationalist bubble, Hopkins responded, “Oh everything. . . . It’s my royal family. This is my country. Prince Harry is my Prince Harry.”⁴⁰

When Hopkins remarks, “It’s my royal family. This is my country,” what she means is that both the royal family and the UK should remain *white*. When she says “Prince Harry is my Prince Harry,” what she means is that he should have married a *white* British woman. That a major newsmagazine such as *60 Minutes* would give a prominent white nationalist a platform to bash Markle—a white nationalist who has dubbed migrants “cockroaches” and “feral”; called for a “final solution” to terrorism; upheld “white genocide” conspiracy theories; referred to London as “Khan’s Londonistan” (referencing London’s mayor Sadiq Khan); and claimed there is “institutionalised discrimination against whites”—says much about how systemic racism and its legitimating racial frame operate in English-speaking countries.⁴¹

White denial of the white racism that Markle faces is not limited to overt white nationalists. Former press secretary to Diana, Princess of Wales, Patrick Jephson—who was also interviewed for this particular episode of Australia’s *60 Minutes*—claimed that the issue of white racism was “entirely misleading. It’s irrelevant and I would warn against anybody taking that line as any sort of explanation as to why Meghan sometimes doesn’t get the press she necessarily wants.” In response to Jephson’s narrative, and referencing Harry’s defense of Markle, the white *60 Minutes* reporter suggested that Harry had “played the racism card, to an extent.” Diana’s former press secretary disclosed that he “strongly advised [Harry] against doing that,” adding “if you take that point of view then you’re going to miss perhaps some more relevant reasons to why Meghan isn’t as popular as she should be.”⁴² Note, too, that the phrase “played the racism card” is a relatively recent *white-created* term added to the dominant white-racist framing, in this case a phrase attempting to denigrate anyone who questions the centuries-old systemic racism of a country.

In response to claims that Markle and Harry believe Britain has a problem with white racism, Lady Colin Campbell remarked: “This is absolute poppycock. Britain is inclusive. It is outrageous to claim that.”⁴³ In her recent book *Meghan and Harry: The Real Story*, this royal writer argues that Markle’s biraciality was actually a benefit for her in the eyes of white Britons, including royals. “Had Meghan not been a woman of colour,” contends Campbell, “they would never have allowed the marriage. It was the only thing that was unreservedly in her favour.” As for negative stories about the duchess, Campbell insists:

most of the people who were spreading these stories were not racist or snobbish. Many . . . were frankly concerned with the way Meghan and

Harry had been conducting themselves. They wanted them to behave in a less aggressive, assertive, and demanding manner. ... to conduct themselves the way ... William and Catherine did. ... [Racists in Britain are] so few and far between to be of no consequence ... though their existence would confuse the American press into thinking that Meghan was a victim of racism in Britain when nothing could have been further from the truth.⁴⁴

This type of white denial of systemic racism, including the racist framing of black women, is by no means new. Today, white Britons commonly adopt a narrative that ignores or downplays the UK's extensive racist history or maintains that white racism has ceased to function as a major factor in contemporary society. The same narrative has been well-documented among whites in Markle's country of origin.

Defense of Empire and Other Contemporary British Denials of White Racism

The UK was indeed an important leader in the development of anti-racist legislation in 1960s and 1970s, soon after the postwar immigration of people of color from the Commonwealth. Yet, much of this legislation is, at best, weakly enforced. Moreover, the bulk of the country's long racial history is grounded in the extreme racial oppression that took the form of white slave-trading, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism. And though the UK saw a flowering of anti-racist movements and progressive legislation against discrimination sooner than other European countries, its extensive history of this slave-trading, slavery, colonialism, and imperialism has deeply shaped the legal, political, economic, educational, and other institutional systems of Britain. As one historian explained, the effects of the British Empire are tangible and enduring even if empire itself is "made silent, or invisible" in contemporary white memory, with the empire's white colonies still conjuring up a vanished era through the persisting narratives of "racial whiteness."⁴⁵ This global contemporary reality makes current claims of a *colorblind* or *post-racial* British society ill-informed and duplicitous.⁴⁶

In recent years, nostalgia for the British Empire has been expressed by many whites, including members of the British commentariat and polity, leading scholars, and the public. The British historian Kim Wagner explains that this defense of empire commonly reveals "delusions of past grandeur" or a "persecution complex." Britain is regularly portrayed as both "a global power and a heroic underdog, single-handedly holding off the barbarians, whether Zulus, Nazis, immigrants or the EU." Wagner continues his overview:

to even suggest that the civilising mission might have been an essentially racialised project, or that the British could be quite as brutal as,

say, the Belgians in Congo, is to challenge a particular *narrative* that so many people still hold dear. Ultimately, this is not about the past but the present, it is not about facts but feelings, and is not about history but identity.⁴⁷

Wagner notes the work of prominent white historian Jeremy Black, who has written aggressively that “[b]laming imperial rule serves a variety of cultural, intellectual and political purposes, and at a number of levels. Domestically, aside from the ‘culture wars’ and identity struggles which ... appear to be becoming more active and potent, it is in part a strategy designed to create a new public identity.”⁴⁸ While Wagner concludes there is a reasonable argument “against empire-bashing,” he believes Black’s work is highly problematic. He explains that the conservative historian “fails to acknowledge [that] while the brutality of the British empire may not have been historically unique, the way that it is still celebrated today as essentially a force for good perhaps is.”⁴⁹ Wagner adds that recent opinion polls in Britain show that a significant majority of respondents view the British Empire as something of which to be proud, and that this is evidence that the views expressed by the historian Black are not uncommon.⁵⁰

Oxford academic Nigel Biggar’s article “Don’t Feel Guilty About Our Colonial History” recently ignited controversy. Concerned that his work would be misread as demonstrative of the university’s scholarship, other Oxford-based researchers wrote in protest of his cost-benefit analysis of British imperial history.⁵¹ Backlash from right-wing newspapers soon followed that protest. The historian Jonathan Saha wrote the following in defense of Biggar’s critics.

To judge British colonial rule by its effects without taking into account its fundamentally racist legal and bureaucratic structures is to suggest that there are circumstances when white supremacy is acceptable. The argument that positive things were done through British imperialism that might excuse its inherent racism (let alone the numerous atrocities committed by British colonial regimes across the world) is ... a subtle defence of white supremacy. The claim that colonial rule did good because it “developed” colonized societies (with proponents of this position often citing improvements in medicine and infrastructure) rests on the implicit counter-factual view that without imperial intervention these societies would not have participated in modernity. ... It implies that only white rulers could have brought about these changes.⁵²

Saha further reasons that Britons who glorify the Empire see any criticism of it as synonymous to impugning modern-day Britain or as a leftist guilt-inducing campaign. An example of this public “sensitivity,” he explains, is the right-wing media’s attack on Biggar’s scholarly detractors. Another example is found in the actions of the former minister for universities and

science, and brother of Boris Johnson, Jo Johnson. Jo Johnson criticized the necessary safe-space policies for students of color on historically white campuses, by suggesting that additional security for them to participate in higher-education settings is “an attack on (implicitly) white students’ right to express themselves.”⁵³

To summarize, in defending the centuries-old British Empire, historians frequently proceed on three major assumptions, all out of a *white* racial framing of Western history. One, Western imperial rule is natural and inevitable, for it has been with us throughout the course of Western history. Accordingly, which nations realized imperial supremacy and how they have used it to prosper or fail should be our only empirical concerns. Two, British imperialists have been among the most benign colonizers in history, governing with more integrity, righteousness, and justice than not, and more fairly than their colonized nations’ earlier or subsequent rulers. Three, the British Empire is unfairly condemned via modern-day historians’ ideologies and political agendas, as opposed to objective assessments of the historical evidence.⁵⁴

In *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World System, 1830–1970*, John Darwin argues it is not helpful to keep fighting about whether the Empire was good or bad because there will never be agreement. He suggests an alternative way forward: understand how it worked and why it fell apart. Arguably, alas, we cannot move forward in such a way, given that when the former colonies achieved independence, agents of the withdrawing Empire expunged thousands of official records of transgressions committed against Indigenous peoples.⁵⁵ The concealment and destruction of such facts precludes important insights into how the British Empire actually operated and why it eventually failed.

Such cover-ups also conveniently circumvent needed reparations for past crimes. Take, for example, the story of the Koh-i-Noor diamond, which has been part of the British crown jewels for more than a century and a half. After imprisoning one heir to the Punjabi throne and forcing the other, a young boy, to sign a legal document relinquishing the gem and all claims to sovereignty, the diamond was given to Queen Victoria. Today, it is one of 2,868 diamonds that adorn Elizabeth II’s Imperial State Crown. When she complained of the crown’s weight, Twitter was abuzz with one suggestion on how to make it lighter: return the legendary Koh-i-Noor diamond to its rightful owners.⁵⁶

The 2020 Black Lives Matter Movement and Racial Injustices in British Institutions

Building on systemic-racism theory and research, we show throughout this book how white-on-black and white-on-brown subjugation and oppression have underpinned British society since at least the seventeenth century. Reflecting on this centuries-old picture, one can ask the pivotal question of how the British system of racial oppression has been regularly *reproduced*

over generations. As we demonstrate, a multi-generational approach to racial oppression is essential to a comprehensive understanding of its development and current institutions—i.e., the *social reproduction* of oppression. For Britain’s systemic racism to persist across these many generations, it must routinely create and reproduce the necessary societal institutions and their internal normative structures. Today, as in the past, these include substantial control by elite and ordinary whites of British economic, political, legal, educational, and media institutions—all critical parts of the country’s systemic racism. If you break a well-crafted, three-dimensional hologram into smaller parts and shine a laser through one part, you can project the whole holographic image again from that one part. Like such a hologram, each apparently separate British institution reflects in many ways the reality of centuries-old systemic racism. Unsurprisingly, each major institutional component of systemic racism is linked, directly or indirectly, to the other major institutional components.⁵⁷

Each new generation of Britons inherits established social institutions that protect unjust enrichment, privileges, and power for whites and unjust impoverishment, disprivilege, and disempowerment for blacks and other Britons of color. Important too is reproduction over generations of the societal framing apparatus—that is, the white racial frame that aggressively rationalizes and legitimates long-lasting racial oppression in Britain.

Later in this book we provide many examples of the harms of systemic racism in Britain. Let us anticipate that discussion briefly by considering what impelled the 2020 British Black Lives Matter movement that developed in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. Similarities in police mistreatment of black people in Britain and the USA were key to this movement. Recent statistics confirm that police in England and Wales are five times less likely to use force against whites, nine times less likely to stop and search them, and three times less likely to arrest whites than they are blacks. A black person in the UK is more than twice as likely to die in police custody, and with the police force more than twice as likely to be the cause of their death. In 2018–2019, a black person was ten times more likely to be stopped and searched in the UK than a white person, with 22 percent of searches resulting in a criminal justice outcome.⁵⁸ The lethal effects of police racism and the coronavirus pandemic, which protesters argued must be confronted simultaneously, also drove the Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Blacks in England and Wales were almost twice as likely to die from the coronavirus as whites, with poverty, congested housing, and employment in lower-paid and front-line jobs being contributing factors (see Chapter 7).

Moreover, a 2020 online survey of 1,535 British adults found that black and white respondents reported considerably different personal experiences with police officers. Forty-nine percent of black respondents said they “personally have not been treated with respect” by law enforcement versus 26 percent of white respondents who said the same. Fifty-nine percent of black respondents said a family member or friend had *not* been treated

with respect by police versus 31 percent of white respondents who said the same. Surveyors also found that 54 percent of black respondents said British police are “institutionally racist,” while just over a quarter of whites (27 percent) said the same.⁵⁹

Beyond the survey data are stories like that of Cressida Dick, commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service in London. In 2020, she told her officers not to take the knee in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. The pushback on her action was strong. “I think it is completely wrong to prevent officers—if they want to—from showing solidarity with Black communities, who are so often discriminated against and need support,” responded Labour Member of Parliament Dawn Butler. Butler continued: “If our local police followed ... Dick’s diktats, she would take our policing backwards. ... The [Black Lives Matter] movement has been so powerful and inspirational but now we must deliver on that call to action, and bring about true equity in society—where we remove *structural* and *systematic* barriers for all.”⁶⁰

In the interim, from his California home, Prince Harry spoke out publicly in support of Black Lives Matter, remarking that “institutional racism has no place in our societies, yet it is still endemic. Unconscious bias must be acknowledged without blame to create a better world for all of you.”⁶¹ And while several organizations associated with the monarchy, including the Queen’s Commonwealth Trust, posted online support for the movement, Markle and Harry were the first British royals to publicly speak in support of the movement. When addressing graduating students at her former high school, Markle emphasized the US police killings of unarmed black Americans, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor: “I wanted to say the right thing and I was really nervous that I wouldn’t, or that it would get picked apart, and I realized the only wrong thing to say is to say nothing. Because George Floyd’s life mattered and Breonna Taylor’s life mattered and Philando Castile’s life mattered and Tamir Rice’s life mattered.” “Black lives matter,” she added.⁶² Soon after, speaking to Rashad Robinson, the president of Color of Change—a US civil rights advocacy organization—Harry remarked, “we have to go to the *root of the problem*, to the *source of the problem*, and actually fix it there. ... This is not down to the Black community, this is down to every single person who is on the planet right now.” When Robinson himself remarked that we need to ensure that “we drive action towards structural and systemic change—changing the rules that have held people back,” Harry said he could not agree more, adding, “You say it so beautifully.”⁶³ Color of Change is just one group, among many, with whom Markle and Harry have engaged as they develop their awareness of systemic racism and publicly elevate the issue.

At the time of writing, Amelia Windsor, the queen’s first cousin, is the only other British royal to publicly support Black Lives Matter. She backed the movement on a social media account and participated in at least one protest. A digital editor for *Town & Country* explained why few royals did the same: “A core tenant of the British monarchy is its apolitical nature. ... Issues of racism and police brutality should not be considered political, but

unfortunately they are politicized, which is just one of the possible reasons why, despite their significant platforms, the working royals are staying quiet at this moment.”⁶⁴

Speaking in defense of the royal family, a former press secretary to Elizabeth II responded to Markle’s speech to the graduating students at her former Los Angeles high school as follows:

What’s happened in the states is an absolute tragedy and it should never have happened but unfortunately it did happen. Had Meghan and Harry still been in the U.K. and working members of the royal family that speech couldn’t have happened. I’m talking about the whole speech It’s highly politicized because of the very nature of what it is.⁶⁵

Note this ex-press secretary’s qualification, “What’s happened in the states,” as if the killing of unarmed black men at the hands of white police is unique to the United States. Remember, too, that the duchess had said in the speech that “Black lives matter,” a statement that should be moderate enough for other British royals also to utter.

The claim that the British royal family is apolitical is a myth. In 2001, Prince Charles—heir to the throne—complained about the European Convention on Human Rights, referring to it as “compensation culture” (see Chapter 6). Elizabeth II’s well-known yearning for Scotland to remain in Britain and for Turkey to stay out of the European Union are two more recent examples that shatter the illusion of an apolitical royal family. In exchange for Adolf Hitler making no further demands for European lands, George VI publicly supported the 1938 Munich Pact—the international agreement that allowed Hitler to claim the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, which had a predominately German population (see Chapter 6). And there is, of course, the monstrous political legacy of monarchs like Queen Victoria during her long reign over violent British colonization across the globe, as documented in Mike Davis’s *Late Victorian Holocausts*.⁶⁶ When a statue of Victoria was recently defaced in Manitoba (Canada), the scholar Jason Hannan explained why. Victoria “was in charge during the key period of relations between First Nations and a colonial occupying power, which kicked people off of their land, which forced Indigenous people onto reserves and, eventually, which led to policies like residential [Indian] schools.”⁶⁷

Admitting she was not surprised that the British royal family had mostly failed to publicly comment on the Black Lives Matter movement, writer Mikhaila Friel describes their most obvious link to institutionalized racism: the centuries of African slavery and the slave trade, for which the queen has failed to apologize, and from which she and her family have greatly benefited. The failure to condemn this violent political legacy says much about the royal family’s white privilege mentality, argues Friel. That the queen has not apologized is symptomatic of an absence of regret, of antipathy to addressing historic wrongs, and of a disingenuous commitment to multi-racial Britain.⁶⁸

In summer 2020, this white-privilege mentality was on full display again, when a medal that the queen customarily awards to diplomats and senior Foreign Office officials who have served abroad was exposed as racist in its design. Created in 1818 under George III, this medal of the Order of St Michael portrays a white, blond, and blue-eyed Archangel trampling on a Satan figure who has dark skin and hair. The Scottish Nigerian musician Bumi Thomas offers a different interpretation of the medal, linking its imagery to centuries of British systemic racism and colonialism, and to the white American police officer who pressed his knee on George Floyd's neck long enough to kill him. She explains:

It is not a demon; it is a black man in chains with a white, blue-eyed figure standing on his neck. It is literally what happened to George Floyd [whose death led to the global Black Lives Matter movement] and what has been happening to black people for centuries under the guise of diplomatic missions: active, subliminal messaging that reinforces the conquest, subjugation and dehumanisation of people of colour. It is a depiction on a supposed honour of the subjugation of the black and brown people of the world and the superiority of the white, a construct born in the 16th century. It is the definition of institutional racism that this image is not only permitted but celebrated on one of the country's highest honours. Whilst statues are being pulled down and relocated, emblems and symbols of this nature also need to be redesigned to reflect a more progressive, holistic relationship between Britain and the Commonwealth nations.⁶⁹

Two other racialized events—the Grenfell Tower fire and the aforementioned Windrush scandal—serve as further links between the brutal police killing of Floyd in the USA and the British Black Lives Matter movement. The 2017 fire was the UK's deadliest domestic tragedy since World War II. It stemmed from what should have been a containable kitchen fire and caused the deaths of at least 71 people, mostly people of color. Anti-racism activists have argued that the fire was the direct result of systemic racism and systemic classism, including residents' unheeded pre-fire safety complaints. The engineer selected by Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson to lead an inquiry into the tragedy had previously headed an engineering industry group that had received a substantial grant from Arconic Corporation's charitable arm, the firm responsible for the tower's dangerous combustible casing.⁷⁰ As the scholar Maya Goodfellow explains, the “charred remains of Grenfell Tower stand in London's landscape as evidence of the deadly effects of austerity, deregulation, gentrification and legislated corporate greed.”⁷¹ We would add persisting systemic racism to this sad list.

The black anti-racist activist Doreen Lawrence has spoken out about the role institutionalized racism played in the 2017 fire. Since 1993, when her young son Stephen Lawrence was murdered by white youths, she has been

fighting for racial justice. She was reminded of what an uphill battle that is when, in 2020, London's Metropolitan Police announced that its investigation into her son's murder would "move to an inactive phase." Over 20 years prior, an inquiry into his death concluded that "institutional racism" does affect British policing. That the police moved the investigation to inactive when the white conservative Boris Johnson was leading the country is significant. In articles Johnson penned in 1999–2000, he claimed that the inquiry into Lawrence's death had caused "the cowing of the police" and had trapped them in unjustified "racial awareness programs." When asked if he still holds these views 20 years later, the prime minister refused to answer.⁷²

A year after the Grenfell Tower fire, thousands of blacks who had arrived in Britain in the decades between 1948 and 1971 from Commonwealth countries in the Caribbean and Africa (the "Windrush" generation) were erroneously told they were not lawfully in Britain (see Chapter 3). Political activist Patrick Vernon has suggested such discriminatory events highlight a number of questions for black Britons: "Are we really British? Are we valued? Is our contribution valued in this country? The whole Black Lives Matter thing crystallises that."⁷³

According to a 2020 online survey of 1,535 British adults, some 55 percent of black respondents said they did not trust the government to prevent future Windrush-style racial discrimination; whereas, 55 percent of whites said they were confident that this would not happen again. This online survey also found that 33 percent of black respondents versus 11 percent of white respondents believe the UK has "not done anywhere near enough" to address historical racial injustices.⁷⁴ Today, a majority of white Britons, including the queen, prefer to ignore past centuries of racial oppression or to mentally separate that past oppression from the present.

Reproduction of systemic racism over long centuries has been considered more or less normal by most white Britons, and the ways and mechanisms by which this racist system has been reproduced and transmitted over generations have received too little attention in social science analyses. The large-scale racist institutions, such as the racialized economy and government, imbed white-controlled normative structures and social networks, and routinely perpetuate internal racial hierarchies and inequalities. These institutions are constantly created, recreated, and maintained by the processes of institutionalization, including legal processes, and by the racially conforming actions at the micro level of most whites. The so-called apolitical nature of the British monarchy is part of these processes. We pause now to consider some technicalities of the constitutional monarchy and further consider its allegedly apolitical nature.

A Powerful Constitutional Monarchy: A Brief History

Parliament is currently the legislative assembly of the UK. The political entity called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland (UK)—the sovereign state that existed between 1801 and 1922—was created by the

Acts of Union at the turn of the nineteenth century. (This state is now called the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.) The UK has long had legislative assemblies called parliaments, early on with one branch of Lords (aristocrats and royals) and one of Commons (ordinary people). The parliaments have a long history of struggles to limit the power of British monarchs. The monarchy is centuries old, and for many of those centuries was absolutely powerful. By the late 1600s, the power of kings and queens had declined and the “relationship between the Lords and Commons had shifted in favour of the Commons.” The 1832 Reform Act further modernized and democratized electoral procedures, as did other such Acts in the early and mid-1900s. Over time the House of Commons became by far the dominant branch of Parliament, as it is today.⁷⁵

Nowadays, sessions of the British Parliament are opened with “a speech by the monarch from the throne in the House of Lords in the presence of members of the House of Commons. The speech, written by the government ... contains a list of proposals that the government intends to introduce in the upcoming parliamentary session.”⁷⁶ Being told what to do by the leadership of the dominant political party suggests the British monarch is weak, irrelevant, and an anachronism. That is not true, for the monarch still has numerous political powers that are periodically utilized as “reserve weapons” of the British ruling elite, of which the monarch is a critical part.

At the end of Queen Victoria’s long reign in 1901, that white-male elite spent much money building up the symbolic and ceremonial aspects of the British monarchy, and to protect certain reserve powers, even as voting rights of ordinary white men were expanded. In this way the refurbished monarchy has long been used via symbolic means to reinforce the country’s traditional ruling class structure.⁷⁷ The monarchy and its accoutrements have remained a *critical symbolic backup* for the British elite-white-male dominance system, assisting in conning a majority of Britons to accept this hierarchical reality to the present day.

Moreover, the monarchy is still about more than just powerful symbolism. The reigning monarch is official head of the Privy Council, the oldest form of legislative assembly in Britain. Among other things, this powerful council plays a role in specific statutory regulatory bodies (e.g., healthcare, higher education). According to the royal website, “It is the court of final appeal for the UK overseas territories and Crown Dependencies, and for those Commonwealth countries that have retained the appeal to Her Majesty in Council, including Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua and Barbuda, Belize and Tuvalu.” Approximately 700 elite political advisers serve on the Council, mostly major politicians and present or former members of the House of Commons and House of Lords. A handful of them attend monthly meetings where the Council secures the monarch’s formal approval to a number of “Orders” previously discussed and approved by Cabinet ministers.⁷⁸

The official royal website includes a superficial outline of what is discussed during the monthly meetings. Mainly, it includes who of the

rotating roster of Cabinet ministers have been in attendance alongside the Lord President, who is always present. At the time of writing, Conservative Member of Parliament Jacob Rees-Mogg occupies this role. Council meetings are not open, leading *The Guardian* correspondent Jon Henley to describe how difficult reporting on the Council is: “Piercing the dense fog of obscurity that shrouds this most august of institutions” requires “exhaustive research undertaken in various dusty corners of the internet.”⁷⁹ To imagine what goes on beyond the gilded gate, one might consider Rees-Mogg, who is typical of the top echelon of the elite: white, male, Christian, son of a Tory peer, and privately educated.

When asked to respond to a survey that found that 28 percent of then-Prime Minister David Cameron’s wishlist of future Conservative Members of Parliament were schooled at Oxford or Cambridge, and that 52 percent were privately educated, Rees-Mogg replied: “Oxford and Cambridge are world-renowned universities that get the cr me of British academic life. It would be absolutely perverse to be biased against some of the cleverest people in the country.” Clearly, he is oblivious to how white male privilege and systemic racial, gender, and class oppressions work—a tendency among members of the white elite.⁸⁰

Just *four* Cabinet ministers attend monthly Privy Council meetings with the queen, and Rees-Mogg is permanently in attendance, accenting the inner workings of the white British establishment. This reveals who closely advises the monarch, as does the fact that the overwhelming majority of the 700-member Council is white and male. Calculating from members listed on the Privy Council website as of mid-2020, we determined the gender and racial group of each via a search of news articles and biographies.⁸¹ They are predominantly white men (541, or 77 percent), while another 105 (15 percent) are white women. Hence, whites make up 92 percent of the Council. Just 55 (about 8 percent) are people of color. Half of the people of color are from Commonwealth nations.

One of our goals is to move away from typical passive tenses and vague nouns in discussing those who have ruled Britain. To understand British society we must understand well its controlling private and public networks and organizations, such as the royal establishment manifested in the Privy Council. To understand what a society is, and to make solid predictions about its future, we must also study the dominant racial, class, and gender framing in the minds of elite white men who constitute, with a few others, the top decision-making class. Alas, few societal analysts have made systematic use of a specific analytical concept like *elite white men* for those who constitute the overwhelming majority of these most powerful decision-makers. Their everyday choices and actions regularly shape not only major British institutions but also some major institutions in Commonwealth countries across the globe.

This influential Privy Council advises the monarch on her/his required official duties, including enacting Acts of Parliament, issuing Royal Charters to various organizations, making treaties, awarding national

honors, and making official appointments. The monarch's powers also include the ability to suspend parliament and even to "dismiss an elected government from office."⁸²

Significantly, as James Kilby and Rob Sewell note, "We are led to believe that such powers . . . are a relic of our feudal past." But these powers are far from hypothetical. For example, the significance of this power reserve was made clear during the 1975 Australian constitutional crisis when Elizabeth II—as Australian and British queen—dismissed Prime Minister Gough Whitlam of the Australian Labor Party. Besides the deposed prime minister and the queen, the crisis also involved Sir John Kerr (the governor general who formally dismissed Whitlam in his capacity as the queen's representative) and Malcolm Fraser (leader of the opposition and Liberal Party, appointed to replace Whitlam). This crisis was a type of coup against the Australian Labor government. Clearly, the British monarch can and does implement enduring stately power. "[T]hese powers . . . are simply held back to be used as a last roll of the dice for the *ruling class*."⁸³

Australian scholar Jenny Hocking writes that: "As an autonomous post-colonial nation, we assume that the Queen exercises no residual monarchical power over our system of governance. . . . This assumption is misplaced." The queen was not politically impartial regarding Australia's political matters. Kerr's private papers disclose that Buckingham Palace was involved in the planning that led to Whitlam's dismissal. Hocking was forced to legally seek the release of secret letters between the queen and Kerr. "These historic letters, critical to our understanding of the dismissal, are held by our National Archives in Canberra [the capital of Australia] where they are kept hidden from us under the strict, and potentially indefinite, embargo of the Queen," explains Hocking.⁸⁴

More recently, in 2019, the British Labour Party joined with the Liberal Democrats to call for the queen to intervene to stop the new Conservative Party leader, Boris Johnson, from suspending (proroguing) Parliament. Instead, the queen intervened to permit Johnson to take this action to continue with his aggressive plans to remove Britain from its long engagement with the European Union (Brexit). Her action created worry among the ruling elite because monarchical power works best when *hidden*. This use of the queen's prerogative to suspend Parliament, as one left-leaning commentator put it, "further revealed the rottenness of the British state. In normal times, the Monarchy's involvement in politics is kept to a minimum." Later, the British Supreme Court ruled Johnson's request to the queen for parliamentary suspension was illegal under the unwritten British constitution.⁸⁵

In the future, moreover, this significant monarchical power can "be used against a left Labour government that attempts to challenge the power and privileges of the big banks and [corporate] monopolies. . . . [T]his is the main role of the monarchy and the reason why it has been kept in being by the ruling class for so long."⁸⁶ One key aspect of this monarchical preservation is seen in vigorous efforts by the ruling white elite to keep the

allegiance of the British population, which in the majority still supports the nationalistic symbolism and mystique of the white monarchy. Recent ratings of Elizabeth II by a nationally representative British sample found that 73 percent had a positive view of her, with just 10 percent stating a negative opinion. In addition, a 2020 survey of British adults found that a majority, 62 percent, thought that Britain should have a monarchy, versus 22 percent who were opposed.⁸⁷

Who Owns Britain? Racial and Class Lessons from the Coronavirus Pandemic

The queen and her closest family members have colossal wealth in land and investments. This in itself is political, as is widening inequality. The coronavirus pandemic has further exposed these extreme societal inequalities. Take the Duchy of Cornwall, for example. Funding most of Prince Charles's yearly expenses, it includes 53,000 hectares spread across 23 UK counties. In 2016, the Duchy of Cornwall was valued at over £1 billion. In 2019, Charles received £21.6 million in proceeds from this country estate.⁸⁸ At Birkhall, his huge Scottish estate where he recovered from the coronavirus, he was isolated and waited on by servants. A royal reporter at *Vanity Fair* reported at the time: "There is a personal assistant on hand to assist and someone preparing his food and that is it. . . . The food is taken to the door, the staff member retreats, and the prince takes his meal."⁸⁹

Weeks from her ninety-fourth birthday in 2020, the queen was chauffeured to Windsor Castle from Buckingham Palace during the pandemic for her own personal safety. Similarly, as a child she moved to Windsor Castle from Buckingham Palace during the German bombing against the UK. Spanning 13 acres and consisting of 1,000 rooms, Windsor is the largest occupied castle in the world. Buckingham Palace—with its 19 state rooms, 52 royal and guest bedrooms, 188 staff bedrooms, 92 offices, and 78 bathrooms—is located in the center of London and has 500 staff, making it less safe for the elderly monarch. Notably, 22 royal staff—including a chef, housemaid, personal butler, and the monarch's personal assistant and dressmaker—forfeited their home lives, perhaps even their health, to stay quarantined at Windsor Castle to serve the queen and her husband (Prince Philip) during the coronavirus pandemic.⁹⁰

Prominent royal pundits, including Ingrid Seward, editor of the popular royal magazine *Majesty*, said little or nothing about the royal staff's potentially risky sacrifices or the queen's opulent surroundings. Rather, Seward equates the queen's life during the coronavirus pandemic to imprisonment, remarking: "The last time she was incarcerated in Windsor Castle was in 1940."⁹¹ Of course, the queen's isolation was very different to that of actual British prison inmates—of which 12 percent are black, even though they account for 3 percent of the nation's population. During the pandemic, inmates generally had no more than 45 minutes a day outside their cells, resulting in growing rates of depression.⁹²

Describing her very privileged existence under quarantine at Windsor Castle, a former spokesperson for the queen said she and Prince Philip “might well go outside for a walk as everybody else is doing. Windsor Home Park is [the private 655-acre estate of the castle] ... you could get lost in it without meeting anybody.”⁹³ Note the assumption that *everybody* can similarly take a harmless walk. To the contrary, the coronavirus left many in Britain afraid of venturing outside, especially people of Asian origin, who feared the growth in anti-Asian hate crimes there before official quarantine even began (see Chapter 7).

A recent University of Exeter study found that access to a private garden translates into greater psychological well-being and that people with access to open-air spaces, such as a backyard, are more likely to stay physically fit. Here is an additional fact the former spokesperson and any well-off Briton hoarding many acres of green space for their private use seem willfully unaware of: low-paid working-class populations, in which people of color predominate, are nearly three times as likely not to have a private garden and to rely on local parks. Access to green space is therefore another example—along with the ability of more white Britons to work from home and the racialized death rates resulting from the coronavirus—of the racially coded nature of the pandemic.⁹⁴

Not much was made about the choices senior British royals had when it came to where to live during the pandemic, despite the fact that at the opposite end of the spectrum were reportedly 4,266 “rough sleepers”—a British term for homeless people. Some researchers suggested the actual figure was much higher. Rough sleepers were particularly vulnerable to the coronavirus because they were much more likely to have pre-existing chronic health conditions and were unable to abide by necessary sanitation protocols.⁹⁵ Five years prior to the pandemic, the *Daily Mail* ran the headline “Homeless Migrants Sleep Huddled On Steps Just Metres From Queen’s Residence,” noting that many “men and women, believed to be mainly Romanian and Bulgarian nationals, can often be seen camped out on grass ... where homes can sell for tens of millions of pounds.”⁹⁶

In 2019, less than 1 percent of the population was exposed by Guy Shrubsole, an environmental activist, as owning *half* of England. Major landholders include the queen, numerous other aristocrats and gentry, Saudi princes, and wealthy business people. Not much in this severely skewed ownership pattern has changed for centuries, yet few Britons are cognizant of these facts. Shrubsole estimates that the land under the ownership of the royal family alone equals 1.4 percent of England. Additionally, the queen, by means of her Duchy of Lancaster, owns huge boggy areas for grouse hunting on her Whitewell Estate and in the North York Moors. Grouse moors are known to contribute to global warming, flooding, extinction of animals, fires, and other environmental destruction. An economist at the Institute for Public Policy Research, the UK’s foremost progressive think tank, notes: “We have this idea that the class structures have changed so that the aristocracy is not as important as it used to be. What

this demonstrates is the continuing importance of the aristocracy's wealth and power in our society."⁹⁷

Unmistakably, highlighting these huge class inequalities provides an important take on the monarchy and its central role within the British ruling elite, including its colonial history and expansive expectations. But the research we draw on for this discussion badly needs to be broadened to explain how the contemporary ruling elite is not just a classed (i.e., capitalistic) elite but also a white-racist (and often male-sexist) elite, as we fully demonstrate throughout this book.

Systemic Racism: A Brief History of British Imperialism

The large-scale slaughter, colonization, and enslavement of Indigenous peoples is central to the emergence of Britain's systemic racism, in its onshore and offshore variations. Consider the famous admiral Sir John Hawkins (1532–1595). He appears to have been the first English colonizer to get rich off the backs of enslaved Africans. In 1562–1563, he enslaved at least 300 Guinea-coast Africans. Their destination was the Caribbean island of Hispaniola (currently Haiti and the Dominican Republic), where Hawkins sold them for a sizeable profit to Spaniards. At the time the powerful Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) sat on the English throne. She funded Hawkins's second slaving voyage in 1564–1565. Earlier, England's King Henry VII (1457–1509) commissioned the first explorers of the so-called new world. Led by John Cabot, a 1497 landfall on the coast of North America and the eventual settling of English, Irish, and Scottish people there caused, among other things, the extinction of the Beothuk—a group of Indigenous people living on the island of Newfoundland. Henry VII, like Elizabeth I after him, encouraged exploration and the conquering of lands and people, with the goal of procuring treasures.⁹⁸

If we calculate the length of British involvement in the Atlantic slavery system from the date of Hawkins's first voyage to the African continent to the final abolition of slavery in the British colonies, the British transatlantic slave trade lasted for about 271 years. Additionally, the end of centuries of slavery was followed by extensive racial segregation and other discrimination targeting black Britons, to the present day. In contrast, the 1965 Race Relations Act—the first legislation in the UK to firmly address racial discrimination—was a mere 53 years old when Markle married Harry, and it has not been aggressively enforced. These numbers reveal in glaring terms the length of time that British society's foundational social structure has encompassed extensive racial oppression and white racial tyranny.⁹⁹

In addition to central participation in the slave trade, the English elite launched major overseas colonies starting in the sixteenth century. Many involved substantial slavery systems. Eventually, English (later British) control was so global that at any one time there was daylight in one of the territories, leading to the maxim, "the Empire on which the sun never sets." Put another way, at its pinnacle in 1920, the British Empire ruled

over approximately 412 million people, or 23 percent of the global population. At its height, this highly racialized empire included 57 colonies, dominions, territories, and protectorates from Australia, Canada, and India to Fiji, Western Samoa, and Tonga. From London, the mostly white male elite governed and ruled virtually a quarter of the world's landmass.¹⁰⁰

The British Empire lasted half a millennium, if one marks its beginning from Cabot's voyage in 1497 to the transfer of Hong Kong to China in 1997. Others mark the end of the Empire officially in 1947, when the British cabled Washington, DC that they no longer had the wherewithal to defend Greece or Turkey as the USSR loomed large.¹⁰¹ Most of those colonized, exploited, or killed off in this imperialism were, to use contemporary terminology, people of color. Globalized English (later British) oppression conspicuously reveals the length of time that eurocentric (later white racial) supremacy has been a standard part of the UK's foundational political and social structure.

Since the eighteenth century, the explicitly racial hierarchy at the heart of systemic racism has been a dominant and powerful force within the UK, as in North America. "The Secret Teacher," an anonymous blog by experienced teachers, captures well how the historically oppressive treatment of people of color by white Britons, including the elite, awkwardly coincides with the British rhetorical values of freedom, justice, and the rule of law.

Race issues are increasingly being discussed ... thanks in part to social media and movements such as #BlackLivesMatter. ... But the UK education system does not prepare children to have these conversations. ... Amid the units about the slave trade, abolition and the Civil Rights movement in the US, we forget the Civil Rights movement in the UK, unless teachers choose to include specific case studies. The brutalities and crimes of the British empire are ignored. Even Winston Churchill, who ... believed in racial hierarchies and eugenics, escapes scrutiny beyond his war hero reputation. Students are led to believe racism and discrimination came out of the ether in this country. That adds to the marginalisation many feel, and has a profound impact on students' understanding of racism. ... In whitewashing the discrimination and bloodshed ... is it any such a wonder that parts of society are racist, misogynistic and prejudiced?¹⁰²

Notice the continuing significance of the British Empire, as its brutal and criminal realities are frequently ignored inside and outside the classroom. The white elite that shapes the culture of learning in British schools is central to this whitewashing. In 2013, the education secretary—a white male member of the Conservative Party—claimed that the teaching of British history was too often about "post-colonial guilt." However, he was forced to redraft plans to modify the more honest history curriculum after widespread condemnation by teachers at all levels. Critics were justly

concerned that his proposals were saturated by white nationalism. Even though the curriculum was rewritten, calls for more “British history”—code for white history—have not disappeared. Such white nationalist claims were bolstered by the Brexit debates, especially on immigration, and the election of white nationalists Boris Johnson in the UK and Donald Trump in the USA. The USA has seen similar calls for sanitizing and ignoring its white-racist history coming out of white supremacists in the Trump White House.¹⁰³

Legacies of a Racialized Empire: Contemporary Racial Discrimination

Efforts in the UK to remedy systemic racial discrimination and inequality in education, employment, housing, politics, and other legacies of British imperialism and slavery are regularly met with contradictory and incongruous claims of “reverse-racism,” as in the USA. Assertions that officially ending legal discrimination was sufficient and that further attempts generate unjust impediments for whites, especially white men, are popular among white Britons. Such assertions discount the continuing consequences of British imperialism, as centuries of systemic racial oppression continue to influence racial discrimination and disparities in the present day. These contradictory and incongruous claims help to legitimate persisting and huge racial inequality, as is evidenced in the average black college graduate earning approximately a quarter less than the average white graduate; in the black unemployment rate being roughly twice as high as the white rate; and in black Britons being considerably less likely than white Britons to attend a leading university or attain a managerial position.¹⁰⁴

We should note the demography of British racial groups (also called ethnic minorities) at this point. In the most current population estimates for England (2016), whites make up 84.9 percent of the population, a slight decline since the 2011 census, with the remaining 15.1 percent being people of color. The latter are listed as 3.5 percent black (mostly African British, African Caribbean British), 8 percent South and East Asian, and 3.7 percent mixed-race or other (mostly black white, Asian white, Arab British).¹⁰⁵

These Britons of color remain vastly under-represented in positions of influence, including in politics, academia, and the judiciary. Consider the British Parliament. Before the 2015 general election, in which Boris Johnson (then London mayor, soon after prime minister) was running for a House of Commons seat, a broadcaster suggested that voters had a choice between him and another white man who had attended primary school with Johnson, or a white man who had been at secondary school with Johnson. The broadcaster’s observations capture the reality of the old white boys’ network, which remains at the heart of the British elite. In that election, Members of Parliament—hailed as the most diverse group ever—included a mere 29 percent that were women, even though women

comprise half the UK population. Racial minority Members of Parliament totaled 6 percent of the newly elected Parliament, in spite of representing more than double that percentage in the overall population that year. To put the numbers here in proportion, consider that voters would have needed to elect 130 additional women and more than twice the number of racial minority Members of Parliament to be representative of the UK population. Clearly, UK political parties and norms are not dedicated to that democratic principle.¹⁰⁶

Racial discrimination and inequality remain well-institutionalized and thus systemic. White Britons, on average, have more wealth, more education, and higher incomes than Britons of color, and many whites rationalize this unjust reality by drawing on the timeworn white framing of Britons of color as lazy, uncivilized, or inferior to whites. Many whites continue to ardently support and actively maintain racial inequalities in various societal settings, including engaging in everyday discrimination that has a weighty impact on Britain's social structure. A recent survey of 1,000 Britons of color found they were consistently more likely to encounter negative everyday experiences (usually related to racial discrimination) than whites in a comparison poll. Some 43 percent reported having been discriminated against in regard to job promotions in recent years, as compared to 18 percent of whites. Britons of color were "three times as likely to have been thrown out of or denied entrance to a restaurant, bar or club in the last five years" as whites. Britons of color were much more likely than whites to report having been "wrongly suspected of shoplifting in the last five years." They were more than twice as likely as whites to have faced abuse from strangers during the last week. Just over half said they had suffered discrimination because of their physical appearance, as compared with less than a third of whites. They also reported they had to work harder to succeed than whites and were paid less than whites for comparable work.¹⁰⁷

These findings came a year after Prime Minister Theresa May (2016–2019) published a "race disparity" audit. This audit combined government statistics and covered racial breakdowns in 130 areas across health, education, housing, employment, and criminal justice. Among the audit's findings were: "Bangladeshi and Pakistani households had an average income of nearly £9,000 a year less than white British households between 2014 and 2016, and the gap between white and black Caribbean and black British families was £5,500." Some 41 percent of Britons of color reported having been treated as *not* British in the last year. When dining out or shopping, they were twice as likely as whites to have been mistaken for staff in restaurants and stores. Half of black Britons reported job discrimination, as did 41 percent of Asian Britons. Britons of Middle Eastern descent (typically Muslim) were more likely to face discrimination than people of other religious backgrounds; this included being unfairly stopped by police and whites not sitting next to them on buses and trains. The government report also found that "black Caribbean pupils are permanently excluded from school at three times the rate of white British pupils" and that "black

men are more likely to be found guilty at crown court” than whites with comparable cases. The “race disparity” audit also reported that unemployment rates for Britons of color were significantly higher than for whites across the country.¹⁰⁸

A recent investigation by the BBC’s *Inside Out London* program uncovered anti-black racism in UK rental housing. Posing as a white landlord, an investigative reporter asked ten real estate agents not to rent his property to African Caribbean people. All ten agents agreed. “We cannot be shown discriminating against a community. But obviously we’ve got our ways around that. Ninety-nine per cent of my landlords don’t want Afro-Caribbeans, or any troublesome people,” explained one white agent. “Afro-Caribbeans” and “troublesome people” are often synonyms in white racial framing. Words matched deeds; a white investigator who asked to view the rental property was granted access; whereas, a black investigator, with the exact same credentials, was told the property was already rented. Contemporary discrimination often involves this sort of racialized lying and opportunity hoarding by whites.¹⁰⁹

Contemporary social scientists and other social researchers detail the pervasiveness and centrality of this racial oppression and inequality. Their research makes clear that whites as individuals and collectively are adept in safeguarding the country’s systemic racism and its white power and privileges. Rather than inactive bystanders or insurgent allies working to dismantle systemic racism, most whites in the UK, as in other white-dominant nations like the USA and Canada, work to protect unjust racial opportunities and benefits within the economic, social, political, and legal institutions that were originally constructed to create, champion, and protect white power and privilege. As African American philosopher George Yancy maintains, white privilege cannot be separated from “the oppressive consequences and implications tied to it in relationship to Black [and we would add brown] bodies.”¹¹⁰ In our view, to have any real chance at challenging systemic racism in the UK, white Britons must first accept the harsh truths about what being white really means in a Western society that was created, and has been maintained to systemically empower, enrich, and privilege whites.

The Enduring Significance of the First Lords of Modern Predatory Capitalism

The Legacies of British Slavery and Colonialism

In the immediate run-up to the 2018 wedding of Markle and Harry, much was made of an enslaved African American woman, Nancy Bowers. She was Markle’s great-great-great-great maternal grandmother and was born into slavery in 1820s Georgia, a new US slave state at the time.¹¹¹ In mainstream media discussions of Bowers, much less was said about the centuries of *British* slavery and their extensive consequences for Britain, to

the present day. This capitalistic slavery became foundational for modern British economic development.

White English colonists established a modern slave society in Barbados in the early seventeenth century, basing the territory's economy on enslaved labor. Plantation slavery developed over centuries throughout the Caribbean, South America, and the southern USA, where Bowers was born. Markle's four-times great-grandmother was thus born into a reality of horror and anguish, perfected by white English colonists, among whom were the forbearers of the family that Markle married into—a royal family who, like others in the British elite, benefitted immensely from the profitable triangle of trade between the west coast of Africa, the Americas, and England (soon Britain). Britain could not have become the dominant economic force on the planet by the turn of the nineteenth century without controlling many of the world's major slave plantations, enslaving in excess of 800,000 people by that time.¹¹²

The extensiveness of this enslavement history is glaringly obvious, given its many graphic legacies. There is the fact that approximately 33 percent of the properties under the care of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty are linked to slavery and colonialism. Remarkably, the director of culture and engagement for the National Trust said the release of this data is not meant to be a judgment on history. "We're presenting information based on research, allowing people to explore and draw conclusions for themselves. No one alive today can ever be held responsible for the wrongs of the period when slavery took place, but we can seek to understand this better."¹¹³ His words suggest a *white fragility* or a misdirected sensitivity to issues surrounding this history. It is likely that the director is afraid of offending white Britons and hence his understated prose. His comments are also problematic given the massive wealth transfers that even the National Trust references. Writing on behalf of the Trust, Lucy Porten explains the following about the East India Company, whose "conquest of India," she argues, "almost certainly remains the supreme act of corporate violence in world history."

For over 250 years, [the company] led a complex global trading network. ... At least 229 landed estates were purchased in Britain by those who had made their fortune either as employees of the company or as independent merchants in India between 1700 and 1850. Among the properties now cared for by the National Trust, at least 50 have a connection to the company, be it through past owners or their family members, those who worked for, supplied, supported or opposed it, or through the items in our collections, their commission, acquisition or subject matter. Often, such a connection can be found across several generations, even if the property in question changed hands.¹¹⁴

The historical vestiges of slavery and colonialism also include buildings named in honor of slaveowners and statues as memorials to

them. Seventeenth-century slave trader Edward Colston, who gave huge sums of money to the city of Bristol in southwest England, is but one example. He made his fortune on the blood, sweat, and tears of the 85,000 Africans he helped enslave while managing the Royal African Company (RAC). Significantly, following the 2020 killing of yet another unarmed black man by a white police officer in the USA, protesters in Bristol tore down a Colston statue and dumped it into the harbor.¹¹⁵ The actual significance of this protest act—acknowledging the foundational nature of British racism—was lost on Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who insisted that such anti-racist demonstrations had been “subverted by thuggery.”¹¹⁶

The actual violent *thugs* were men like Colston, who should have been knocked off their prestigious pedestals long ago. Johnson’s reaction to the statue’s destruction is no surprise. In 2016, he questioned why US President Barack Obama had removed a bust of the openly racist Winston Churchill from his presidential office, writing, “Some said it was a snub to Britain. Some said it was a symbol of the part-Kenyan President’s *ancestral dislike* of the British empire—of which Churchill had been such a fervent defender. . . . [I]f that’s why Churchill was banished from the Oval Office, they could not have been more wrong.”¹¹⁷

On several occasions during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, Johnson admitted that UK racism exists, although minimizing the issue. An ardent white-racist framer, he re-victimized people of color, laying the blame in part at their feet, saying: “What I really want to do as Prime Minister is change the narrative so we *stop the sense of victimization* and discrimination, we stamp out racism and *we start to have a real sense of expectation of success*.” While he announced a new cross-governmental commission to investigate racism and discrimination, he had previously failed to implement findings arising from earlier government inquiries and reports on racist practices. What’s more, he appointed his political advisor Munira Mirza to head the new commission. She is an elite acolyte of his, one with a conservative colorblind ideology even though a woman of color. She has openly referred to institutional racism as a myth.¹¹⁸ People of color often operate, because of societal pressure or personal choice, out of some version of the dominant white racial frame. White racial framing has never been limited to just whites.

During this same period, Home Secretary Priti Patel—also a woman of color and elite acolyte with a conservative colorblind ideology (see Chapter 5)—labeled the political acts of Black Lives Matter protesters “sheer vandalism” and vowed to bring them to justice.¹¹⁹ No mention was made by Johnson or Patel of the fact that almost a third of all UK police custody deaths in the past two years (2019–2020) were of black people.¹²⁰

On June 7, 2020, anti-racist protesters in central London added the accurate words “was a racist” to Winston Churchill’s statue in Parliament Square. While video footage showed a small group trying to protect the statue, a larger group of protesters chanted “Churchill was a racist”

and “Boris [Johnson] is a racist.” Signs containing the words “British Colonialism is to blame” and “What if it was your son?” were left at the base of the statue.¹²¹

Nearly two decades before these anti-racism protests, Johnson had referred to the continent of Africa as a “mess.” Writing, as usual, from his strong white-racist framing, he explained his imperialistic view.

{W}e must ... not blame Britain, or colonialism, or the white man. The continent may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more. ... The best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction; on the understanding that this time they will not be asked to feel guilty.¹²²

Johnson, unsurprisingly, leaves out of his calculus the huge white-enriching exploitation and impoverishment of Africa over several centuries, to the present day—exploitation that helped greatly in making Britain a wealthy Western country. Contrast Johnson’s reaction to the Black Lives Matter protests to that of historian David Olusoga, who duly explains: “Statues are about saying ‘This was a great man who did great things.’ That is not true, [Colston] was a slave trader and a murderer.” The mayor of Bristol, Marvin Rees—who like Markle is mixed-race—also argues in defense of those who consider Colston’s statue “an affront to humanity,” saying their views should be taken seriously.¹²³

Significantly, a 2020 online survey of 1,535 British adults found that black respondents were more than twice as likely as white respondents to say they are “offended by statues of people who were involved in the slave trade or colonization.” Two-thirds of black adults agreed, but just under a third of whites did. Additionally, blacks were roughly twice as likely as whites to support the removal of such statues. Moreover, 81 percent of black respondents and 64 percent of white respondents said they understood why people would want the offensive monuments removed.¹²⁴

To comprehend the continuing oppression that takes form in police misconduct against black and brown bodies, one must do at least two things. One, expose who actually runs the country, as well as their racial, class, and gender framing. Two, recognize that the white-racist oppression of people of color is not new but has been foundational to and systemic in UK society since at least the seventeenth century. Both actions are at the heart of the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests. The anti-racism activist who said, “You can’t enslave people, have the largest colonial empire in history and be like ‘Yeah let’s be peaceful—let’s talk.’ It don’t work like that,” understands the necessity of doing both, as do scholars like Olusoga.¹²⁵ Nearly 300 years after the death of Colston, elite white men and their acolytes mostly still do not recognize the necessity of doing either, which is key to the furtherance of systemic racism.

Another instance of whites' downplaying the historical suffering of enslaved human beings is the fact that the Royal African Company (RAC), which Colston managed, had earlier been named the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa. Such linguistic denial is important to the dominant white frame, now over several centuries. "Adventurers Trading to Africa" sounds more like a bunch of innocuous globetrotters than predatory capitalists, mass murderers, and enslaving captors. Such white misrepresentations of slavery's brutality and wealth-generating profitability have long been intentional.

The powerful and wealthy RAC was established by City of London merchants and the Stuart royal family. The Stuart King Charles II (1660–1685) granted the RAC a royal monopoly on the expanding slave trade. RAC vessels brought more enslaved African workers to the Americas than any other such capitalistic enterprise. Charles II is actually an ancestor of Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall, Prince Harry's step-mother. Family trees of the British elite conspicuously reveal the intergenerational connections between them and their enslaving ancestors. Note that in the run-up to the 2018 royal wedding, the enslaved great-great-great-great grandmother of Markle made headlines, yet far less was made of the fact that huge British fortunes, including current country homes, are directly linked to white slaveowning and slave-trading ancestors. To this day, slavery's cultural bequest also permeates the palates of elite and non-elite whites alike, from sweetened tea to silver service to cotton clothwork, and, of course, in the pervasive racial and class inequalities that typify daily life in the contemporary UK. Despite these critical historical facts, many Britons have a clearer understanding of US slavery than of British slave-trading in Africa or British-owned slave plantations in the Caribbean. This, too, is intentional, part of a grander white racial framing—indeed, whitewashing—of British history.¹²⁶

Slavery: Foundations of Modern British Capitalism

Note, too, how the heavy British involvement in the Atlantic slavery system was closely linked to the emergence of modern capitalism and the modern state in Britain. Centuries of unpaid black labor had a significant role in both creating the massive surplus capital that was the basis of much of the country's capitalistic economic development and expansion, and in creating much material prosperity and wealth for numerous generations of white individuals and families, especially many in the white British elite, including the royal family.

Many powerful white men in Britain—including leading political, business, and intellectual figures inside and outside the royal family—were substantially involved in slavery's investments and profits. Stockholders of the famous British South Sea Company, established to transport enslaved workers from Africa to overseas colonies, included the leading scientist Isaac Newton, influential authors like Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe, and the

founder of the Bank of England, the Earl of Halifax. They also included numerous members of the House of Lords and House of Commons. These influential white men, and others like them, viewed slavery as an acceptable wealth-generating investment, one they often passed along to later generations of whites.¹²⁷

Over time, capitalized slavery profits became central to building up the great wealth and power of Britain as the first modern industrialized nation. As Britain's Industrial Revolution was expanding, in the 1740s, one business pamphleteer wrote about the source of much British wealth in this era.

The most approved Judges of the Commercial Interests of these Kingdoms have ever been of the opinion that our West-India and African Trades are the most nationally beneficial of any we carry on. It is also allowed on all Hands, that the trade to Africa is the Branch which renders our American Colonies and Plantations so advantageous to Great Britain. ... The Negroe-Trade therefore, and the natural consequences resulting from it, may be justly esteemed an *inexhaustible* Fund of Wealth and Naval Power to this Nation.¹²⁸

This pamphlet accents the central and continuing role of the African-origin labor in British shipping and manufacturing, and in creating an “inexhaustible Fund of Wealth and Naval Power” for the country, but especially for British capitalists. One historian, Robin Blackburn, has estimated that by the 1770s the British trade profits connected to this Atlantic slavery system were huge, making up “between 20.9% and 55% of Britain's gross fixed capital formation.”¹²⁹

Cities like London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Bristol developed major slave-shipping ports and thriving factories off this ever-expanding fund of slavery-based capital. Textile manufacturing in northern England and New England in North America was the core industry of the Industrial Revolution, and most of the cotton used in these factories was grown by enslaved black laborers. The profits resulting from this slavery-manufacturing nexus, together with the British and related international trade in other slave-produced products, often became capital circulating through many banking enterprises. These profits provided a substantial part of the large-scale investments in yet other emerging British and American industries. The enslaved labor of millions of Africans over several centuries was the ultimate foundation of modern capitalism, and thus of our modern industrial and technological age.¹³⁰

White Mythical Tales of the Abolition of Slavery and Persisting Systemic Racism

A common British version of the white racial frame would have us believe that British slavery ceased to exist because of the moral transformation

of slavery-involved whites. In contrast, historian of slavery and Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago Eric Williams (1962–1981) long ago argued effectively that slavery in the British Empire was abolished because this form of predatory capitalism stopped being economically advantageous for many white slaveholders. This interpretation is in keeping with African American scholar Derrick Bell's description of the *interest convergence* that sometimes takes place between part of the white elite and dissenting people of color, as it did in the era of racial change that led to British slavery's abolition.¹³¹ That is, at about the same time that Markle's ancestor Nancy Bowers was born into slavery in 1820s Georgia, slavery was starting to conflict with a new economic approach that many British capitalists were increasingly excited about—free trade across the Empire. For instance, British merchants exporting East Indian, Brazilian, and Cuban sugar to Britain were not benefitting from the export protections that maintained the sugar monopoly of the West Indian slave plantations, and so wanted them ended. Meanwhile, with the onset of new transport and military technologies (e.g., railways, steamships, gunboats), British predatory capitalists recognized they could amass profits in previously difficult-to-reach places, including distant Australia and South America. By 1833, when British slavery was abolished, the economic system of slavery was already substantially declining due to other globalizing investments of elite whites and their acolytes.¹³²

Most white Britons did not care that the opulence of post-abolition Britain, and the continuing poverty and suffering of post-abolition Caribbean areas, were still intimately joined. Many decades later, the prime minister of Antigua and Barbuda, Baldwin Spencer, reasoned that black Caribbeans' ongoing travails were unequivocally the consequences of such earlier economic exploitation. Speaking at a meeting of the heads of government of the Caribbean Community, he linked past colonialism to the present.

We know that our constant search and struggle for development resources is linked directly to the historical inability of our nations to accumulate wealth from the efforts of our peoples during slavery and colonialism. . . . These nations that have been the major producers of wealth for the European slave owning economies during the enslavement and colonial periods entered independence with dependency straddling their economic, cultural, social and even political lives.¹³³

Currently, the economic systems of Antigua, Barbados, and Jamaica continue to suffer as a result of the black loss of inherited family wealth over those many colonial generations, and because of their historically imposed reliance on foreign capital and other financial arrangements.¹³⁴

Recently, a research team that examined the records of the 1830s Slave Compensation Commission found that they contain a census of British slavery as of August 1834, just after the slavery system was terminated.

The census includes a complete record of slaveowners, where the enslaved lived, and how much revenue the enslavers collected. Given this comprehensive data, the many decades of white success in downplaying Britain's slavery history is all the more remarkable—making the white racial frame's concealing power today even more striking. After all, British ships carried at least 3.4 million enslaved Africans to the Americas.¹³⁵

The Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 officially emancipated about 800,000 enslaved African-descended people in the Caribbean and South Africa, as well as a smaller number in Canada, who were legal property of British slaveowners. The Act included a provision for financial damages to be paid to slaveowners by British taxpayers for loss of enslaved human property. The Commission oversaw the British government allotment of £20 million (about 40 percent of all government expenditures for 1834) as compensation. Today, that sum is estimated at £17 billion. Until the bailout of British banks during the 2009 Great Recession, reparations to Britain's 46,000 slaveowners represented the largest monetary bailout in British history. Yet those who had been enslaved received no compensation. In fact, for four years after their liberation, they were bound under the Act to work 45 hours a week (unpaid labor, misleadingly known as *apprenticeship*) for those who had hitherto enslaved them.¹³⁶

Placing the arrogance and duplicity of this white racial framing on full display, historian Kris Manjapra hauntingly explains: "During this period of apprenticeship, Britain declared it would teach blacks how to use their freedom responsibly, and would train them out of their natural state of savagery. But this training involved continued unpaid labour for the same masters on the same plantations on which they had worked the day before."¹³⁷ The cruel hypocrisy of the pro-white subframe (e.g., whites are virtuous and superior) is blatantly evident here. Who in this scenario is the real savage—the oppressor or the oppressed? Even for adamant supporters of the dominant white frame, this enforced apprenticeship should be hard to defend. Consider the label *apprentice*, with its synonyms, including amateur, beginner, and newcomer. These words suggest a lack of prior knowledge, despite their years of enslavement and work experience. And if formerly enslaved workers are *apprentices*, are former slavemasters *mentors*? According to the mythical thinking of the pro-white subframe, the absurd answer has to be "yes."

Hired in Britain, government magistrates were sent to plantation colonies to ensure that apprentices followed the strict dictates of former slavemasters. They could have them reprimanded, even tortured, for any number of things, including racially stereotyped laziness. The treadmill, a torture device intended to instill fear in black apprentices, was a rotating wheel with wood planks, from where they hung by their hands from a plank, typically for hours, as they "danced" unshod. They were also often tortured with a whip.¹³⁸ Yet again, whites were extraordinarily hypocritical in framing black workers who did most plantation work as lazy. Reflecting on centuries of enslavement, the contemporary

African American entrepreneur Claud Anderson memorably said that if non-blacks had been the better workers, “why would supposedly bright [white] businessmen spend 250 years traveling half way around the world to kidnap [millions of] innocent, but lazy blacks, then knowingly bring them to America to do work that other ethnic groups could do better?”¹³⁹

These harsh ironies were created and sanctioned by major figures of the time, including John Gladstone (1764–1851), father of Victorian prime minister William Gladstone (1809–1898). As a politician, William Gladstone espoused reimbursement for enslavers and supported the so-called system of apprenticeship. He defended West Indian slaveholders’ interests. John Gladstone was paid a huge compensation (£80 million in current pounds) for the 2,508 people he enslaved on nine plantations. Unsurprisingly, in his inaugural speech in Parliament, Prime Minister Gladstone defended slavery.¹⁴⁰

Researchers recently examining Slave Compensation Commission data have confirmed that Charles Blair (1776–1854), the great-grandfather of famous author George Orwell (1903–1950), was at that time paid £4,442 for the 218 men and women he enslaved. Ancestors of the novelist Graham Greene (1904–1991), the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861), and the architect Sir George Gilbert Scott (1811–1878) all received significant monetary reparations after slavery’s abolition. An ancestor of David Cameron, the UK prime minister from 2010 to 2016, also received such compensation.¹⁴¹

Arguably more noteworthy is the finding that British slavery was much more commonplace than earlier recognized. While a majority of whites who enslaved their fellow human beings were men, scaled-down slavery involvement among the middle class included some widows and single women, who owned no land in the Caribbean but rented out their “human property” to white landowners. Approximately 40 percent of white enslavers in the British colonies were women, and they often had inherited human property through their husbands. Still, most of the government’s compensatory money went to the “richest citizens, who owned the greatest number of slaves.”¹⁴²

And while British slavery is often assumed to be a pursuit restricted to whites in slave-trading ports like London and Bristol, records show that slaveowners lived throughout Britain. The general conclusion of the contemporary researchers examining the Slave Compensation Commission data is that British colonial slaveownership was of far more importance for Britain than has hitherto been acknowledged. As the historian David Olusoga has agonizingly explained, millions of black people know that as descendants of the enslaved they “carry the same English surnames that appear in the ledgers of the Slave Compensation Commission—Gladstone, Beckford, Hibbert, Blair, etc.—names that were imposed on their ancestors, initials that were sometimes branded on their skin, in order to mark them as items of property.”¹⁴³

Early on, racial oppression and consequent inequality were embedded deeply in major UK institutions. But the white racial frame’s mythologies

and misrepresentations often prevail over historical truth. The scholar Catherine Hall, who helped spearhead the Slave Compensation Commission research, explains that “Britons were the first in the world to abolish slavery. ... That’s the way in which the history’s been written. ... [F]or example, in Macaulay’s great *(The) History of England*, he scarcely mentions slavery—scarcely mentions the Caribbean—but he celebrates the fact of abolition. And that’s a very common pattern.” Hall recognizes the true cost of this dominant racial framing: “Slavery has left the most terrible marks and legacies on not just people’s material lives. ... [T]he levels of inequality, the levels of under-development of the Caribbean in terms of health and education are deeply shocking ... [and] there’s also the psychic histories connected with that. ... *They aren’t just over. They carry on.*”¹⁴⁴

In 2018, Prince Charles belatedly described Britain’s part in the slave trade as an “atrocity.” He included the oft-cited line, “Britain can be proud that it later led the way in the abolition of this shameful trade” in the same sentence in which he condemned “the abject horror of slavery,” saying it should “never be forgotten.”¹⁴⁵ Despite his words, from 1807 to the present day, no money has been paid by the government to the African workers that white Britons enslaved or to their descendants over many later generations. Additionally, not a single word of official *apology* has ever been uttered to them. In 1993, Bernie Grant, a reparations activist and one of the first black British Members of Parliament, demanded an apology from the British state for the legacies of slavery. “I am going to write to the Queen. I know she is a very reasonable woman,” he announced in a speech in Birmingham. He died in 2000 without an apology. In 2015, during an official visit to Jamaica, then-Prime Minister David Cameron announced it was time to “move on from this painful [slavery] legacy and continue to build for the future.”¹⁴⁶

As for Charles’s 2018 critique of British slavery, it does not come close to making amends for the unfathomable misery British royals and other whites have long inflicted on black people, in the past or present. “It’s not enough for the son of the monarch to apologize,” observed the pop-culture pundit Kristen Meinzer, “The monarch should.”¹⁴⁷ To which we would add: concrete reparations and a genuine commitment to dismantling contemporary systemic racial oppression must also be made. Charles’s good-bad rhetoric, the British state’s reticence, the queen’s silence, and Cameron’s whitewashing sentiments are typical of the white elite, both those inside and outside the royal family. That is part of the contemporary reality of elite whites’ racial framing. Acknowledging white Britain’s crimes against humanity over centuries, and providing substantial restitution to black Britain, is something the elite has *never* been willing to do.

Elite white insensitivity and tactlessness knows no bounds. In 2018, in a tweet complete with an image of Africans being marched in yokes and ropes into slavery, the Treasury Department wrote: “Here’s today’s surprising #FridayFact. Millions of you have helped end the slave trade through your taxes. ... In 1833, Britain used £20 million, 40% of its national budget, to buy freedom for all slaves in the Empire. The amount

of money borrowed for the Slavery Abolition Act was so large that it wasn't paid off until 2015. Which means that living British citizens helped pay to end the slave trade."¹⁴⁸

The white-run Treasury Department got the facts *wrong*. The British slave trade was not abolished in 1833, but in 1807. And slavery was not abolished in all parts of the British Empire in 1833, for that law applied to the British Caribbean, Mauritius, and the Cape Colony, and in the area of today's South Africa, but not to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) or British India. In addition, no freedom was purchased for plantation slaves in 1833 because the enslaved were forced to work without pay and under the persistent threat of penalty until 1838. Nor did the Treasury Department's tweet reference the fact that generations of British taxpayers had been paying off a government loan that reimbursed well-off white enslavers, not enslaved black workers and their families. The tweet reeked of white framing. As historian Olusoga flawlessly responded, "[This] is what happens when those communities for whom this history can never be reduced to a Friday factoid remain poorly represented within national institutions."¹⁴⁹

Postcards from a Mythologized British Past: White Saviors

Drawing on recent Oscar-nominated British films *Victoria & Abdul*, *Darkest Hour*, and *Dunkirk*, the writer Amrou Al-Kadhi aptly describes the conveniences and impacts of whites racially framing, or whitewashing, this racist history of Britain. Such films are "postcards from a mythologized Great Britain," functioning to expunge or distort British history in order to advance white-nationalist nostalgia. Considering the lore surrounding Harry's four-times great-grandmother Queen Victoria, Al-Kadhi explains that the recent biographical drama *Victoria & Abdul*, about the relationship between the queen and her Indian Muslim servant Abdul Karim, is "absurdly rose-tinted," with Victoria portrayed as anti-racist, even though "she was a notorious racist."¹⁵⁰ Revealing the film's visibility outside of Britain, a *Washington Post* critic noted that, while there had been friendship between Victoria and Abdul, "by keeping the focus on court gossip it misses the political structure that allowed Victoria to control Abdul at her whims. . . . This kind of shallow Raj [Empire] revisionism is possible because of how little we've confronted the enduring and painful legacy of the British Empire."¹⁵¹

In *Victoria & Abdul*, civilized Indian development is depicted as beholden to the British. In reality, Britain's Industrial Revolution was buttressed by predatory capitalist endeavors in this South Asian nation. Britain's extensive exploitation of India, including its agriculture for export, reduced the country's share of the world economy from 23 percent to 4 percent, and in the process triggered major famines, killing about 20 million South Asians.¹⁵²

While stories of Markle's enslaved great-great-great-great-grandmother were featured in news reports in the run-up to the 2018 royal wedding, little or no mention was made of Harry's great-great-great-great-grandmother's racist reign as Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland

and Empress of India. Queen Victoria reigned over a white-racist, ruthless, and predatory empire from 1837 to 1901. Under her rule, for example, the 1857–1858 “Indian Uprising” was suppressed. In defiance of punitive land taxes and hostile British-style reforms, the Indians had bravely rebelled against one of the most influential and brutal companies ever to exist, the British East India Company. Following the failed uprising, the British government transferred power from deviation from conventional white India’s Mughal monarch, who had ruled Delhi for centuries, to the British Crown. The British Raj—the term for British rule of the Indian subcontinent—was erected on the blood and bones of people of color. The subcontinent’s societies, politics, and territorial lines were forever changed.¹⁵³ Notably, Victoria is widely known to be much admired by her great-great-granddaughter, Elizabeth II.

If we reconsider how the British elite has hidden its slaveowning and slave-trading history, we often observe white racial framing in full operation. For example, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, thousands of white families made their riches by means of the slave trade or from the sale of slave-produced products. Nowadays, slave traders are frequently whitewashed and vaguely referred to as “West Indian merchants,” while slaveowners are referred to as “West Indian planters.” Alongside such euphemistic terms are thousands of positive family profiles written in commemoration of prominent seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britons, profiles relegating their proprietorship of human beings to mere footnotes or otherwise purging the bloody specifics from the historical record. While the geography of British slavery has helped to make this *white amnesia* possible (i.e., unlike in the USA, British slavery was mostly overseas), certain elements of the dominant white racial frame, especially its *white savior* myth, have played an important role in the cover-up.¹⁵⁴

The much-celebrated abolitionist William Wilberforce (1759–1833) has long served as a diversion from the factual and complete picture of British slavery. The pomp and circumstance surrounding him and other white abolitionists has functioned to protect the sanitized white framing of British racial history in several ways. In Holy Trinity Church in Clapham, a well-off London suburb, a stained-glass window above the altar depicts Wilberforce breaking the news of the 1807 British government’s abolition of the slave trade to a black woman. She is shown kneeling before him in a prayer-like stance. A second male white savior figure appears in the artwork alongside a black male standing and rubbing his wrists, having been newly freed of golden-colored chains the second white man is now holding. In another patent example of the frame’s white savior myth, there are no less than 32 images of Wilberforce in London’s National Portrait Gallery. This famous gallery houses numerous portraits of illustrious Britons but contains a mere four images of black abolitionists and other anti-slavery activists from the same era. Through the lens of the pro-white subframe of the dominant white frame, we again see how white virtuousness is foregrounded, including in words and visual images. Reducing chronicles of the abolition

of slavery to tales of white saviors, who nobly bestowed freedom on black people, fits well into the dominant racial framing of British society.¹⁵⁵

The anti-others subframe of the dominant white frame is in operation here too. That view would have us believe that enslaved people were convinced of their personhood and desire for freedom mainly because of beneficent whites. This is false. Black uprisings for freedom were common across the slavery era. By the 1810s and 1820s, when Nancy Bowers, Markle's ancestor, was born, slave societies in the British Caribbean were experiencing serious black revolts. In 1816 in Barbados, the enslaved population revolted for their freedom. In 1823, those enslaved in Demerara (modern-day Guyana) rose up. Shortly after Christmas in 1831 in Jamaica, around 60,000 enslaved people went on strike for their liberty, burning sugar cane fields, and destroying sugar mills. These courageous souls exhibited incredible discipline, jailing slaveowners on estates but never harming them. Conversely, when the tide turned against the rebellion, the white British Jamaican government reacted quite brutally, slaughtering hundreds in the ensuing conflict, on scaffolds or by firing squad.¹⁵⁶

As white-framed institutions like the National Portrait Gallery remind us, heroic stories about enslaved souls resisting white oppression are deliberately overshadowed by whites' need to frame themselves as saviors, rescuers, or protectors. This may explain why the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade produced only one serious film. The British-American biographical drama, *Amazing Grace*, focused on the campaign against the slave trade in the British Empire led by Wilberforce. This is white racial framing personified. As Aidan McQuade, the Director of Anti-Slavery International, put it:

[Wilberforce's] portrayal as [the] "one voice [that] changed the lives of millions" does not fully take into account the fact that abolition of the trade was not the result of the efforts of any one individual. Africans resisted their enslavement from the moment of capture. The revolts on the ships and uprisings in the Americas and Caribbean were pivotal in causing plantation owners to question whether the slave trade was still economically viable.¹⁵⁷

What's more, Wilberforce did not even "believe in racial equality," even though he thought that, with training, Africans had the potential to become "a grateful peasantry."¹⁵⁸

The tremendous strength of the white racial frame is seen in the fact that not until 2010 did researchers launch an examination of the records of the nineteenth-century Slave Compensation Commission, mentioned previously. The 1830s Commission was directed to administer the compensation to slaveowners for loss of *their* human property following the abolition of slavery. And it was authorized to provide a roughly complete census of slaveownership in the Empire at the time.¹⁵⁹ That Western academics did not dive into this treasure trove of data long before 2010 is testament to

the persistence of the dominant white frame, and the continuing influence of the white elite that benefits most from its perpetuation and from white amnesia and denial of racial oppression.

The British had been engaged in the transatlantic slave trade for more than 200 years by the time it was officially abolished in 1807 (see Chapter 2). The complete abolition of slavery did not follow for another generation, as the actual census of slaveownership in the British Empire in the 1830s illustrates.¹⁶⁰

The contemporary research team that launched an examination of the detailed records of the 1830s Commission determined how payouts from the end of British slavery greatly stimulated capitalism. Like earlier capital made off the backs of those enslaved, this new infusion of capital stemmed from those enslaved. Again, this unjustly gained capital funded manufacturing, subsidized railways, sponsored mining firms, bankrolled merchants and banks, financed insurance companies, supported museums, and helped elite whites to build country estates and amass major art collections. The Bank of England, UK's central bank, and other major banks across England and Wales benefitted hugely from these compensatory payments to former white slaveholders. Unfortunately, the *slavery origins* of modern capitalism are rarely recognized, even today.¹⁶¹

Slavery researchers have also exposed the extraordinarily vicious and violently oppressive nature of numerous white slaveowners and their overseers. Consider the wealthy white slaveholder Thomas Thistlewood (1721–1786). Operating from Jamaica in the mid-1700s, his own diaries record *3,852 acts of rape* that he committed with *136 enslaved women* in almost four decades, including his long-term coercive relationship with Phibbah, his enslaved “wife.” In an entry from 1756, Thistlewood writes about the cruel punishment he inflicted on an enslaved black man. “Gave him a moderate whipping, pickled him well,” he wrote, “made Hector shit in his mouth, immediately put a gag in it whilst his mouth was full and made him wear it 4 or 5 hours.”¹⁶² The ongoing white savior myths about British slavery certainly have no room for such harsh realities imposed by elite British men. Once again, we see how old and strong the dominant white racial frame has been, from centuries ago to the present day.

A Comparative Note on Slavery in the UK and the USA

Comparisons of the UK and the USA are significantly improved by understanding how the two societies began and developed historically. The historical origins are different, including the timing and entry of contemporary groups of color. The American colonies (later the USA) developed by the 1700s into a slavery-centered society in which much of the economy, especially that beyond the subsistence farms of whites, was controlled by white slaveholders and merchants, shipbuilders, insurers, and bankers linked, directly or indirectly, to slave plantations and the Atlantic slave trade. Much of the international economic system for centuries was

centered in slavery, slave-produced products, trade with plantations, and the economic recirculation of capital from the profitable slave economy. Various British cities were central to this international slave trade. In the USA, millions of Africans and their descendants became central to the manual labor force, and thus to building up great wealth for some whites and to create economic success for many others.¹⁶³

No one group of color in the UK has been so central to the creation of the internal wealth and political constitution of the nation as African Americans have been to the USA. Unlike in the UK, the USA (as of 1787–1790) began as a slavery-centered political economy and nation. Coupled with whites' violent seizure of Indigenous American lands, African American enslavement was essential to much economic development and wealth creation. The US Constitution (1787) was written by powerful slaveholders and the merchants, bankers, lawyers, and other white men economically associated with them. That Constitution has at least a dozen provisions designed to uphold the US slavery system.¹⁶⁴

Without the millions of enslaved African Americans, there likely would not have been the economic development that led to the political-economic creation of the US nation at that time—and its economic and territorial expansion thereafter. Ironically, substantial capital used to fight the revolutionary “freedom” struggle against imperial Britain came off the backs of enslaved African Americans. By the 1700s, the development of this slavery-centered system led to the production by leading whites of sermons, newspaper articles, and books that were central to the creation of a broad white racial frame designed to justify and maintain the unjust enrichment of whites from slavery and related commercial efforts. This 246-year history of enslavement was followed by nearly a century of Jim Crow segregation for African Americans (altogether 82 percent of US history). This explains why, for four centuries now, African Americans have been central to the development of racial inequality, racial hierarchy, and racial framing. Over this long period, together with Native Americans, African Americans have been central in the development and persistence of many racial aspects of US society, including its foundational institutions—more so than later immigrant groups of color, such as Asian and Latino/a Americans, who have also been racially oppressed since the mid-nineteenth century. This white-racist system, and its racist framing of African Americans and other Americans of color, has endured in many ways to the present.¹⁶⁵

In contrast, the UK was not founded as a nation on enslaving millions of non-European people who were fully racialized within its territorial borders. The UK did not develop early on the kind of slavery system, with its racial hierarchy and constitutional buttressing, that made up the political-economic core of the new United States of America. In contrast, by the early 1700s, Britain was directly and increasingly involved in the Atlantic slave trade that transported many enslaved Africans to North America and the Caribbean. Britain itself never had a large enslaved population within its territory, and its fully developed white racial frame

thus evolved gradually over time. The historian Olusoga has explained: “Whereas the cotton plantations of the American south were established on the soil of the continental United States, British slavery took place 3,000 miles away in the Caribbean. That geographic distance made it possible for slavery to be largely airbrushed out of British history, following the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.”¹⁶⁶

Mythical English National Culture: The Politics of Race and Nation

Let us return to film critic Al-Kadhi’s apt analysis of the Oscar-nominated British films from 2017, *Darkest Hour* and *Dunkirk*. He comments sharply on *Dunkirk*’s white racial framing: “I’m not sure if Christopher Nolan [who wrote and produced the film] has an aversion to people of colour, because there is not a single one in his movie. Its dystopian quality is only accurate in how it relays what the world would be like if solely inhabited by white men. The film ... literally erases the fact that almost 5 million Commonwealth soldiers ... fought in the war, and that British Indians had a prominent role at Dunkirk.” Of *Darkest Hour*, Al-Kadhi writes that it is “one in a long line of British period dramas that view [Sir Winston] Churchill as a national hero, conveniently muting the reality of his racist tyranny (it’s telling that many of Churchill’s imperialist exploits abroad are not widely known).”¹⁶⁷ These and other recent films regularly perpetuate white-virtuousness mythologies that remain central to the UK’s dominant white racial frame.

A major challenge to the UK’s enduring white racial frame is found in social historian Paul Gilroy’s brilliant examination of anti-black racism and contemporary culture in his book *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*. Gilroy’s study of major black contributions to British culture, typically framed as standing on a purely white Christian history, provides a conceptual model that allows one to make sense out of a highly racialized UK society.¹⁶⁸ As one reviewer wrote, Gilroy “shrewdly refrains from the usual explanations of racism as a peculiar evil on the margins of British society and shows how the history of British racism is bound up with an imaginary English ‘national culture’ which is supposedly homogenous in its whiteness and Christianity.”¹⁶⁹ For example, Gilroy demonstrates that black music is a major illustration of a counter-culture in Britain. His work comes to mind when reflecting on the meaning of Markle in the era of Brexit and the related debates over non-white and other immigration to Britain. Take, for example, the black gospel choir performing *Stand by Me* at her racially diverse wedding, a song influenced by an early black American gospel composer (Charles Tindley), and composed by a black songwriter (Ben E. King) and his white associates. Markle’s deviation from conventional white royal norms attests to the importance of Gilroy’s message, which critically questions white notions that black culture has meaning in Africa only and that European culture is purely white.¹⁷⁰

Conclusion

In the UK, the oppressive treatment of people of color coexists uneasily with professed ideals of freedom, justice, and equality before the law. Social scientists have developed various perspectives to explain racial inequalities and the enduring UK racial hierarchy. We argue that *systemic racism* and the attendant concept of the *white racial frame* offer a valuable analytical framework from which to understand British systemic racism, including the pervasive racial dynamics surrounding the entry of Meghan Markle into the royal family. Certainly, a significant aspect of systemic racism theory, which originated in the black American race-critical tradition (see Chapter 2), is that it sets racial subjugation and discrimination in a rich historical context, and accentuates the many ways in which racial oppression is systemic in white-dominated societies.

We trace the ways in which the racial pecking order, racial inequalities, and racial discrimination have long been reproduced at the core of British society. In opposition to claims that white-imposed racism is gradually declining, even becoming a negligible part of UK society, data on and analyses of UK racism help in making sense of the hyper-racialization of Markle, and show that the character and markers of racial oppression begun centuries ago persist in copious ways in the present era.

White racial framing is important to legitimating and rationalizing the continuation of systemic racial discrimination and inequalities throughout all UK areas and institutions, including in governmental, legal, educational, and economic bodies. In modern-day Britain, one moderate version of white framing characteristically translates into rather timid or sanitized discussions of racial inequality and discrimination. Markle's biracialism, for example, is something many in the white-dominated press are fixated on, while at the same time they seem resistant to address more openly its many ties to systemic racism. This is characteristic of moderate versions of the dominant racial frame. Certainly, part of how the white racial frame functions is by weakening attention to and the discourse surrounding the still-pervasive systemic racial disparities in British society.

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