

Speech by Inspector Paul Wilson, Chair, Metropolitan Police, Black Police Association, at the Citizenship and Crime, The Howard League Annual Conference, 15-16 September, 1999, New College, Oxford.

Understanding Institutional Racism

Criminal justice and security is one of the largest industries in the United States.

An industry that is increasingly seen as 'controlling' the lives and hopes of future generations of African-Americans.

A study conducted by the Sentencing Project in 1989 found that more than one-fourth of all Blacks between the age of 20 and 29 are under the control of the USCJS . This alarming figure becomes more so when you consider there are more Blacks in prison in this age group than there are all Blacks in college.

The most comprehensive statistical report on race in the criminal Justice system in the UK was recently presented by Home Office Minister Paul Boateng.

Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice System 1998 details developments in ethnic monitoring and statistics.

Some of the main findings in the report show:

Substantial differences in how police forces use their powers to

- stop and search, arrest or caution suspects;

- Black people were more likely than white or Asian people to be stopped, searched and arrested but were less likely to be cautioned;
- People of minority ethnic origin are under-represented in the police, prison service, lay magistracy and senior posts in all criminal justice agencies.

I make mention of the American criminal justice system as we appear, in this country, to suffer similar racially motivated sociological experiences albeit at a later date and of course on a much smaller scale.

In particular I have over the past few months, indeed years, taken an interest in the experiences of the Black American police officer. It was perhaps this interest that led me to help form the United Kingdom's first Black Police Association back in 1994. <http://www.bpa.cc>

The relationship between the minority communities and the police has recently taken a particularly unusual but not unexpected twist in the city of Chicago, Illn. Police shot and killed two young unarmed blacks. Protesters converged on City Hall. Black leaders denounced racism in police ranks.

The twist: The police officers who pulled the trigger are black. Now Chicago's

police dept. which has long promoted the recruitment of black officers as a way to stamp out racism, is struggling with whether minority Officers can be racist!!

Interestingly, the officers involved in the shooting have a black police chief who immediately defended their actions and publicly denounced any suggestion that police officers 'stop' members of the public solely based on race. He went on to admit that there were problems between his department and members of the black community. And yet Chicago police has a significant percentage of black officers.

New York Police Dept. has approximately 10,000 black officers, again reflecting the community it serves, yet, as we know that force is experiencing some particularly difficult allegations of racially motivated shootings, deaths and beatings.

Although it is not entirely realistic to draw comparisons between American and British society I feel there are some lessons we should learn sooner rather than later. In particular, merely reflecting the community we serve does not in itself produce an equitable service for that community. It certainly does little to dismantle Institutional Racism.

Ladies and gentlemen, you can hope for many things in your life.

You can hope that people will become more tolerant.

You can hope that the world you leave your children will be a better one.

But hope is never enough on its own.

And hoping that racism will just quietly fade away - in these more enlightened days - is just fanciful.

To really understand the threat that racism poses we have to accept that the problem lies not so much with the individual as with the institutions within our society.

I am not just talking about the Metropolitan Police or indeed the criminal justice system but all of the major institutions within our society.

For how many other organisations also need to make the changes we need to make in the police?

Take the church for example; I was brought up actually believing that our Lord Jesus Christ had long golden hair and pale skin. Throughout my religious education it was never once even suggested that black people had any role whatsoever.

These were extremely powerful messages and ones which I'm sure helped to shape the negativity that traditionally surrounds the African race and helps promote the systemic disadvantage experienced by black people today.

London and indeed Britain is a country boasting a multi racial population However the entire police force still conforms to the mores of a white culture.

The clearest illustration of this came in the Stephen Lawrence Murder Inquiry.

The insensitivity, the ignorance, the plain apathy to issues of race and ethnicity were all a picture of a Metropolitan Police Service that has deep problems.

Some within senior management and indeed society are still clinging to the more easily-digested notion that if you can just weed out the few racists in the ranks, the problem will leave with them.

Mayoral candidate, Ken Livingstone, has issued a five point mandate of the changes he will make if elected. One of his proposals is to root out the minority of racist police officers. Now I've shared a platform with Ken in the past and I've challenged him on this very issue. The experience of black people in this country and others with a similar history of either slavery or colonialism has nothing to do with a few racist individuals.

(say that again in case anyone misunderstood)

Such views are analogous to the Department of the Environment teaching victims of pollution about gas masks, but not addressing the factories spewing the pollution.

Lets examine the facts in the police service for example. When we take into

account:

the differential treatment by the police of the minority ethnic public; stop and search is but one example but then there are the personnel statistics in terms of rank and grade, which indicate that if you're black in the Met you will have a markedly different career experience to your white colleagues. And I'm not suggesting conscious racism, just as I'm not suggesting the religious material I experienced in my formative years was consciously designed to promote a message of white superiority.

However, we have to conclude that if the few-bad-apples fallacy were true, that minority of officers that Ken Livingstone and others believe to be racist would have to be the most active and productive in all the annals of policing.

There is a continuing commitment among some senior police officers for a fairness culture today, and there is no doubt that it has produced a more open, self-critical police service. However the view that still holds sway is one of a white dominated mono-cultural police service.

At best, that tells us that the Met cannot yet appreciate the value of a multi-cultural organisation.

Yes, the Metropolitan Police have made very public commitments -to equal opportunities, to recruiting and retaining officers from minority ethnic groups.

But that of itself will not deal with institutional racism.

The Police must provide as effective a service to minority ethnic communities as it does to the majority group.

That too, is a change that only senior management and positive leadership can bring about. We have heard the words loudly enough, but the deeds are taking some time to follow.

I say this, recognising that the police force I joined is not the police force we have today.

However, practices, structures and systems must all change. The occupational culture must change.

And that calls for many different steps.

The culture of an organisation may be defined as a system of underlying values, beliefs, shared meanings, norms, and traditions that serve as a foundation for an organisation management. The culture of an organisation can be likened to a lens of 'normality' through which everything is judged, evaluated and ultimately considered acceptable. Although organisational practices and traditions are perceived as being neutral and objective, they can often have differential impacts on organisational members because of their race and gender identity.

I want to spend some time on the barriers faced by black people in organisations for this is very much part of the Institutional Racism we refer to. Those of you that have read the racism chapter in the MacPherson report will know that during my evidence I expressed the view that the occupational culture is a primary source of Institutional Racism.

Home Office research has confirmed what was generally well known among black officers and that is that black officers, regardless of educational achievement, take longer to get promoted than white officers. This fact is most probably replicated throughout the criminal justice system and is in itself a barrier to the effective recruitment and retention of black personnel.

To address these issues calls for an understanding of the dynamics of being black in a white cultural work environment.

Americans have conducted a four year study of black women managers, compared with white women managers. The results illustrate the enormity and complexity of the problems faced in trying to create that much desired level playing field

Life Journeys of Women in Corporations

Four year research

Makes explicit the barriers faced by black American women managers when compared to White women managers.

Survey Results:

analysis of the survey data revealed a number of

significant differences in the work place experiences of Black compared to White women.

The major findings are summarised:

- There were no differences in the educational preparation of Black and White women managers.
- The majority of each group possessed a graduate degree in a business field.
- Additionally, the Black women reported more years of job experience than White women. Yet, significantly more White women than Black women were at the top management level of their companies.
- Significantly more African American women were at lower management levels.
- Number of promotions and promotion rate for White women was positively related to having White and Black men as part of their network and feeling a part of the White male network.
- Black women managers were less likely to have White men in their professional networks.
- Being accepted into organisational networks is important to long term advancement.
- Black women are often excluded from these networks and are marginalised and isolated in their work settings.
- They do not have the opportunities associated with being accepted as a full member of the organisation.
- Consequently, access to mentoring is limited. Without mentors and sponsors, they must learn to succeed in spite

of exclusion from the mainstream of organisational life.

- In this respect, Black women are doubly disadvantaged. To compensate for a lack of cross race mentoring, they can only hope to establish such relations with other African American women and men in their organisations.
- However, senior Black men and women may be scarce, making such relationships impossible to establish.
- A poignant barrier was race and gender dynamics in the work place that result in Black women being very conscious of their double minority status.
- One pervasive feeling was that they had to outperform their White male and White female colleagues to succeed. This puts Black women constantly under the pressure to be superstars to combat stereotypes labelling them as inferior and incompetent.
- Black women still suffer from a token status in many organisations.
- Their White supervisors downplay their abilities and skills, and unlike their White women colleagues, they perceive themselves as working under the shadow of being hired only because of their race.
- In contrast, compared to Black women, the White women in the research reported feeling accepted into White male networks.
- To a certain extent the White women in the study had assimilated and their acceptance was positively related to their advancement.
- On the other hand, Black women rarely had the chance to become part of the mainstream.
- This finding highlights a key difference between the experience of African American women managers and White women managers: White women may be more socially and culturally acceptable in White male dominated organisations than Black women and men.

In sum, research suggests that while gender represents a barrier to the mobility of White women, the addition of race creates qualitatively different types of barriers for Black women. It can be argued that while White women may hit a glass ceiling in their careers, Black women encounter barriers that are embedded in both racism and sexism.

These research findings argue strongly for not lumping together the advancement issues experienced by Black women and White women.

From all that I have said today, you might imagine that I am bitter or discouraged. I am neither.

The Metropolitan Police have been placed under tremendous scrutiny during the Stephen Lawrence inquiry.

The results have been difficult to deal with.

But I believe that good can come from this, if we are prepared to make the changes.

And we need to remind ourselves of this: what would we find if we held other public bodies and organisations up to such scrutiny?

So let's not bog ourselves down in apportioning blame. Far better that we look for

the answers.

For the Met, it means better training, more non-confrontational contact between police and community, 'lay involvement' and a continuing assessment of all policy and procedure in terms of adverse impact on minority ethnic groups

In all our institutions we should be starting from the same premise:

You can't make a rainbow with just one colour.

President Clinton said this, "*I still believe that race is the single most defining issue in American society. And the gap of understanding between the races remains the single greatest threat to the safety and welfare of our cities and our nation*".

There must be those, particularly in light of recent events, who feel that the issues facing America are reflected here in Britain.

Our greatest challenge as we head into the 21st century is: how can Britain become a truly great multicultural society?

In terms of demographics, we have always been a country of many cultures, peoples and languages.

On paper and in words, Britain has always espoused a philosophy of equality and respect for all its citizens. It is the actions and practices of our institutions, our businesses and some of our people, however, that too often undermines Britain's declarations of equality.

By the year 2010, for example, many of the what are now termed as ethnic minorities in London will in fact be the ethnic majority.

As our society becomes increasingly more diverse, our understanding of race relations must go beyond black/white issues. The Britain of the 21st Century will come in every shade of brown and Black.

As public servants, community leaders, and just plain members of a concerned public we must set the tone for what is tolerated in our community and what isn't. We must take the lead in speaking out and educating the public on race relations.

We must foster honest dialogue within our own communities in order to engage in honest dialogue with other racial/ethnic groups. Institute diversity workshops in our workplaces and businesses. Encourage people to make a deliberate effort to get to know someone of another background. Broaden your cultural and social horizons. Face fears.

In his second Inaugural Address, President Clinton so clearly articulated the great-unfulfilled promise of America: I think it is of particular relevance in Britain today:

"The challenge of our past remains the challenge of our future. Will we be one nation, one people, with one common destiny, or not? Will we all come together, or come apart?"