

English for Life in the UK

Episode 23 - Black Lives Matter

17 June 2020

(Mark) Hello and welcome to Episode 23 of the podcast, English for Life in the UK. This podcast is for intermediate-level learners of English and is produced by a group of volunteer teachers from the Saint Augustine's Centre in Halifax, Yorkshire, where we provide a range of support and advice to those in need, and in particular to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Now, in normal times, we run a course at our Centre which is supported by this podcast, but we are now recording these podcasts from our homes, as a result of the virus lockdown, and we apologise for a slight reduction in the quality of the sound.

We hope that these podcasts will be helpful to anyone wanting to improve their English and at the same time learn more about life in this country. You can find links to other episodes and transcripts - that is, the written version of all these podcasts - at our website.

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Here you can find more information about the Centre, about the support that we provide and for any of you that can afford it, how to make a donation, to help keep our work going.

Today's episode is brought to you by Christine, Sheena and Mark, and also includes an interview with Bola, from the organisation Light Up Black and African Heritage, Calderdale.

(Music)

(M) So today we're going to talk about Black Lives Matter and we've chosen this topic because it has come right to the top of the agenda, right around the world and the issue has been sparked by a particular event in Minneapolis, in the United States, where a black man, George Floyd, was killed by a policeman. The policeman had pinned George Floyd, an unarmed man, to the ground and had his knee on his neck, for almost 9 minutes, towards the end of which George Floyd called out "I can't breathe". And then he died. And that event has sparked protests, demonstrations and events all around the world.

The term 'Black Lives Matter' originated in 2012 as a social media hashtag (#), following the death of another black man. The organisation was formed to campaign against racism, police brutality and injustices in the criminal justice system. And for the United States, this is particularly significant, in terms of the history of that country. The majority of black people in the United States today are descended from slaves: slaves that were brought to America under horrendous conditions, to work in the plantations. And for many years black people were, first of all enslaved but then, later, were treated as second class citizens for many many years. So although slavery was technically abolished after the civil war in the United States, segregation of the races and deep inequalities and injustices were felt by black people in the USA for many years.

In the 1960s, a series of events led to what was called the Civil Rights Movement, where Martin Luther King and other significant black leaders campaigned for changes in the law to protect and give equal rights to black people in the USA. Now there were significant changes as a result of that and yet the inequality and injustice has been - has continued, and has been felt by black people in America ever since.

So, this event, the death of George Floyd, has just been another event which has - but a very significant one - which has sparked demonstrations and the raising of this issue about injustice and inequality for black people in the USA.

(6: 00 minutes)

But in fact, this has, as I said, led to events all around, demonstrations all around the world, including in this country. So Christine, tell us a bit about why is this significant, in the United Kingdom.

(Christine) Well, it's interesting Mark. I mean, the history of black people in this country is quite different from America, with the majority of black people coming to live in this country after the Second World War. They were invited to come, black people from the Commonwealth. They - there have, of course, as we've mentioned in other podcasts, there've been black people, some black people living in this country for centuries, but that's when a large number of people came and they met with racism and injustices when they first arrived. And there were attempts to outlaw that - discrimination was outlawed - the first Race Relations Act, was in 1965. The Race Relations legislation has been expanded as governments have attempted to abolish discrimination and persecution of different races. What happened in - at the end of the 1990's, was that one in particular - a black lad was killed in London - and the response by the police - the Metropolitan police, to his death was inadequate, basically. The people - there were some, a group of white youths who stabbed Stephen Lawrence, was his name, and the police response was really shocking. And there was an inquiry, the Macpherson Report, which led, in fact, to an amendment of the Race Relations Act, in 2000. And so since that time, since 2000, the police and all the public sector bodies have had a duty not just to avoid discriminating, but to promote equality amongst groups of different races. However, despite that legislation, despite the fact that it's illegal to discriminate, and it is a requirement of public sector organisations to promote equality, black and minority ethnic people are still getting a raw deal in - for example - black people make up 3% of the population and yet 8% of deaths, in police custody.

(9:16)

Black people are three times more likely to be arrested than white people and more than five times more likely to have force used against them, by the police. There are also inequalities not just in the police service - in terms of health at the moment, with the Covid-19. Black, Asian and minority ethnic people are much more likely to die of coronavirus, than white people. So it's not surprising that black people feel aggrieved and so they - people across this country were quick to take up the mantle if you like and to join the protest. Sheena, I think you know a bit more about the protest in Bristol. Is that right?

(Sheena) Yes, I have friends in Bristol that have been friends for 40 - 50 years - and last week, last Saturday, their daughter, Alex, who was adopted herself from Sri Lanka, so she's quite dark-skinned and has always lived in an environment surrounded by white people. And her parents told me she'd become very impassioned by the Black Lives Matter movement and she sent me through her placards that she had just made, that said "I can't breathe" - a very bright orange background, with black letters, that could be seen very clearly in the crowds last Sunday. And so Alex and her parents, who are white, went along to the march, last week and they found it very moving, very emotional, because it's been a big issue in Bristol, for a long time. Bristol Council have - they have 2% of the people who live in Bristol are from a black or Afro-Caribbean background, and there's been moves in Bristol to make changes for the last 20 years, to certain things - especially, the Colston Hall which is a concert hall, named after Edward Colston and this issue has been going on for, I would say, at least 5 years now, changing the name of the concert hall. But because the Council never can make a decision about it, even though there's protests and there's been petitions, nothing has happened, so a lot of people who have tried really hard through democratic means, have become very frustrated, and during this - during - everyone knows about this now = but

during this very peaceful procession of people and protests where there were very, very few police present, hardly any police were around, and the crowd, they knelt for their eight and a half of minutes in silence. It was very disciplined. They kept their distance as much as they could and everyone wore masks, so it was a very peaceful protest and then - they didn't know about it but then - meanwhile the statue of Edward Colston was pulled down very easily from his plinth, just four tugs apparently, and then he was rolled into the sea.

(M) So who was Edward Colston?

(S) He was a merchant, but his trade was in - well, part of his trade - was taking black Africans from Africa and selling them in the Americas, to provide labour and as part of the slave trade. So we transported 3 million slaves from Africa and he was responsible for nearly a third of that transportation. So he was very significant. People in Bristol, until maybe ten years ago, only knew him as a philanthropist, because he had a school, he had alms houses: so they only knew the good things about him. And then, in the last ten years, it's emerged about the slave trade and that the wealth that he had, and a lot of the wealth in Bristol, came from selling slaves.

(14:13)

(C) It's interesting what you say there, Sheena: that very few people in Bristol knew about the history. Because the truth is, it's very much glossed over: about how the British Empire became so rich, became so wealthy, and became so powerful. And there's one of the - one of the demands of the people who are protesting at the moment, is to make changes to the school curricula, because there is a, what's called, Black History Month, at the moment and many schools do, during one month in the year, include some mention of the history of black people in the United Kingdom and about this reality - the evils - of British imperialism, as well as the good, to bring some balance to it. But there is a call for a substantial rewriting of the curriculum, so I don't know what will come of that, but I'll be very interested to see.

(M) Christine, reflecting on our use of language here, it seems to me, it's important that we understand a bit about how language changes, in relation to this issue of race and also, what is considered to be appropriate language to use these days. Would you like to say a bit more about that?

(C) Well, yes - but of course, I'm a bit nervous, because it can be very sensitive which terms are used. I worked with people from black and minority ethnic communities for decades and when I first started working, we talked about minority no, we first started talking about *ethnic minorities* - that was the phrase that was used in the '70's or '80's. And then we started talking about Black and minority ethnic people and the 'Black' would have a capital 'b', to say it was a political word - that it didn't just refer to skin colour. It was about people who identified as black regardless of their skin colour. Recently, then it was - well there were a few other iterations there - but recently, people I notice are talking about "BAME" (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people) - sometimes its shortened to BAME or sometimes people say "people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities" would be another way of phrasing it. In America, in the past decade or so, they talked about "POC" (People of Colour - POC), and that term is now being used in this country.

(M) What about, Christine, what about the term "*institutional racism*"? That's something that's been talked a bit about, as part of this issue.

(C) Yes, I mentioned the Macpherson Report and the Race Relations Amendment Act of 2000 - that was the first time that institutional racism was recognised as a fact, a reality. When Stephen Lawrence was murdered, the Inquiry did not find the police officers who were dealing with it, handling that death, that they were individually racist. They didn't find that they were individually prejudiced or discriminating or racist themselves, but it was that the whole way the Metropolitan Police - the Met - was set up - just meant that, because the call came for a young black lad who'd been stabbed, the response was much slower, and it was

inappropriate. It wasn't taken as seriously as if it had been a white person. And so that was institutional racism. So, doesn't require an individual to be racist, but the whole way that an organisation is set up, it means that the effect is that people from different ethnic backgrounds are treated poorly - not as well as - as white people.

- (M) When we decided we were going to talk about this subject today we thought it was really important to talk about it. We were conscious that many, probably the majority, of our listeners are from black and minority ethnic backgrounds and this issue being such an important one, we thought it was important we addressed it within this podcast. However, we are very conscious that the three of us recording this are all white. And I think we should say all privileged white, as well, so we have done our best to reflect the context of this issue but we felt it was very important that we heard the voice of a black person from our local community and so I interviewed Bola Adams. And we will play that interview now.
- (M) So, Bola, thank you very much for joining us. Would you like to just introduce yourself?
- (B) Yeah, hi, my name is Bola Adams. I just want to thank you for this opportunity, for me, it's a privilege and I also thank Mark. Actually, as I say, my name is Bola Adams, originally I'm from Nigeria. I moved to Halifax and I started up an organisation called "Light Up Black and African Heritage, Calderdale". So that's the organisation I am working with.
- (M) That's great - thanks very much Bola. So, tell us what do you think the significance is of the events that have unfolded around the world, over the last couple of weeks.

(20:50)

- (B) Wow - For me, it's a big thing that has unfolded, as you rightly said, a significant thing. I think most black, African people of black culture, of black heritage, people - I think they've been quiet for so long and what just happened to George Floyd brings out the voice. It's like there's a proverb in my country that they normally say – that when you start, when you beat something or let's say if you are beating a child, if you keep beating the child, even if you are older than the child or you are younger than the child, and you are beating the child, it will come to a point where the child will come back to you in a bad way, in a violent way, and say "Please can you leave me, don't kill me".

Such things happening now all over the whole world, we've seen what has been happening, so many things have been happening to black [people], especially all over the whole world not even America, even in UK. In part over the whole world can see what is going on right now. So I think, what has happened now, is just a voice, people are just saying "It's enough, it's enough". I think we have been quiet for so long. There is a scripture in the bible that says "I have been crushed, I have been broken, but still I am not letting go". I think this is the reason why everybody's just speaking out now. We can't take it anymore. We've been so silent. You've been treating us badly and if you look at the thing that happened to George Floyd - I pay tribute to him, you will see what happened to him. At the last part, when the police lay his knees on him - he said "I can't breathe, I can't breathe. My stomach is hurting".

So, for me, it shows a lot of things that is going on in all over the whole world. Many people can't breathe, many people can't - it's just hurting them. They can't speak and people are crying, they are dying silently, so I think what has happened has brought a big voice that - "No, enough is enough". As black community as a diversity and immigrants in the nation, wherever the nation that (*unclear*)..... we're just saying "No - enough is enough". We need to cry out, we need justice now, we need to say "No", to what is going on around all over the whole world, so I think that's what is happening here.

- (M) That's great, thank you Bola. You touched on mentioning this country, there - what do you think the significance is, particularly, for the United Kingdom?

(B) I think for the United Kingdom like one of the, the subject is saying to me when I looked at the life of Stephen Lawrence - I am going to bring that up, because this happened in the UK. I'm going to bring that up, when I look at the significance when I went back and I researched about the old story about this young guy. The white people coming out stabbing the boy, in the night and to me, I think if Stephen Lawrence is my own younger brother, is my own blood, and somebody stabbing him. And if you look at the story, I gathered about him is that even when they stabbed him, even when he was injured, everything has gone out of him, with the pain – he still - he came up and he was running for his life - the same thing as George. He was running for his life. He was saying "I can't breathe" and if we are going to take away the colour. We are all shouting "you are white", "you are black", if you take away the colour of black, and you take away the colour of white, the same blood that runs in you, the same things are running over the world, the same veins that runs through you, the same brain, the same eye, its the same thing. It's just the colour, so I don't know why they are racist. I don't know why the white person saying "oh because you are black, move - you are a monkey". I've seen, I've researched and I've seen that. I know this has to stop - I think that is the reason why everybody is voicing now - I think George Floyd has brought out a lot of pains. You know, when these pains is growing is just like a great pregnant woman. When you are pregnant, on the day of labour you feel pain, because why - a baby is coming out. So, I think the pain is too much for people to carry, the pain is just too much and people who have, like George Floyd, they passed it, And now I need to voice up - for UK, I think this is the reason why people are out there and saying 'No, we have to stop this.'

(25:25)

(M) Thank you. Thank you, Bola, that's very powerful. So, last question - what would you like to see happen now, as a result of these demonstrations, the outcry that there has been around the world. What would you like to see happen?

(B) Yeah - Thank you so much for that question. One thing I want to say is yeah, I've been listening to the news. I've been seeing a lot of things that is going on. Yeah, I heard the black community are saying now, we need to start seeing the history of Black People put into the curriculum of education in the UK. Yes - that's one thing I want to see. Let the white people know. Because I was speaking to somebody, the reason when I sat down, and I was thinking and I was wondering why, why are white people behaving bad to black? I looked at it. If you look at it, it is all over everywhere - even Royals, in the Queen's room, it's there. We see Megan married to Harry, one day they just came up and say "No, we can't stay in the UK, we are going to Canada". If you look at what was, is going on. One of - I think one of the MPs was saying - maybe it was racist, it might be, I don't know, but I think that might be part of it. Megan said "No I don't think I need to go through this again. So I think I just have to have me and my family alone"

So as I say..let them tell the white people. How black [people] come into faith - Black didn't just come into faith. I'm going to use Nigeria as an example. UK, Britain colonised Nigeria. UK, Britain colonised a lot of African people there and they are taking royalties, every year. They need to tell it to the white children - they need to let them know that these are the things that is going on. Black didn't just show face. I was researching about the Edward Colony [Colston] and when I looked at his record he was taking the black people, he was bringing them into America, and bringing them into the UK, as slavery, using the money he was getting from there, helping the economy. That is bad - for me, he is using blood to make himself big. They need to tell it to the children of white. White people need to know that this is the reason, this is how black people are come up, they didn't just show face. The same way you are brought up -so this has to be told to them, they need to know about the history of Africans.

And also, one thing that wants to make a change and also in UK is that. Let there be love. Let there be love, in the economy, let there be love everywhere - in immigration, let there be love. As I said earlier on, immigration people, being (*unclear*) because you are black - they

are looking for a way to frustrate you, not give you your document - that needs to be stopped: they need to stop that. As I say, UK colonized Africa and every year they are getting royalties from us, so what a sense of this you are getting from me and my own children and my grandchildren are coming into the country, to make life and you are saying 'no' to them - that needs to stop. They need to stop all this and also I want the black people also, to go out there. Being educated they should stop all the violence - the violence won't stop all this, killing each other won't stop all this. Right now, we all need to come back together as one and work with the law. And before I go, I am just going to make one of our mission statements, as in Light Up Black and African Heritage in Calderdale, one of our mission statements is quoting from James 3:18 in the Bible, he say you can develop a healthy, robust community, that lives right with God, and enjoy its results, only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honour. So let's all come together as brothers and sisters, as one, as a family. Be in peace. There is love, yeah black you are facing a challenge, a white brother a white sister comes to you, lifts you up and help you. So these are the things I want to see, these are the things I want to see.

- (M) Thank you Bola, that was very powerful. Thank you indeed.
- (B) That's fine. Thank you so much.
- (M) Thank you very much on behalf of St Augustine's and all our students. That's great. Take care. So, Christine, I think that was a very passionate interview with Bola, which really reflects how strongly people, black people all around the world, are feeling, right now.
- (C) Yes, I agree - I am glad you interviewed Bola, Mark, thank you. And it's important that we remember the significance of this, in people's lives. As we're - the three of us - are white people, we don't have to put up with racism. It's not directed at us in our daily lives but our black, asian and minority ethnic colleagues and friends, they put up with it. I won't say, everyday of their lives, but it's built into our society. Its not surprising that she is so passionate, and people like her are so passionate.
- (M) And in fact, people are saying, we are not going to put up with it any longer, we're going to - we're going to really argue for and I was impressed with the fact that she had very specific proposals as well, about how to take this forward. And her acknowledgement as well, that many white people are also are angered by this and want to see significant change as well.
- (C) Yes, that's very interesting - in the protests in this country and in the States, as well. As well as the black, asian and minority ethnic people, there are many white people. They're allies - that's a term that's used now, for standing alongside them. Yeah
- (S) And my friends in the Bristol march and the protest said at least 30% of the people there were white, including the people who pulled the statue down and who have been since arrested for doing it.
- (C) Yeah - interesting - and I just hope that something will come of it, because I mean the law in this country - it was brought in, in 2000, with a lot of hope for change, but not much change has happened. Well, particularly not in terms of the criminal justice and police system. Perhaps more so in education and health, but there's still a long way to go in that respect.

(Music)

(32:50)

Language Support

In this part of the podcast, I will choose a few of the words and phrases used in this episode and explain them in a little more detail. I should say that this episode contains quite a lot of difficult language, so don't worry if you don't get it the first time.

Early on, I used the phrase “**social media hashtag**” - social media, I expect you do know, can refer to Facebook, What's App, Twitter, and other forms of media through the internet. A hashtag (#) is a sign that can be attached to any social media post and is often used to gain interest in a particular subject, interest and support, for that subject.

So, Black Lives Matter became a hashtag used throughout social media.

We said that a particular event had “**sparked demonstrations**” - now a spark is usually from a fire and can be used to light another fire. But in this case, to spark an event, or a reaction, simply means that something has happened which has quickly led to something else happening, as a result.

Segregation is a word meaning a separation of - or treating separately of - different groups; in this case, different races.

We talked about “**black people being aggrieved by**” that means they were unhappy about, they felt that something had happened that was not fair, that was unjust, so they had a *grievance*; that is, something, that they feel, that they rightly don't feel happy about and if that happens, then you can say that you are **aggrieved**.

Christine said that black people have been getting a “**raw deal**”. That means that they've been treated unfairly, they've had a bad deal, a bad arrangement, something that has not worked in their favour; that is, a raw deal, a bad deal.

She then went on to say that other people - the demonstrators, the protesters had “**taken up the mantel**” on behalf of those black people who had been discriminated against and treated unfairly. To *take up the mantel* is to do something on behalf of other people. So, even if somebody themselves has not been the subject of racism, or indeed us as white people, have not experienced racism, we nevertheless take up the issue on behalf of those people who have, we take up or pick up the mantel, on their behalf.

When Sheena was talking about the statue of Edward Colston, in Bristol, she said that originally people had only known him as a “**philanthropist**”. A philanthropist is somebody who does good works and gives money to good causes. But what she said then was, the fact that he was also a slave trader was something that had been “**glossed over**”. To gloss over something is to treat it as unimportant, to ignore something difficult or unpleasant. So the fact that he was a slave trader had been ignored for too long and now of course that is what has led to his statue being pulled down.

Finally, Christine talked about many white people being “**allies**” with black people and allies are friends who are on your side - so working together for something.

That's it for this week. I hope you've found this episode useful and helpful. The transcript will be available on our website in a few days and we recommend that having listened to this once, you then listen to it again, reading the transcript at the same time.

So until next time, stay safe and keep working at your English. Thank you. Goodbye.

(Music)

(39:09)