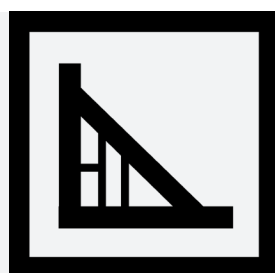


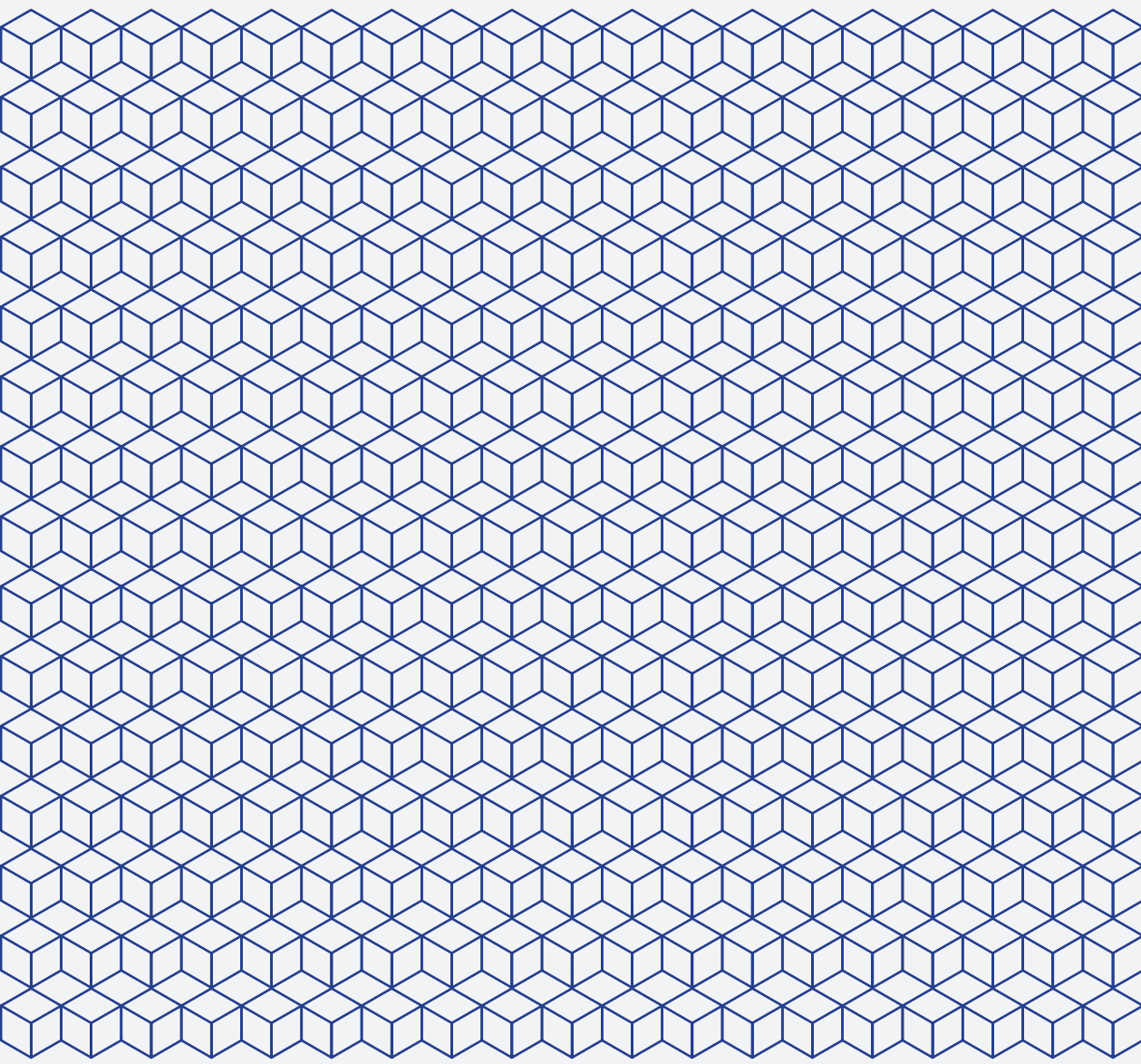
Written and compiled  
by James Trafford

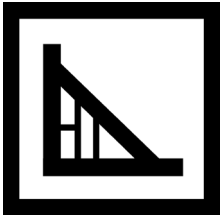
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**Race and Work**





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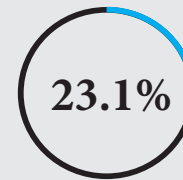
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## **Race and Work**

In recent political discussions, wage inequality, debt, and austerity are often painted as leveling forces. That work no longer functions to provide security and subsistence for many is often seen as a kind of "equal opportunity oppression", which increasingly affects us all. However, race continues to be a determining factor when it comes to the inequalities of work, employment, and wealth. Understanding this is essential given our context of heightened scrutiny of inclusion and exclusion, the rise of ethno-nationalism, and the weaponization of alleged postracialism. Adequately addressing these issues requires us to adopt a comprehensive approach.

## Wages & Employment

According to a recent report by the Resolution Foundation, household incomes vastly differ by ethnic group. The income of Bangladeshi households being £8,900 a year (35%) less than the White British median; Pakistani households £8,700 less (34%) and Black African households £5,600 less (22%) (Resolution Foundation, 2017). In London, the mean pay gap between ethnic minorities and White British people is 21% (GLA, 2017). This inequality is exacerbated, rather than diminished, by the level of education, with UK Black workers with degrees earning 23.1% less on average than White workers with degrees (TUC, 2017).



**UK Black workers with degrees earn 23.1% less on average than White workers with degrees.**

(TUC, 2017)

Similar differences are found with employment status. In 2017, Black and other ethnic minority people were over twice as likely to be unemployed as White people (Department of Work & Pensions, 2018a). At almost all qualification levels, White people were more likely to be employed in 2017 than people from other ethnic groups (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017). For example, six months after graduation, ethnic minority graduates are substantially less likely to be employed than White British counterparts, where these differences cannot be explained by region, qualification, or parental background (Zwysen & Longhi, 2016).

**In 2017, Black and other ethnic minority people were over twice as likely to be unemployed as White people.**

(Department of Work & Pensions, 2018a)

**The median Bangladeshi household's income is £8,900**

**a year (35%) less than the White British household median**

**The median Pakistani household's income is £8,700**

**a year (34%) less than the White British household median**

**The median Black African household's income is £5,600**

**(22%) less than the White British household median**

(Resolution Foundation, 2017).

## Precarious work

Low wages are clearly connected with the overrepresentation of Black and minority workers in the gig economy.

Jobs characterised by precarity and lack of rights are twice as likely to be filled by Black and ethnic minority workers than White workers. Of an estimated 1.1 million people on zero-hour contracts, a quarter are Black and ethnic minority workers (TUC, 2017a). Excluded from, or marginalised within traditional labour markets, BME people are pushed into forms of employment with less rights, less security, lower pay, and less likelihood of career advancement.

Jobs characterised by precarity and lack of rights are twice as likely to be filled by Black and ethnic minority workers than by White workers.

(TUC, 2017)

## Wealth and Poverty

Persistent low income is defined as earning less than 60% of UK median income before housing costs in at least 3 out of 4 years. 20% of people living in Asian and Black households lived in persistent low income between 2010 and 2016, compared with 8% of people living in White households (Department of Work & Pensions, 2018b). Even more stark, is the fact that in 2006/8 Black household wealth was found to amount to only 22% of White household median net wealth in the UK, with the median net wealth of a White British household being £221,000, but only £21,000 and £15,000 for Black African and Bangladeshi households, respectively (Carrera &

In 2006/8, Black British household wealth was found to amount to only 22% of White household median net wealth in the UK.

White British household median net wealth

**£221,000,**

Black Caribbean household median net wealth

**£76,000**

Black African household median net wealth

**£21,000**

Bangladeshi household median net wealth

**£15,000**

(Carrera & Beaumont, 2010).

The Working Age Poverty Rate:

White people — 9%

Black Caribbean/Black African people — 39%

Pakistani people — 45%

Bangladeshi people — 46%

(Department of Work & Pensions, 2018c)

According to a recent government report, after housing costs, the working age poverty rate for White people is 19%, whilst it is 39% for Black Caribbean/Black African people, 45% for Pakistani people, and 46% for Bangladeshi people. Child poverty rates on the same measure show that Black children are nearly twice more likely to be in poverty than White children, and Bangladeshi children nearly 2.5 times as likely (Department of Work & Pensions, 2018c).

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## Austerity & Welfare Reform

Far from universally levelling, the austerity policies put in place in the UK since 2008 have been implemented differentially, and have had differential impact.

Changes to Universal Credit in the UK sit atop a series of cuts to benefits and alterations to taxation, all of which have disproportionately affected Black and Minority Ethnic women, with Black women (employed or not) standing to lose £5030 a year: 28% of net individual income of those not in employment and 20% of those in employment (Women's Budget Group 2017). According to a study carried out by the Women's Budget Group, due to cuts to benefits and services, Black families in the poorest fifth of households will see their living standards fall by over £8,400 a year on average between 2010 and 2020. (Hall et al., 2017)

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(Hall et al., 2017)

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## Crime

Imbalances in crime statistics should also be considered as part-and-parcel with issues surrounding work and poverty, particularly where BME people are pushed out of formal labour, becoming disciplined and managed by a hostile policing and justice system.

The UK prison population has nearly doubled since 1993, with Black people in 2015/16 proportionally more likely to be in prison than those living in the US: Black people are four times more likely to be in prison than would be expected given their proportion of the total population (Lammy, 2017; Ministry of Justice 2016). Of under 18s in custody in UK in 2017, 45% are from designated Black and Minority ethnic groups, up from 24% in 2007 (Sveinsson, 2013), with rates of prosecution and sentencing for Black people three times higher than for White people in the UK in 2016 (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2016). As noted by a recent

StopWatch report, criminalising practices such as stop and search are famously disproportionate, with Black people stopped and searched over 14 times more than White people in 2016/17 without grounds for suspicion (Shiner et al., 2018). The same report found that Black people were convicted of cannabis possession at 11.8 times the rate of White people, with more Black people prosecuted and convicted of cannabis possession than for the supply of Class A and B drugs combined in 2017. Just as blatant is that Black men are 228% more likely to be arrested, plead not guilty, and be sent to prison by the Crown Court than their White counterparts (Uhrig, 2016).

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(Lammy 2017; Ministry of Justice 2016)

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## Conclusion

It is clear from the evidence presented that debt, austerity, and other causal factors leading to our current predicament cannot be analysed through a lens that is indifferent to racial difference. Black and minority ethnic groups continue to feel the effects of the financial crisis most acutely, with debt, precarity, and austerity measures working on cumulative hierarchies across employment, wealth, and housing.

Many have argued that debt and austerity are not economic necessities, but are rather political-economic choices that restructure the lives of the population. But, if this is the case, we need to consider how these decisions operate not only to embed existing inequalities, but also to further develop them into structured racial hierarchies. To see this, we will need to consider the political economy not only in terms of production and labor, but also as a complex of power relations that maintain these hierarchies through differential labour markets, wealth, housing, criminalization, and bordering practices. 21st century Britain is organized around relations of coloniality: structuring culture, labour, markets, intersubjective relations, and life experience within subordinating and racially shaped relations, behaviours, and practices. Brexit and ethno-nationalist discourse should also be understood in this light (El-Enany, 2017).

As we consider universal welfare reforms in response to current crises, these fault lines will need to be unflinchingly addressed. As Robbie Shilliam has shown, the racialised poor have been portrayed as having an irredeemably degenerate character, with Black people in the UK differentiated and excluded from a White “underclass” who could be potentially rescued and regenerated through welfare (Shilliam, 2018). Given the particularity of these forms of injustice, universal solutions must be attentive to these particularities.

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