



RACISM AT WORK

The Danger of Indifference

Binna Kandola

"I loved Binna's book. Such wisdom and a great read."

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

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The moral right of Binna Kandola has been asserted.

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"This book sets new heights in thought leadership focusing on the harsh realities of racism in the workplace. An essential for read for everyone working in the field of culture, diversity and inclusion."

Arun Batra, Ernst & Young LLP

"Binna Kandola's deeply insightful book, shows that racism is unfortunately still very much alive today. It's time that racism be openly examined and discussed. Let's get going... read this book, reflect, share with others, and join forces to lessen racial biases."

Lisa Kepinski, Inclusion Institute

"A radical and invaluable read for anyone working in this field."

Rob Neil, Interim Chair of the Civil Service Race Forum, Ministry of Justice

"This evidence based approach makes it essential reading for policy makers, CEOs and HR professionals. But more importantly Kandola's practical list of actions reminds us that we all have a part to play in building a just and equal society"

Barbara Roche, Former Minister for Women and Equalities

"Binna Kandola's book is a clarion call to become more informed, understanding, compassionate self and organizationally aware. If we take the opportunity to learn from him, our lives and workplaces will be richer for it"

Karen Murphy, Facing History and Ourselves

"This is an important insight to behaviours and one which should be read not just by those tasked in HR roles but by all those involved in recruitment processes."

John O'Brien MBE, The ONE HUNDRED agency, Omnicom

"A thought provoking account of the complexities of racism at work and the impact bias behaviour has either at a conscious and unconscious level. A must read for all organisations and individuals who are involved or curious about diversity in the workplace."

Tola Ayoola, Cabinet Office

"A timely and well evidenced book that challenges us to rethink how we perceive racism in the 21st century. A must read for all senior leaders and anyone that has influence over other people's careers."

Uzma Hamid-Dizier, Slaughter and May

"This book provides a practical, yet nuanced approach to an urgent topic."

Claudia Hammond, Presenter 'All in the Mind'

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Preface

'What are you working on?'

It's an innocuous enough question – and a guaranteed ice-breaker. But I hesitated to answer. My ideas were at an early stage, forming and reforming, and I didn't know if I was ready to share them. On the other hand, if I did tell her, I might get some useful input and suggestions. My friend was involved in diversity work at a senior level and had taken a keen interest in my recent books on unconscious bias and gender bias. She'd worked hard to increase the number of women in leadership positions in her organisation and I respected her opinions. She'd understand my project immediately. So, for the first time outside my own head, I heard myself saying: 'I'm writing a book about race bias in organisations.'

She frowned into her glass, then gave me a puzzled look. 'So,' she said, 'what's it about?'

Maybe she'd misheard. I repeated what I'd said, a little less confidently. And she told me that racism was a thing of the past.

In fact, she said, the Women's Movement could learn a lot from the Civil Rights Movement and its success in achieving racial equality. Sure, there were pockets of racism in society and there always would be ... But thankfully, in her organisation, as in all modern, right-thinking organisations, racism was a historical curiosity – an unsavoury and regrettable aberration of less enlightened times, but no longer an active force.

The encounter knocked me off balance. Here was a respected person, active in the diversity and inclusion field, telling me that racism was a non-issue. It was gauche of me to bring it up. My book's imagined audience evaporated.

And yet ... the project wouldn't leave me alone. It gnawed at me, demanded attention. I couldn't give up this easily. I began telling other people about my venture, and their reactions varied. Most were enthusiastic, but there were also some sceptics.

Then it hit me. Those who understood my project and responded to it were a diverse group. Those who didn't get it were, without exception, white.

I didn't want to discover this unsettling fact. I didn't want it to be true. I had to test the observation – and talking about the book became a mini-project in its own right. Over many weeks and months, and in many different situations, the results were consistent. Without exception, minority friends and clients immediately understood what the book was about, and could see the need for it. One friend, a black British woman, simply sighed, 'At last'. Many white friends and clients grasped the point of the book as well and encouraged me to pursue it. But every single naysayer was white.

The sceptics included people responsible for ensuring equality in their organisations as well as consultants advising clients on equality issues. If experienced and engaged practitioners could see no need to discuss race bias in organisations, it would be impossible to gain senior-level commitment to take action on the issue. After all, if there's no problem, there's no need for a solution, is there? This was going to be a tougher assignment than I had first thought.

I didn't take on this project lightly. To begin a discussion about race, whether in a real-world setting or in the pages of a book, is to invite anxiety. There are so many aspects to the debate – the inglorious history, the entrenched antagonisms and, not least, the strong emotions prompted by race – that no one can approach the subject without great wariness. The ground we are about to tread together is treacherous.

Yet, it is these very difficulties that make race such an appealing topic for settings in which controversy is welcomed – such as radio talk shows. The emotional charge of race is amplified by the belief that discussion of it is being suppressed. The fact that there are already at least two sides to any story makes it legitimate to use reports of apparent racism as triggers for debate: 'Do you think the Oscars are racist? Call now – we want to know what you think.' There's rarely a shortage of callers eager to participate, representing a wide spectrum of opinion. But while the switchboard may light up, little light is shone on the topic itself. When the main aim is entertainment, rather than enlightenment, facts and contexts are less important than reactions and opinions.

Debates on race are fractious, challenging and confrontational. This is why most of us choose to avoid the topic altogether, looking the other way – until, perhaps, a case arises that we simply can't ignore. Even then, we may have no better response than to wring our hands and wait for other news to push whatever has made us uncomfortable out of the headlines.

These personal reactions are understandable. But we can't use them as excuses for ignoring the toxic effects of racism on the organisations we serve and use. Our organisations are designed and managed entities: we get to say what they are like and how they behave.

Racism has not been eradicated, despite the enormous strides taken over the past fifty years. It has mutated into new and subtler forms and has found new ways to survive. The racism in organisations today is not characterised by hostile abuse and threatening behaviour. It is not overt nor is it obvious. Today racism is subtle and nuanced, detected mostly by the people on the receiving end, but ignored and possibly not even seen by perpetrators and bystanders. Racism today may be more refined, but it harms people's careers and lives in hugely significant ways. Racism in organisations continues to exist due to our complacency and indifference.

This book describes the origins and evolution of the race bias that distorts our organisations. It explores the effects of race bias. And it confronts the actions that we need to take to make organisations truly equal.

Racism is not a thing of the past – yet. But we can make it so.

Chapter 1

The race zombie

Race – a short word that casts a long shadow. We all belong to the human race, yet race divides us. And race is a topic most of us would rather not speak about, and we certainly do not feel comfortable discussing it in the workplace.

The belief, the so-called ‘science of race’, that some categories of human beings are superior – intellectually, physically, emotionally and even aesthetically – is no longer widely accepted, but terms like ‘race’ and ‘racial group’ persist in the vocabulary, and the derivative terms ‘racism’ and ‘racial prejudice’ are very widely used. Pseudo-scientific theories of racial distinctiveness may have been unmasked and consigned to history, but our everyday language shows that the concept of race continues to figure prominently in our thinking. We can’t avoid using the term ‘race’ and its cognates, despite the discomfort its use creates.

The concept of race is still very much alive – and kicking. We might want to believe the old idea of defined, separate and immutable human groupings has been discredited – at least in scientific terms. However, we still talk about race, even as we talk about not talking about it. It’s a slippery subject. Catching hold of the issue of race and understanding its impact on our organisations and communities is fraught with intellectual, psychological and political difficulties.

Racial theory may be dead, but racism lives on. Like the zombie, the notion of race doesn’t know it’s dead.

The explicit meaning of the term ‘race’ has shifted over time. While it is no longer overtly used to denote the superiority of some groups and the inferiority of others, race does relate to physical features and physical distinctiveness. Colour is one of the key ways in which we differentiate one person from another. There are many ways in which we could distinguish people, but colour has become one of the most significant. It seems natural, unavoidable, but as we will see, this was not always the case.

So while researchers from a wide range of disciplines, including genetics, anthropology and evolutionary psychology, find no value in the idea of distinct races, the concept has become so ingrained in our daily lives that it is difficult to disentangle it. Physical characteristics, including elements other than skin colour, such as hair texture and eye shape, are used to put people into clearly defined groups. We may consciously believe that race plays no part in our actions, but the legacy of racist ideas, actions and imagery lives on publicly in stereotypes – and privately in our unconscious minds. The belief that we, as individuals, could not be racist, and by extension that our organisations can't be either, is one of the most serious obstacles that exists in making racial equality a reality. Be in no doubt: indifference is now the principal way in which racism is perpetuated in organisations today.

Race throws up a number of fascinating issues, which I believe we need to discuss briefly. The first seems quite basic but is at the heart of the discussion about race: how do we label and describe different groups? Second is the issue of how we describe ourselves. Third, just how natural is it to use colour as a means of distinguishing and differentiating between people?

Labelling race

All attempts to create discrete, objective and distinctive racial classifications have failed. Consequently the categories that each society has created will have meaning to people from that society but may not mean much to people from another society.

Every society has its minorities. Members of minority groups often look indistinguishable from the majority but, having been characterised as the 'other', they are often also seen as inferior in some way. In these cases it's not physical characteristics that distinguish between people, but culture. This is the broad distinction between race and ethnicity: racial groups are indicated by heritable characteristics and ethnic groups by their way of life – food, dress, religion, and so on.

Despite this apparently sharp distinction in terms, race and ethnicity do overlap and the words are often used interchangeably. This is particularly clear in anti-discrimination legislation, where the terms are taken to be synonymous.

The word 'race' may be problematic but there are added problems in how different groups are described and how the people in those groups describe themselves. To understand the complexities, one only has to look at the racial data some countries collect in their censuses to examine and understand their citizens.

In many ways, the desire to collect the data is one indication of that society's desire to quantify, analyse and then tackle the bias experienced by some groups. The

categories that are produced are nearly always imperfect and culturally specific. The UK 2011 census had five broad groups: White; Mixed/multiple ethnic groups; Asian/Asian British; Black/African/Caribbean/Black British; Other ethnic group. Within each broad group there were a number of more specific categories: for example, Asian/Asian British was subdivided into Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Chinese. The 2010 US Census¹ also has the category 'Asian people', which comprised Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Asian-Indian, Vietnamese and – the catch-all – other Asian. The way the group 'Asian' is defined therefore varies. The categories are based on geography, colour, nationality and older racial classifications – all in themselves somewhat vague and contestable terms.

For both countries, nevertheless, these categories do not describe something with absolute precision. And it has always been this way. Alexander the Great had a classification to identify different peoples based primarily on colour.² He was not suggesting inferiority but simply registering differences in appearance. It was imprecise but it worked for him. In Tudor England the word 'Moor' was commonly used, but it was a somewhat loose term describing a wide variety of people, including anyone who was Muslim.³ Imprecise, yes, but it was understood by the people using it, if not the people being labelled.

In addition to the official classifications, many academics have their own ways of classifying people. However, the imprecision of race and ethnicity as categories means that membership of a minority varies between contexts. In 1988 I attended a psychology conference in Atlanta, Georgia. At that time there was an ongoing debate in the UK as to whether the term 'black' should be used to describe all visible minorities. At the conference I met two African American psychologists who informed me that people from India, or – like me – of Indian origin, due to their economic success, were considered to be 'white'. On learning this, I had the curious realisation that having left the UK 'black', I had arrived in the USA 'white'.

One effect of increasing migration – and perhaps of its reporting – is the growing experience of cultural relativism, as people find their self-images challenged or devalued by moving to a new place, or by finding new people moving into their communities. Race categories are vague, not due to lack of effort but because the idea of 'race' is deeply flawed. Every society has its own racial classifications, and they are all different. The categories are socially constructed.

Concomitant with the racial categories are racial hierarchies. These exist in every society and in some parts of the world, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE), they are explicit and openly acted upon. Other societies may deny their presence but, like it or not, they exist and are influential. Racial hierarchies benefit the groups at the top and disadvantage all other groups to a greater or lesser degree. It does

Chapter 2

How a world without colour invented black and white

As Alessandro de' Medici, the Duke of Florence and head of the powerful Medici family, rode into Rome one day in 1535, he couldn't help noticing fresh, welcoming graffiti scrawled on the walls of the city. The messages said: 'Hail Alessandro of Colle Vecchio.'¹ Alessandro was due to meet Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, to answer charges made against him by exiled Florentines. We might think the locals were expressing their support for Alessandro by greeting him in this way, but the graffiti was an insult. Colle Vecchio was the village where his mother had been born – and Alessandro's mother was a freed slave. The reference taunted the Medici duke with his humble origins and let him know that not everyone accepted his authority.

The fact that Alessandro was black wasn't mentioned.

If the Romans had thought to mention Alessandro's colour, it would not have been seen as an insult, but as an irrelevant detail. It was his social status, not his physical appearance, which people noted, judged and used as a weapon.

It is difficult to identify precisely when the change in views about people of a different colour took place, but we do know a change occurred around the time of the slave trade. In the early sixteenth century, skin colour was not seen as an indicator of someone's personality, qualities or intellect. By the nineteenth century this had changed dramatically and the ideas of the so-called science of race – the idea that some humans were superior to others – now permeated everyday life. At this time there was believed to be a strong relationship between a person's physical features and attributes such as intelligence.

The English writer, Thomas Adolphus Trollope, a pillar of the British community in nineteenth-century Italy, saw in a portrait of Duke Alessandro not a leader but a



Portrait of Alessandro de Medici, first Duke of Florence 16th century, Galleria Degli Uffizi
(© De Agostini Picture Library Getty Images)

'wretched youth'. He continued: 'The small contracted features, the low forehead and mean expression are altogether unlike any of the Medici race, in whom, whoever else they might be, there was always the manifestation of intellectual power.'¹ (p309)

Based on appearance alone, Trollope deems Alessandro atypical of the powerful, wealthy and intelligent Medici clan. Instead, Trollope found him to exhibit 'lowness of the type'. (p309) Fascists in the twentieth century would seek to deny that Alessandro's mother could ever have been African.¹

In the years between the Roman public's assessment of the duke's person and Trollope's damning classification of his portrait, the basis of judgement changed radically. By any measure, this was a remarkably rapid as well as a fundamental transformation. Once an irrelevance, colour gained the power to tell us everything we needed to know about a person's intellect and character.

Surface differences: the classical world

For much of human history, people did not stereotype others based on the colour of their skin. Racial or colour prejudice as we know it today did not exist during the Egyptian, Greek and Roman empires. Racial prejudice is therefore not an inherent human function. We created races – and, in so doing, we created racial prejudice. Frank Snowden, the Harvard history professor, describes this in his book *Before Color Prejudice*.² The provocation in the title comes in the word 'Before'. To our modern sensibilities it does not quite make sense: since colour prejudice is something that we have had to battle with, it is difficult to conceive of a time when it genuinely did not exist.

The ancient Greeks and Romans noted that people came in a variety of hues, which gave an indication of where they came from. But they inferred nothing more than this. It was perfectly obvious that people from Africa were darker than those from Rome and Greece. The Greeks knew Africans as people from *aithiopia*, a word derived from *aitho* ('I burn') and *ops* ('face'). Ethiopians were therefore 'burned-faced people'. Marcus Manilius wrote a poem in the first century AD in which he describes the colour of people from different parts of the world, remarking

that Ethiopians were the darkest, Indians were less sunburned, Egyptians were mildly dark and Mauri (or Moors) were lighter black. As a taxonomy, Manilius's scheme is no worse than contemporary attempts to describe people by the colour of their skin.²

Alexander the Great also noted the similarities between people from different regions: for example, although many Indians were similar in colour to Egyptians, others in the south were the same shade as Ethiopians. The distinctions went even further: Ethiopians could be dark (*fusci*) to very black (*nigerrimi*).²

Even in these early accounts, it is the 'other' people who have a colour. The observers did not think too much about their own skins – a point noted by the Arab historian Ibn Khaldun. Whites were not described by their skin colour because 'whiteness was something usual and common (to them) and they did not see anything significantly remarkable in it to cause them to use it as a specific term'.^{2 (p7)}

For ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans, slavery did not depend on a racial ideology. Nor were slaves exclusively black – in fact, most slaves were not.³ Slaves could, and did, come from anywhere, and Slavic slaves were fair-skinned and blond.⁴ The key dividing lines between people were religion and language, not appearance.

Egyptians had long had contact with black people from the Kush (now Sudan and South Sudan). They had traded, worked and fought alongside one another. The Egyptians did not consider the Kushites' skin colour significant or unusual. When people from other parts of the Mediterranean encountered Kushites, they were taken aback by the strangers' appearance, but the indications are that this initial surprise was quickly overcome. The Romans readily deployed black soldiers across their Empire, including its northern extremity at the fort of Aballava on Hadrian's Wall (modern Burgh by Sands, near Carlisle in England).²

These equitable views about black people did not change from Egyptian times to the Roman era, a period of several thousand years, during which time intermarriage and inter-mating were not frowned upon. The Bible's references to black people are similarly positive. While some people may know that Moses married a Kushite, they may not realise that she must have been black. When Aaron and Miriam, his brother and sister, are annoyed with Moses' choice of wife, it is Miriam who is punished.² Ebed-Melech is another Kushite referred to positively in the Bible. Elsewhere, the Old Testament writers refer to other people who were black, such as the Nubians, but their colour has no particular significance.

We should not assume that people were colour-blind, because they were not. Black people can be seen in Egyptian artwork and some surviving expressions also reveal that skin colour was noticed: for example, the Greeks and Romans used the

RACE AT THE ROVERS



PART 1 – RACISM: THE EARLY YEARS



CAROLUS LINNAEUS, THE 18TH CENTURY SWEDISH BOTANIST, WAS THE FIRST TO CREATE A TYPOLOGY OF HUMAN BEINGS.

LINNAEUS BELIEVED PEOPLE COULD CHANGE, BUT HIS IDEAS BECAME THE BASIS FOR RACIST THINKING AMONGST NOTABLE PHILOSOPHERS...

Europeanus - White, sanguine, muscular, gentle, acute, inventive, governed by laws.

Americanus - Reddish, choleric and erect, obstinate, merry, free, regulated by custom.

Africanus - Black, phlegmatic, relaxed, crafty, indolent, negligent, governed by caprice.

Asiaticus - Yellow, melancholy, stiff, severe, haughty, avaricious, ruled by opinion.

...INCLUDING VOLTAIRE



THE NEGRO RACE IS A SPECIES OF MAN AS DIFFERENT FROM US AS A BREED OF SPANIEL IS FROM THAT OF GREYHOUNDS.

EARLY PIONEERS IN FOOTBALL

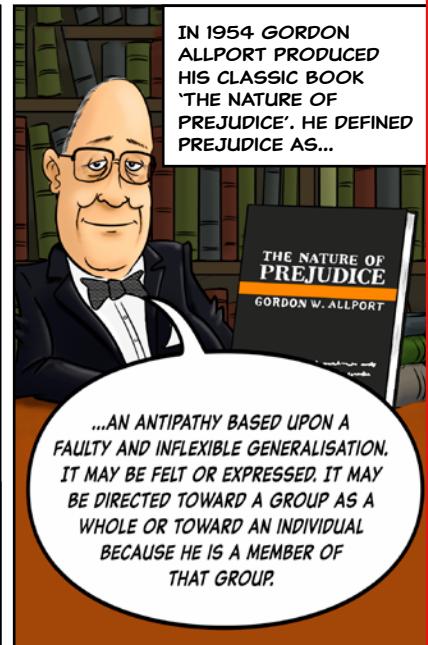


NOT SURPRISINGLY RACIST IDEAS LIKE THESE Affected THE WAY BLACK FOOTBALLERS WERE VIEWED AND TREATED. THEY WERE REGULARLY SUBJECT TO RACIST ABUSE AND HAVING THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS UNDERMINED OR OVERLOOKED.



WALTER TULL: PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALLER AND THE FIRST EVER BLACK BRITISH ARMY OFFICER, DIED IN WWI.

IN 1954 GORDON ALLPORT PRODUCED HIS CLASSIC BOOK 'THE NATURE OF PREJUDICE'. HE DEFINED PREJUDICE AS...



...AN ANTIPATHY BASED UPON A FAULTY AND INFLEXIBLE GENERALISATION. IT MAY BE FELT OR EXPRESSED. IT MAY BE DIRECTED TOWARD A GROUP AS A WHOLE OR TOWARD AN INDIVIDUAL BECAUSE HE IS A MEMBER OF THAT GROUP.

Glossary

Bias – ‘a prejudice that leads to a tendency to favour one entity over another, often unfairly. Biases can be explicit or implicit.’^{1 (p73)}

Explicit attitudes and beliefs – ‘ones that individuals profess publicly or express directly. These attitudes and beliefs are conscious and acknowledged by the individuals who hold them.’^{1 (p74)}

Implicit Bias – ‘also known as unconscious bias or hidden bias, implicit biases are negative associations that people unknowingly hold. They are expressed automatically and without conscious awareness. Implicit biases have been shown to trump individuals’ stated commitments to equality and fairness, thereby producing behaviour that diverges from the explicit attitudes that many people profess.’^{1 (p75/76)} Furthermore, ‘everyone is susceptible.’^{2 (p14)}

In-group – ‘a group with which one feels the sense of membership, solidarity or shared interest. In-group members may be established among numerous identities such as race, religion, sexual orientation, etc.’^{1 (p76)}

In-group bias – ‘positive attitudes that people tend to feel towards members of their in-group. Feelings of safety and familiarity are often associated with in-group members. In-group members are inclined to forgive members of their in-group more quickly than they are members of out-groups.’^{1 (p76)}

Out-group – ‘groups with which one does not belong or associate. Some people feel a sense of dislike or contempt towards members of out-groups.’^{1 (p76)}

Stereotype – ‘a standardised and simplified belief about the attributes of the social group. Although not always accurate stereotypes are often widely held and can have both positive and negative impacts on individuals. The act of stereotyping involves creation (making the cognitive association) and application (using that association to make a judgement about a person or group).’^{1 (p77)}

(The Psychology of Diversity – Dovidio)

Prejudice – ‘negatively biased attitudes towards, and generally unfavourable evaluations of, a group that are then described to individual members of the group. Stereotypes and prejudice often leads to preferential treatment for some groups and discrimination against others.’^{3 (p391)}

Modern prejudice – ‘this can take many forms, but it does not involve openly expressed or direct negative attitudes. The manifestations of modern prejudice are

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RACISM AT WORK

The Danger of Indifference

There have been dramatic, positive shifts in attitudes to race over the last 60 years. Generally speaking, we are more liberal, more open and more tolerant towards minorities. Yet, despite these very positive trends, the outcomes for some minorities in particular have not changed very much at all. This is because, like a virus, prejudice has mutated.

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Binna Kandola is a business psychologist. He is co-founder and senior partner of Pearn Kandola, leading business psychology practitioners. He has written several books, including the award-winning *Managing the Mosaic: Diversity in Action*.

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