

# Racism in Education

Learning resource for teachers



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**Sheffield**  
By Sheffield. For Sheffield. In collaboration

**Racism in education and society  
continues to cause harm and trauma to  
Black people and people of colour.**

Professor Ibram X. Kendi argues that 'to be anti-racist, we must truly believe that there is nothing inferior or superior about any of the racial groups'.



Ibram X. Kendi by Stephen Voss

## Yet we see patterns of racial inequality across every field and sector of society:

- ➔ Rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people are three times higher than for white people.
- ➔ Black Caribbean and Mixed white/Black Caribbean children have rates of permanent exclusion about three times that of the pupil population as a whole.
- ➔ Students of colour secure significantly lower educational attainment than their white counterparts.
- ➔ 30.9% of Pakistani or Bangladeshi people live in overcrowded accommodation, while for Black people the figure is 26.8% and for white people it is 8.3%.
- ➔ 68% of White British households own their home, in comparison to 37% of Black Caribbean.
- ➔ Black people and people of colour are at a higher risk of developing a mental health problem in adulthood, and yet are less likely to receive support

If we truly believe that there is nothing inferior or superior about any racial group, how can we explain this?

**We must reject 'deficit' approaches that look to racialised communities for the causes - and adopt a social justice approach that places the focus on interrogating the systems that surround us.**

We must begin by **redefining racism**. We have a simplistic understanding of racism.

We need to move away from only seeing racism as intentional acts of immorality, as something that *bad people do*. We are used to linking racism with images of Britain First and the KKK- but if we only link racism with intentional harm, we won't get very far.

Instead we need to broaden our understanding, looking at the ways in which our **societal systems and structures** are working to **reproduce patterns of inequality**.

We need to explore the ways in which we have been socialised into biased ways of seeing and 'knowing'- upholding systems that yield inequitable outcomes.

## Systemic or Structural Racism:

'Systemic racism', or 'structural racism', refers to how ideas of white superiority are captured in everyday thinking at a systems level: taking in the big picture of how society operates, rather than looking at one-on-one interactions.

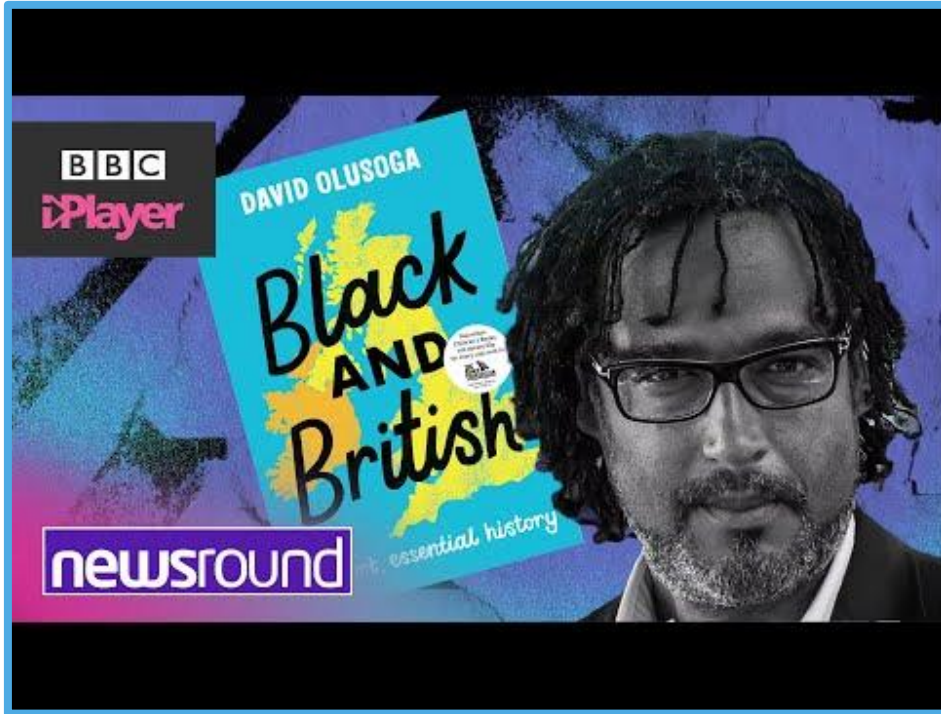
***"It takes a lot more of a historical view to understand the difference between individual bias and structural racism."***

**Akala perfectly explains the structural racism that still exists today in Britain.**





## A Short History of Race in the UK



There are many misconceptions about the history of race and racism in the UK. David Olusoga's celebrated book and BBC TV series, **Black and British**, both depict the long and forgotten history of Black people in the UK.

For example, when people talk about the slave trade, the focus is often on America. How well do we educate on Britain's role in the slave trade and how the legacy of this history impacts on the lives of people of colour today?

David Olusoga on Black, British History

## The education system plays a powerful role in shaping how we see ourselves and 'others'.

A curriculum that lacks diverse voices, perspectives histories can compound 'racial myths' and reinforce false ideas of white superiority.

**Consider the following questions:** How many of our primary and secondary students are aware that there were Black people and people of colour living in Roman Britain? Or that from 193 to 211, a Black Roman Emperor, Septimius Severus, ruled over Britain and Rome? When learning about ancient civilisations, do our students learn about the great civilisations of Africa? For example the Kingdom of Kush (Sudan) and Aksum (Ethiopia)? Do our students learn about the vast contributions of the muslim scholars of the Islamic Golden Age?



Painting of Septimius Severus by Elena Njoabuzia Onwochei-Garcia





Astrolabe, Khalili Collections

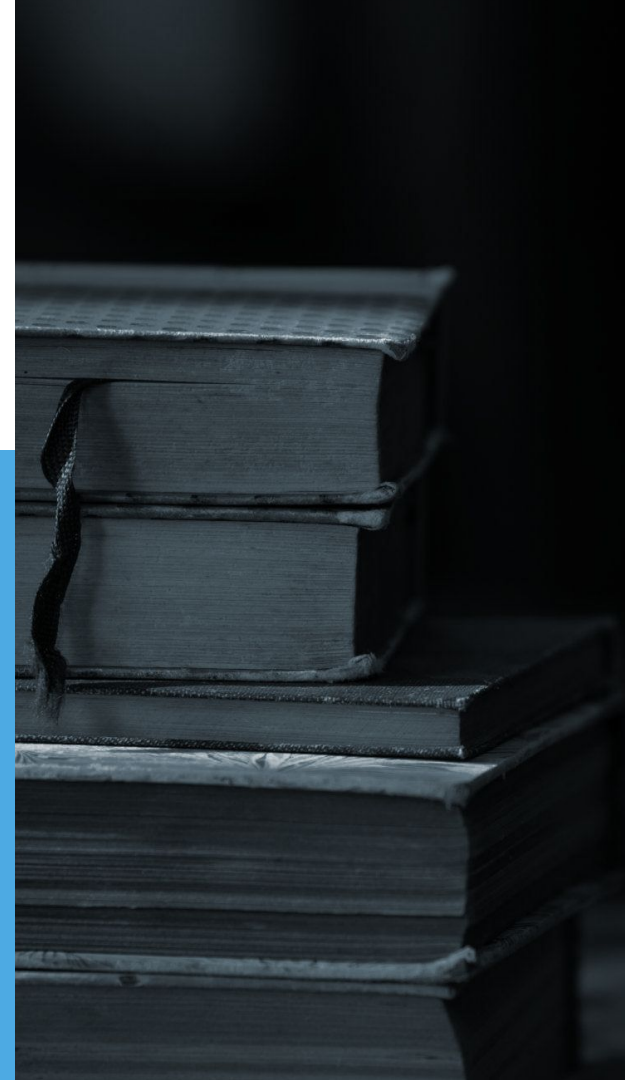
- ➔ Why are some histories taught and some hidden?
- ➔ What impact would a diverse curriculum have on our students' understanding of the world around them?
- ➔ What impact could a diverse curriculum have on the lives of our students of colour?
- ➔ How could racist myths e.g. those relating to Africa being 'uncivilised' and Europe being the seat of progress and enlightenment cause harm? How might these biased ideas cause harm in one-to-one interactions? At systems level within institutions and workplaces?

**To understand how we have been socialised into seeing white as the 'norm' and people of colour as 'other'- and into building an education system that supports this- we need to understand the origins of the word 'race'.**

### **Who 'invented' the concept of race and why?**

Before the 1500s the word race was used as another word for 'type' as in *a type or kind* of something- in a general sense. It had nothing to do with skin colour.

The concepts of 'race' and 'whiteness' were invented by European colonisers in an attempt to create reasons that would explain why white people should be seen as superior to Black people and people of colour.



It was in the interest of colonial governments to make people believe that white people were more intelligent and civilised than non-white people. They used this as a way of 'justifying' slavery and colonisation.

Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, colonial governments attempted to assemble a range of 'scientific' theories and reasons that would 'prove' that there are biological differences between races, and that white people are superior.

**All of these ideas have since been debunked and are widely acknowledged to be unfounded and racist.**

- ➔ **Why do you think European colonisers were so invested in the idea of race?**
- ➔ **If we explicitly educated on colonialism and the invention of the concept of race, what impact could this have on our young people's understanding of the world?**

**BBC Bitesize:**  
**Decolonising the Curriculum**



**“In Year 8... my teacher started the lesson by proclaiming that slavery has nothing to do with race. I remember feeling so angry.”**

A group of sixth formers from London are campaigning to change the way British colonial history is taught on the National Curriculum. They all have family connections to the British Empire, and feel that their past is not being taught properly in school History lessons. While colonialism is taught in some schools, it's not a compulsory part of the curriculum and these young people feel passionately that it should be.

**[Learn more here.](#)**

**Decolonising the education system means creating spaces and resources for a dialogue on how to reimagine and envision all cultures and knowledge systems with respect to what is being taught and how it frames the world.**

## So what is anti-racism education?

The purpose of anti-racist education is to equip staff and students with the tools they need to challenge racism.

- ➔ It is a **perspective** that cuts across subject areas, and informs practices and policies at **every level within a school**.
- ➔ Anti-racism goes beyond 'celebrating difference' (multi-cultural education) by **addressing racism directly**. Concepts such as systemic racism are explored explicitly in the classroom.
- ➔ It involves a discussion of **both the past and present**- tracing past racism through to present day racism and inequality.
- ➔ It educates on some of the **cognitive aspects** of racism e.g. unconscious/implicit bias- and its links with racial socialisation.
- ➔ It equips students with the skills they need to become **critical thinkers**. E.g. *Who is the writer of the story/source? Who benefits from the story/source? Whose perspective is missing from the story/source?*
- ➔ It works towards ensuring a **diversity of voices/perspectives** within and across subject areas.
- ➔ It is a commitment **ongoing critical reflection**- and to **listening and learning** from communities of colour.



### As anti-racist educators:

- ➔ We believe that every subject area can represent a **diverse range of voices and perspectives**.
- ➔ We believe in the importance of **raising racial literacy levels for both staff and students**.
- ➔ We believe that education can **inspire students, nurture critical thinking** and enable students to **grapple with complex questions**.
- ➔ We believe in **dialogic education**, and in **amplifying the voices of our young people**.

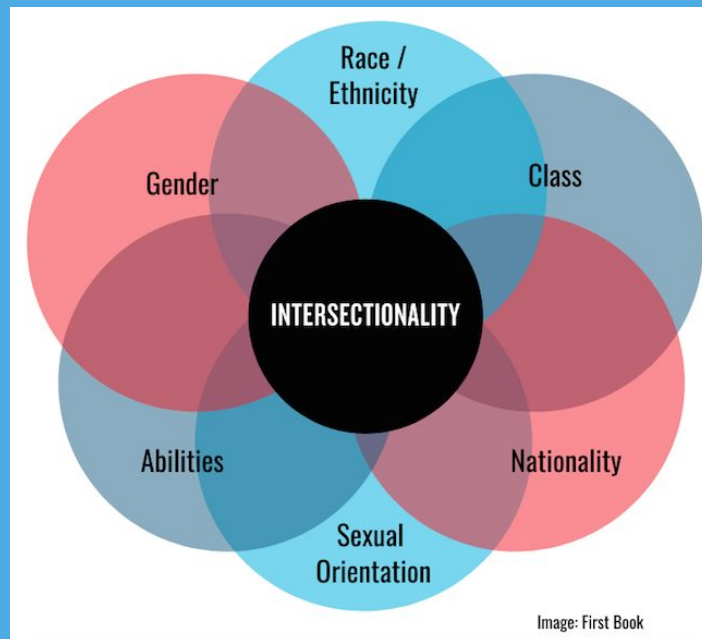
# Intersectionality

As anti-racist educators, we must recognise that race interweaves with other factors and other systems of oppression.

Acknowledging how other factors interweave and intersect with racism is called **intersectionality**- a term coined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (pioneering scholar and writer on civil rights) over 30 years ago.

**'Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things'**

Crenshaw (2017)



Intersectionality graphic: [First Book](#)

## What about white working class boys?

'White working-class boys [are]  
becoming an underclass',  
*The Telegraph*

'White working class boys are the  
most deprived- and ignored- ethnic  
group in Britain...,'  
*The Daily Mail*

'The lost boys: the white working  
class is being left behind',  
*The Spectator*

### **Media discourses: Representation of multiculturalism as a threat to white working class boys**

There has been a damaging trend in media discourse to represent 'white working class boys' as a 'forgotten ethnic group'.

By repeatedly referring to the underachievement of white working class boys in the context of multiculturalism, a false link is made between the social deprivation experienced by this social group and immigration/ the experience of minoritized groups. There is a perception that the social deprivation experienced by the white working class is the fault of minoritized groups and those who call for greater racial equality. There is a perception that multiculturalism gives minoritized groups an 'unfair advantage', (Bieder, 2015).

"By presenting the white working class in ethnic terms, as yet another cultural minority in a (dysfunctional) 'multicultural Britain', commentators risk giving a cultural reading of inequality, focusing on the distinctive cultural values of disadvantaged groups **rather than looking at the bigger picture of how systematic inequality generates disadvantage**"

(Bottero, 2009).



## A closer look at the achievement gap

Gillborn's (2006) research reveals that the achievement gap between white students in receipt of free school meals (FSM) and more affluent white students (N-FSM) is more than three times bigger than the gaps between different ethnic groups who are also in receipt of FSM. There is a 32 percentage point gap between N-FSM and FSM white boys, compared with a 9.7 percentage point gap between FSM white boys and the most successful of the Black FSM boys (categorised as Black African).

- ➔ Gillborn (2009) argues that the statistics reveal that most groups in poverty achieve relatively poor results *regardless* of ethnic background.
- ➔ Gillborn's research also highlights that BAME students secure significantly lower educational attainment than their white counterparts, highlighting that systemic racism still pervades the education system.
- ➔ Black Caribbean students of both sexes are less likely to succeed in school than their white counterparts (Rollock, Gillborn, Vincent and Ball, 2014).
- ➔ Even where Black students have middle class backgrounds, they still underachieve (Rollock et al, 2015, Chatoo and Atkin, 2019).

**The underachievement of the white working class is not to be minimised and must be addressed. However, media and political discourses that frame white working class underachievement as a negative consequence of multiculturalism are misleading and detract from efforts to tackle systematic social inequality and systemic racism within the education system.**



**Next steps: What can we  
do?**

## Recognise the things we can't see when we're in

Get a sense of the current picture:

- ➔ How do our students feel?
- ➔ Do our students feel represented in the curriculum?
- ➔ How diverse is our curriculum? How are we representing non-Western countries, and people of colour and their histories in what we do or don't teach?
- ➔ How diverse is our staff?
- ➔ Have we successfully created safe spaces for our students to discuss their experiences of racism?

## Represent who we serve in our community

- ➔ How could we better represent the student population/the community in our lessons? Curriculum? Text choices?
- ➔ Could we bring in external voices? In what capacity?

## Rethink and refresh existing practices

- ➔ How could we safeguard against unconscious bias/underestimating students?
- ➔ How could we facilitate effective discussions about race and racism in our classrooms?
- ➔ How could we diversify our curriculum?
- ➔ How could we improve the racial literacy of our staff?
- ➔ How could we improve the racial literacy of our students?

## Respond with confidence and

- ➔ How do we get started?
- ➔ How could we ensure that change is strategic, well-planned and measurable?
- ➔ How do we ensure that we don't lose hope?

## Develop our racial literacy

The UK's leading independent race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust emphasises the importance of **racial literacy**, which refers to the capacity of teachers to understand the ways in which race and racism works in society. It also involves having the language, skills and confidence to utilise that knowledge in teacher practice (Guinier, 2004).

Schools should commit to providing high-quality anti-racism education for staff, ensuring that education in this area is ongoing as continuous professional development.

If you would like support in this area or to arrange anti-racism training for your school, contact:

Katie Bayley, Anti-Racism Lead and Teacher of English, Hallam TSA  
[antiracismeducation@hallamtsa.org.uk](mailto:antiracismeducation@hallamtsa.org.uk)

# Educate specifically on 'race', racism and anti-racism as part of our PSHE/Citizenship curriculum

How well do we educate on 'race' and racism, and how we can be actively anti-racist in everyday lives?

Free anti-racism teaching resources for Key Stages 1-4 complete with teacher notes and lesson plans can be found here on the website below:

[www.antiracism.education](http://www.antiracism.education)

These lessons have been created by a collaboration of schools led by Anti-Racism Lead Katie Bayley for Hallam TSA, and have been designed for use in PSHE, Citizenship, Circle Time or as part of the Form Curriculum. The stand alone unit by no means 'does the job' of interrupting systemic racism but provides an impactful first step for schools with strong social justice values.

**ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION**

About Primary Secondary Training Contact [Get Started](#)

## Education is a tool for social justice.

Our aim is to empower students and teachers to explore the ways in which learning about 'race' and racism can help us to challenge the unequal systems that surround us in society.

[Get Started](#)

## Work towards applying the principles of anti-racism meaningfully to all aspects of the

We must safeguard against tokenism or tick box approaches. Together we must support each other within and across schools to ask critical questions of our current systems - to make informed changes to our curriculums and working practices.



For structured support in taking a holistic approach to developing a culture of anti-racism in your school, Leeds Beckett University offer an 'Anti-Racist School Award' programme.

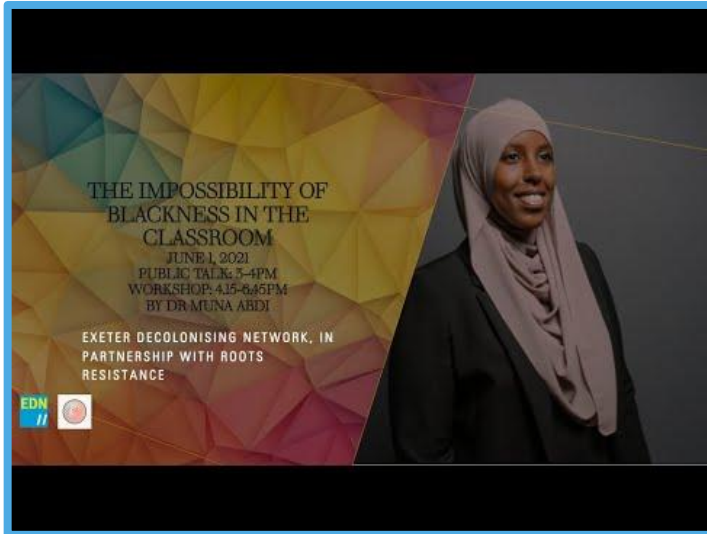
[Find out more here.](#)

## Further Watching

### [The Impossibility of Blackness in the Classroom, Dr Muna Abdi.](#)

This seminar looks at the ways in which racism manifests and is normalised within the classroom space. Racial trauma is explored through the permanence of Whiteness and the impossibility of Blackness.

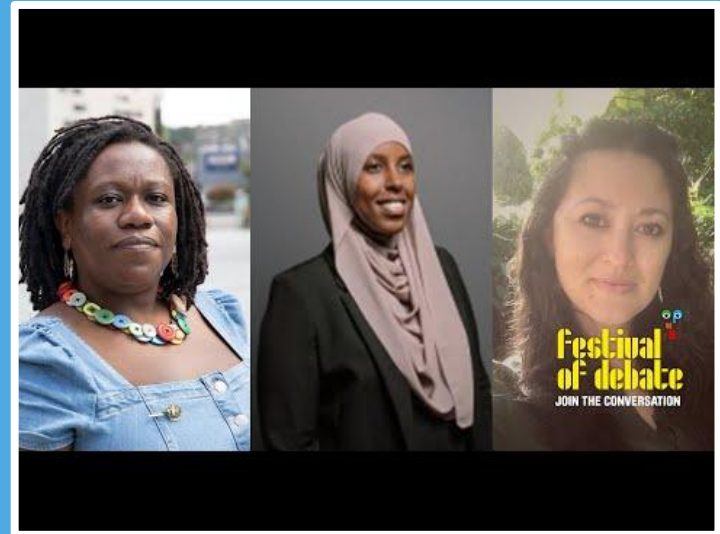
**Run time: 56:54**



### [We Need To Talk About Racism In Education](#)

A 2021 Festival of Debate event, discussing the lived reality of racism in secondary schools and how we can work as a community to challenge it. Featuring Dr Muna Abdi, Melissa Simmonds, Monica Stone and secondary school students from Sheffield and Rotherham.

**Run time: 1:17:10**





## An Introduction to Anti-Racism Education, Katie Bayley- Hallam TSA

In this session we begin to lay the necessary groundwork needed for building an exploratory, post-colonial climate in our classrooms and workplaces. We consider some of the likely challenges we may face when talking about race, and crucially, how an awareness of our own our own bias, combined with an understanding of the theory, can truly have a transformative effect on our interactions both inside and outside of classroom.

**Run time: 1:01:15**



## Myth-Busting the British Empire, Robin Clyfan and Katie Bayley-Hallam TSA

In Anti-Racism Education: Myth-Busting the British Empire, we team up with historian and journalist Robin Clyfan who will challenge us to rethink everything we know about our national history. In this bold, energising and challenging session, Robin will enable us to widen our view of the dominant historical narratives that surround colonialism and the British Empire.

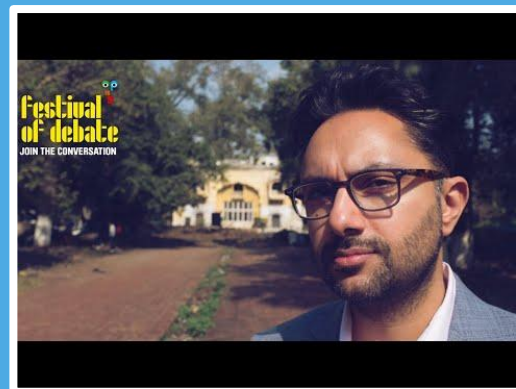
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## Sathnam Sanghera: Empireland

The British Empire is fundamental to understanding Britain. However, even among those who celebrate the empire there seems to be a desire not to look too closely – not to include it in our school history books, not to emphasise it too much in our favourite museums. Sathnam Sanghera and Desiree Reynolds discuss his book, *Empireland: How Imperialism Has Shaped Modern Britain*.

**Run time: 1:30:11**



## Further Reading

[Race and Racism in English Secondary Schools](#) - Runnymede Trust, June 2020

[How to talk to your children about race and racism](#) - Dr Pragya Agarwal and Freddie Harrel, BBC Womens Hour

[The Invention of Whiteness: The long history of a dangerous idea](#) - Robert P Baird, The Guardian Apr 2021 | 34 min read

Before the 17th century, people did not think of themselves as belonging to something called the white race. But once the idea was invented, it quickly began to reshape the modern world.

['Systemic racism': teachers speak out about discrimination in UK schools](#) - Nazia Parveen and Niamh McIntyre, The Guardian Mar 2021 | 6 min read

Teachers describe the systemic and at times overt racism they have suffered in the UK education system, as figures reveal the tiny percentage of BAME staff in senior leadership positions.

[Most black British children report experiencing racism at school](#) - Sally Weale, The Guardian Oct 2020 | 4 min read

Seven out of 10 young black people in the UK have felt under pressure to change their hair in order to appear more professional in school or at work, according to a survey by YMCA.

[Racism and anti-racism in higher education](#) - Sheffield UCU, Feb 2021 | 6 min read

A blogpost by Sheffield UCU exploring resources that discuss racism in the educational system, and others which draw on particular examples and experiences to illustrate the lived realities of racism and its impacts on individuals.

[Sheffield Race Equality Commission Interim Report 29 October 2021](#) | 7 min read

Interim report by the Sheffield Race Equality Commission, set up Sheffield City Council in 2020.

**Why I'm No Longer Talking to White People About Race** - Reni Eddo-Lodge

**Black and British: A Forgotten History** - David Olusoga

**Natives** - Akala

**Racism in Education: Coincidence or Conspiracy** - David Gillborn

**Empireland** - Sathnam Sanghera

**Brit(ish): On Race, Identity and Belonging** - Afua Hirsch

**I Heard What You Said** - Jeffrey Boakye

**Superior: The Return of Race Science** - Angela Saini

**White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism** - Robin DiAngelo

