

## The Post-Racial Princess: Delusions of racial progress and intersectional failures

**Abstract.** Meghan Markle’s marriage to Prince Harry sparked a global debate about the extent to which the union marked progress in British race relations with the royal family embracing “modern Britain”. Rather than representing progress the furor around the marriage is the perfect example of the delusions of post-racialism, which entrench racial inequality. The royal family is one of the premier symbols of Whiteness, the very idea that the inclusion of Markle changes this demonstrates a lack of understanding of racism. Seeing the marriage as progress is an intersectional failure that ignores the limits of representational change as well as the specific limits of Markle as a representative of Black women, particularly in Britain. Issues of patriarchy, nationality, class and colourism prevent Markle representing the average Black woman in Britain. Embracing a Black feminist standpoint negates the idea of representational change because no individual can ever stand in for the collective.

Meghan Markle’s entry into the royal family sparked a wealth of press coverage and debates about the nature of racism in Britain. I saw first-hand how the press feasted on the marriage, fielding calls for commentary from national as well as international news outlets. In fact, I first found out that her and Prince Harry were a couple when *Ebony Magazine* in the United States asked me to write a piece about the significance of pair’s relationship in 2016. The article was in response to a piece in the *Daily Mail* that did not even try to hide its racism, entitled as it was ‘Harry’s girl is (almost) straight outta Compton: Gang-scarred home of her mother revealed - so will he be dropping by for tea?’ (Styles and Bathia, 2016). All the stereotypes of Black urban poverty were rolled out to make it abundantly clear that Markle was alien to the privileged life of the monarchy. The disturbing tone of press coverage led Prince Harry to release a statement condemning the ‘racial undertones’ of the stories at the time (Booth and O’Carroll, 2016). There is no doubt that since their marriage Markle has continued to receive heavily racialized, negative treatment by the press. The couple were so exasperated with the press treatment of Markle that Prince Harry released an official statement in October 2019 condemning the ‘continual misrepresentations’ of her (Duke of Sussex, 2019). So vicious was the coverage that the couple were effectively hounded out of the monarchy at the end of 2019.. But for all the negative treatment that the relationship, and

Markle, received, the press coverage of the wedding was for the most part positive, framing the marriage as a mark of progressiveness in apparently “modern Britain” (Clancy and Yelin, 2018).

In the run up to the wedding, I commented for a range of publications: the *Guardian*, *New York Times*, *Newsweek* as well as appearing on *Newsnight*, Channel 4, CNN, Canadian Television and Globo in Brazil. Sky News sent two different camera crews to talk to our Black Studies undergraduate students at Birmingham City University, and the substance of all these discussions was essentially the same, asking to what extent the marriage improved race relations in Britain. Following the wedding, on May 21<sup>st</sup> 2018 I found myself on *Good Morning Britain* debating against writer Afua Hirsch - we are usually on the same side of the issues - about whether ‘the Royal Wedding is a Sign of Britain Changing?’ In that debate Hirsch argued that it was symbolically important for young Black people to see that the monarchy does not have to be exclusively White, specifically because the institution has such an important place in Britain’s imaginary of itself. Even the smallest change in representation in that previously exclusively White space is seen as progress because it opens a different discussion about race and identity. Hirsch was by no means the only Black commentator to find some hope in the new relationship. In 2016, before marriage was on the table, writer and socialite Lady Colin Campbell remarked on how unimaginable a royal having a relationship with a Black woman would have been 20 years ago, adding that ‘the ethos of the age is acceptance and inclusiveness. The days when marriages were regarded as desirable only if people were of the same class and colour are gone’ (Sykes, 2016). Black Entertainment Television (BET) heralded the relationship as a changing of the guard after the end of the Obama presidency declaring that ‘we may be leaving the White House, but we might be making our way into the royal castle’ (Andrews, 2016). Symbolically, Obama’s presidency and Markle’s royalty are very much connected. They both provided visually different

representation in roles that were previously bastions of Whiteness. But they also both show the limits that this kind of symbolic change represents. During the build-up and aftermath of the wedding I spent a lot of time debating the merits of cosmetic changes to institutions. In the debate with Hirsh I referred to the notion that a Black princess would empower Black communities in Britain as nothing more than a dream, which earned me the accolade of ‘party pooper’ from host Piers Morgan. That is precisely the point of breaking down the discourse of post-racialism, to burst the fantasy balloons of progress and reveal the underlying racist fabric of society (Bonilla-Silva, 2017).

In this article, we will discuss how Markle, as the post-racial princess, is not just a false symbol of racial progress, but that the reality is far worse. First, utilising Critical Race Theory, we will examine the limited power any figure has within institutionally racist systems by exploring the example of Barack Obama’s election to the US presidency. We will specifically focus on the role of the Duchess of Sussex, which is entirely symbolic. Second, we will use the concept of intersectionality to take into account Markle's wealth and class, which further problematizes her marriage as progressive. Third, we will discuss how Markle being American allows commentators to treat her Blackness as a foreign body, drawing on well worked media tropes from the US, and ignoring UK experiences of racism and being Black. Fourth, we must consider the impact of colourism and how Markle's complexion allows for her to 'pass' for White. Fifth, we debunk the myth that mixed relationships are any kind of measure of racism (or progress) in society.

Hailing a Black royal as a sign of supposedly “modern” Britain is in fact symbolic violence, part of a discourse designed to legitimise continued racial oppression by masking it. Below we will undo the post-racial delusions drawing on Kimberlé Crenshaw’s notion of *intersectional failure* to understand the problem of viewing the marriage as any kind of progress.

### *Post-racial delusions*

In the late eighties, the field of Critical Race Theory (CRT) was born in the US, brought into existence by legal scholars frustrated with the frameworks available to them to understand how racism was functioning in society. CRT was heavily influenced by the failures of the civil rights movement despite its successes. The movement was based on the idea of gaining access to the system in order to reform it and therefore deliver racial equality. Major victories were won in these endeavours: desegregation, voting rights protections for African Americans and race relations legislation. The result is that the US has some of the most progressive legislation in the world, including policies like affirmative action that are unimaginable in Britain. African Americans are also more well represented in local, state and national government than Black minorities in any other Western country, with the election of Barack Obama a testament to the foundation laid by the civil rights movement. Despite all of these successes - in fact, the US civil rights movement may be one of the most successful in history at achieving its stated goals - it failed to address the problem of racial inequality.

Sixty years after the infamous *Brown vs Board of Education* ruling that desegregated schooling, US schools are more segregated today than they were before the decision in 1954 (Orfield, 2009). The March on Washington in 1963, immortalised by Martin Luther King's 'I Have A Dream' speech, was not only against segregation but for 'Jobs and Freedom'. Under the reign of the first Black president the unemployment rate of African Americans remained significantly higher than the average, whilst the proportion of Black people in poverty stayed almost 2.5 times higher than for White Americans. In an astounding demonstration of racism and poverty in the US, half of all African Americans with jobs in New York City work in fast food restaurants. Even when Black people have work it does not pay, contributing to the massive increase in food bank usage of African Americans under the Obama administration

(Taylor, 2016). In a far less well remembered speech King warned about the evils of underemployment where people were working ‘full time jobs for part time wages’. So bleak was the situation for African Americans he labelled it an economic depression, with millions on wages ‘so inadequate that they cannot even begin to function in the mainstream of the economic life of the nation’ (King, 2015, p.332). In addition to not solving the old problems, new issues like mass incarceration have emerged condemning African Americans to prison at rates that outstrip even apartheid South Africa (Alexander, 2010). A burgeoning Black middle and political class does not equal racial progress. CRT came out of the recognition of the failure to rebalance the scales, and the late Derrick Bell (1992, p.3) offered the following warning of the illusions of civil rights gains: ‘what we designate as “racial progress” is not a solution to that problem. It is a regeneration of the problem in a particularly perverse form’.

Post-racialism is a particularly pernicious outcome of civil rights gains that regenerate the problem (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). By passing legislation, electing Black officials and inviting a few fortunate African Americans into the middle class we are presented with the illusion of progress. After Obama’s election, sixty nine percent of African Americans said his presidency was ‘the fulfilment of Martin Luther King’s dream’ (Taylor, 2016, p.140). The truth is that Obama was not, and never pretended to be, Black America’s representative in the White House. From his 2004 speech that sparked his run for the presidency he was clear that there was ‘not a Black America and a White America and Latino America and Asian America — there’s the United States of America’ (Obama, 2004). He followed through on this vision with a presidency bereft of a policy platform to address racial inequality. Obama played the aesthetics well, embracing Hip Hop, Black celebrities, basketball, singing in churches and welcoming Black Lives Matter activists to the White House, but the substance was lacking. Worse still, when he did address racial inequality, he did so in a way that made matters worse. His response to the killing of Trayvon Martin was not to address any of the

systematic problems of violence towards Black people, not to change any laws or insist a civil rights prosecution against the child's killer. Instead he launched a mentoring programme, "My Brother's Keeper" (MBK), for Black boys with absent fathers, funded mostly by the private sector and with the full-throated support of the conservative right (Crenshaw, 2014). We cannot even call this blaming the victim, because Trayvon Martin was visiting his father when he was killed. Although MBK had absolutely nothing to do with the Trayvon Martin killing it drew widespread support because it fit the post-racial narrative of the Obama presidency. It took an event rooted in systemic racism and drained all significance of that racism out of it. The encounter was still presented in racial terms, just those palatable to maintaining the status quo, perpetuating the idea that race is only a barrier because of the cultures of the oppressed. Single parenthood, and in particular the failure of Black mothers to raise their male children, was mobilised as the explanation for the crisis of Black boys, an oft used trope to demonise Black families (Crenshaw, 1989). This narrative of cultural deprivation fits the ethos of the American dream that if some can make it, then it must be the fault of those who did not that they have been left behind. That is the symbolic violence behind the Obama presidency, the illusion that it marked progress when it was actually a continuation of the problem 'in a particularly perverse form' (Bell, 1992, p.3). Even after it was clear that Obama had failed to make any inroads into racial inequality, author Ta-Nahesi Coates entitled his book of writings during the era *We Were Eight Years in Power* as if Obama's presidency were some sort of collective achievement for the African Americans he either ignored or maligned.

Obama's reign in the US is instructive for Markle's addition to the royal family because of the symbolism that both represent. However, Obama was actually the leader of the country and had some power, however limited, to address racial inequality. The hope that he would make change was not completely delusional, even if it was entirely misguided. He

certainly *could* have done more, even if eradicating racism is beyond the brief of the presidency. In the case of Markle, however, there was no avenue as a member of the royal family to make any substantive change to racism in Britain. Even the Queen only has symbolic power, Head of State in image only, rolled out to keep up the mystique of the British Crown. The ceremonial nature of the monarch role was on full display during the Brexit parliamentary crisis at the end of 2019<sup>1</sup>.

When Prime Minister Boris Johnson took the ultimately illegal act of closing parliament down to stop the opposition party schemes against his plans, he had to get the Queen to use her powers of prerogative in order to do so (Sumption, 2020). It should be alarming that the monarch has the power to close parliament in a democracy, but her role was entirely ceremonial. The government instructed the Queen to close down parliament and she had no choice but to act. In the end, it was the courts who decided that the action was unlawful and reinstated parliament. Her Royal Highness had no role in deciding the action or whether it was appropriate. As the Duchess of Sussex, Markle did not even have that ceremonial power let alone access to any of the levers of power necessary to make substantive change.

Undoubtedly, having a prominent symbolic position and celebrity status gives Markle more power than the average subject of the Crown. Celebrity and fame are powerful forces in society that can mobilise publics and put pressure on institutions and the government to act (Marshall, 1997). But this should not be conflated with direct access to power that can reshape people's lives. If the first Black president was not able (or willing) to attempt meaningful change then it was always a fantasy to expect the Duchess of Sussex to have that power. Given this reality it is absurd to look to any member of the monarchy to make

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<sup>1</sup> Since the UK general election in 2017 following the vote for Brexit there had been a parliamentary deadlock as to how exactly the UK would leave the European Union. The stalemate led to Prime Minister Theresa May resigning and Boris Johnson replacing her. Johnson was one of the faces of the Vote Leave campaign and promised to end the deadlock. One of the actions he took was to suspend (prorogue) parliament in what many saw as move to stop the influence of politicians opposed to him at the end of 2019 (Sumption, 2020)

significant transformation of the nation. Any examination of the symbolic role of the monarchy makes it abundantly clear that the symbolic violence is even more severe here than with the US presidency.

Another connection between the US and the UK in the current political moment is that an urge to reclaim a past, and Whiter, nation is shaping populist movements. Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan was mirrored by campaigners who successfully pushed for Brexit in order to "Take Back Control". To "take back" suggests returning former prowess and it is not difficult to locate the source of the nostalgia to which many in the nation want to return. It was leaked in 2017 that Whitehall officials had dubbed their post-Brexit plans 'empire 2.0', which can be read as an opportunity to rebuild the colonial links that Britain had to large parts of the globe (Olusoga, 2017). Britain was only ever "great" as an empire so large that it covered a quarter of the globe; so vast that the sun never set on its dominions (Tiejun, 2007). The crumbling of the empire was a key driver for Britain's membership of what became the European Union (the EU) because, cut off from the direct control of large parts of Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, Britain needed the support of her neighbours. Colonial nostalgia played a major role in the campaign to leave the EU, providing an outlet for the 'postcolonial melancholia' caused by Britain losing her prominence in the world (Gilroy, 2001, p.157). Today, this is more of a symbolic project than an actual imperialistic drive. The empire is over and nations like India have, or shortly will have, larger economies and more economic power than their former ruler. It is also true that the term post-colonial does not do justice to the continued economic colonial relationship that the former colonies are tied into. Unjust trade practices, debt and continued economic exploitation make the term *neo-colonialism* far more apt for understanding the situation of the former colonies of the European powers. But this is already true and part of a wider system of Western imperialism that Britain benefits from. Whether the nation remained



inside the EU or not would have made no difference to this relationship (Andrews, 2021). The yearn for the glory of Britannia is symbolic and there is no better representation of the symbol than the royal family.

Replete with her various crowns filled with jewels stolen from various colonies, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II may be the premier symbol of colonial nostalgia. Britain's former colonies remain part of the Commonwealth group of 53 nations, and the Queen is still the Head of State of 15 former colonies including Jamaica, Australia, Canada, Barbados and Belize. The image of Britannia ruling the waves is wrapped in the majesty of royalty. Due to the almost total absence of teaching on the horrors of empire in schools, and the popularity of the monarchy, it should be no surprise that almost 60 percent of the British public believe that the empire was 'something to be proud of' (Dalhgreen, 2014). The royal family is the direct link to the colonial era, with all the trappings of elitism, patriarchy and racism. That an exclusively White family who have only very recently included any diversity (in the form of Markle), can stand as a representation of the nation should tell us everything we need to know about the power of the symbol. Their Whiteness is not a coincidence, it is the point. That is why it is still remarkable in the twenty first century that a prominent member of the royal family has married someone of mixed heritage. Far from Markle's inclusion changing the symbol, she is the exception that proves the rule. The continued press hatred she has been subject to is evidence of the unease of her presence (McLennan, forthcoming).

Markle is the perfect example of the delusions of the post-racial moment. She has married into one of the most powerful symbols of Whiteness and colonial nostalgia, which underpin contemporary manifestations of racism. Her addition to the Windsor family photo will not change the role of the monarchy nor its symbolic violence towards descendants of the former colonies either at home or abroad. In fact, it is more likely that, just as in the case of Obama, Markle will be used to make new connections between the racist institution she

represents and those Black and Brown people who are its victims. As I argued in my debate with Afua Hirsch, the only positive action that the royal family could take in regards to racial inequality would be to abolish itself. If having a Black face in the Whitest of institutions makes Black people feel more connected to the monarchy, then this is the worst possible outcome of Markle's inclusion in the family. We already saw that the couple were being used by the royal family to bolster connections with the Commonwealth (Connor, forthcoming), and it was even rumoured at one point that they may live in "Africa". Yes, Africa, the stories were not any more specific (Andrews, 2019).

The sad reality is that racial equality in Britain is stagnating rather than improving. Racial disparities across all areas of social life continue, including police brutality and abuse of power; steep economic differences; health inequalities; and unemployment (Cabinet Office, 2019). If you want one statistic to tell you the scale of racial injustice then consider that over half of the juvenile prison population is from an ethnic minority (Green, 2019). As the structural problems continue, the last several years have also marked an increase in overt racism and even racially motivated hate crimes. Speaking in a generally positive piece about the wedding in the *Guardian*, historian Ted Powell commented on how it is 'difficult to overstate' the importance of a 'mixed race' addition to the royal family. He continued that it was 'hugely positive for Britain, particularly in the wake of Brexit, the controversies of immigration policy and the Windrush scandal' (Iqbal, 2018). The Vote Leave campaign for Brexit has been credited with rise in racist hate crimes (Burnett, 2017). The Windrush scandal<sup>2</sup> was caused by the government's 'hostile environment' policy towards illegal immigrants, which has also effected countless migrants from the former colonies who migrated legally but have no documents to evidence it (Goodfellow, 2019). People who have

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<sup>2</sup> The Windrush scandal refers to those with the legal right to be resident in the UK but who lack the necessary paperwork because they came to the country decades ago. It is called the Windrush scandal because many of those caught up were from the Caribbean where mass migration to the UK started in 1948 with the arrival of the ship Windrush (Hewitt, 2018)

been living in the country for decades are suddenly subject to deportation and have lost their jobs because they have no proof of their legal status. It is no exaggeration to say that the current government is pursuing one of the most overtly racist policy agendas the nation has experienced in decades. The election of Boris Johnson to Prime Minister with his history of calling Black children ‘piccaninnies with watermelon smiles’ and comparing Muslim women in the veil to ‘letterboxes’ only emphasises the point (Staples, 2019). There is a different, more aggressive feel to the racism that we are experiencing in the current moment. The notion that this context is why we should be thankful for Markle becoming a royal is exactly what Bell had in mind with his warning about what we designate as racial progress. Celebrating a Black princess may make us feel better, but it does not change any of the realities of structural racism, Brexit, Windrush or the marked decline in public discourse. It is an illusion, worth only as much as a mirage on the horizon of a desert. By placing faith in the empty symbol, we take our focus off addressing the real problem of racism that is as deep seated as ever.

### *Intersectional failures*

In order to understand why the progress represented by Markle is a mirage, we need to consider the concept of ‘intersectional failure’. Kimberle Crenshaw uses the term ‘intersectional failure’ to refer to those moments when one form of inequality overrides the intersection with another, in ways which typically work against Black women (Carbado and Crenshaw, 2019, p.116). Speaking at the Women of the World Festival in London in 2016, Crenshaw gave an example of such a failure as the marginalisation of the women who have suffered violence at the hands of the police in the Black Lives Matter movement. Anyone who has paid attention to the movement can recall names like Mike Brown, Tamir Rice and Eric Garner. Rekia Boyd, Shantel Davis and Shelley Frey will be much less familiar. Whilst

it is true that Black men are killed at higher rates than women, Black women are far more likely to be subject to such violence than their White counterparts (Jacobs, 2017). Crenshaw started the #SayHerName campaign in order to bring light to these cases, but has spoken about being shouted down on Black Lives Matter protests, and how the mothers of the female victims have been marginalised by the campaign (Crenshaw, Andrews and Wilson, 2021). Police violence is seen as a racial issue, not a gendered one, and therefore the focus is on the male victims. Black men as victims of state violence in the public sphere fits a narrative of the assault on Black men, who have been represented as savages in need of control since the enslavement of Africans. To understand the same violence against Black women who have often suffered violence? in the private sphere demands a different set of analyses. Intersectional failure is an inability to analyse through a lens that includes both race and gender, with the result being that Black women are marginalised from the discourse and struggle. The post-racial delusions about the royal wedding are also an example of such a failure.

The premise that the royal wedding is positive is based solely through a lens of race. Markle is Black and therefore changes the face of the family, representing the diversity of supposedly modern Britain. Entirely missing in this notion is gender. It is difficult to see how a woman marrying a man can be a sign of either progress or achievement, given the deeply patriarchal roots of the institution of marriage (Lewis, 2001) . The princess narrative is deeply problematic from a gender perspective, as are fairy tales of the shining prince opening their heart and kingdom to their true love. This idea becomes even more absurd when we consider the family she married into. The royal family is a deeply patriarchal institution in terms of structure, succession and presentation (Clancy and Yelin, this issue). In Prince Harry's statement against the press, a major theme was how he had seen the press destroy the life of his mother, Princess Diana who died in a car crash whilst being chased by the paparazzi.

There are particular expectations of a royal wife and the British press will savage anyone who departs from these. If we saw past the post-racial fantasy of Markle, we would query a financially independent, outspoken and successful woman being subscribed in a role that pertains to gendered traditionalism. The idea that a woman marrying a man represents some kind of achievement sets back progressive notions on gender decades.

Crenshaw's (1989) conceptualisation of intersectionality emerged from CRT and Black feminist thought. An immovable part of the concept is the idea that to see the world from the position of Black women is to offer unique insights because of their intersectional location. Patricia Hill Collins (2000) outlined the importance of the Black feminist standpoint in providing the basis of an alternative epistemology. Intersectionality is a way of articulating how the experience of the intersection illuminates social structures and relationships. Therefore, the marginalisation of Black women is particularly problematic because it disallows knowledge from the very standpoint that can reveal the multifaceted ways in which institutions reproduce exclusionary practice.

The other major intersectional failure in the case of Markle is to assume that her entry into the royal family offers insight from a Black feminist standpoint. Markle cannot escape her Blackness, and the vitriol of the press toward her demonstrates the racialized nature of the media coverage she has received. However, Blackness is more than just skin colour, and the intersections matter in terms of embodying Black feminist standpoints. The only argument that would evidence how her inclusion into the family is progressive is that it breaks new barriers in terms of representation. We have already dealt with the weakness of that idea in general, but even if we accept the importance of representation, then Markle being a Duchess fails to offer anything progressive on those terms. Class is certainly an important intersection to consider. A famous, independently wealthy actress marrying into the royal family hardly

represents the average Black woman. The couple's relationship is more like a fairytale from a movie than real life.

The appalling Daily Mail article, with the headline 'Harry's girl is (almost) straight outta Compton' about Markle's family in Los Angeles located her as alien not only because of her race but also her nationality. Aversion to foreigners joining the royal family aside, her American heritage is important to the discussion of race. Britain is terrible at recognising its own racist history and present. Former Prime Minister David Cameron (2014) demonstrated this in his statement that Britain is the country which 'abolished slavery' and 'defeated fascism'. There has been no real reckoning with just how important racism has been to the nation. Due to the formerly enslaved living in America, rather than thousands of miles away in the Caribbean, the US had to acknowledge its history of slavery and racism (Andrews 2018). As we have seen, the situation in the US with regards to racial in/equality is no better for this acknowledgment, but there is a robust public discourse about racism in the nation. So robust that Britain often prefers to talk about racism through America in order to distance herself from the problem. We have Black History Months full of Martin Luther King and US Civil rights movement, and school curricula that when they do address slavery focuses on the US rather Britain's own role in the Caribbean. Britain has even highlighted the recent struggles against police violence in the US, whilst largely ignoring the decades of campaigning about the same problems here. Accepting an African American into the royal family is far easier than doing the same for someone whose heritage is directly linked to Britain's past evils.

The wedding itself was a prime example of this, with Hirsh in our debate on morning television celebrating seeing images of Blackness in the last place we would ever expect. But the pastor was African American, and the gospel choir sang *Stand By Me*, which has been used as an anthem for the US civil rights movement. Embracing African American Blackness

is far easier because the general public is both more used to seeing these kinds of representations from Hollywood, and they allow the distancing of race issues to the US. It is interesting to consider how representations of Black populations in Britain would have been received, and it is also true that Markle's connection to the issues of race in the UK are not the same as someone who has experienced racism on these shores.

The most obvious way that Markle offers limited representation for Black women is her skin tone. Colourism has always been a major issue, where having lighter skin has meant being subject to varied forms of racial oppression (Hunter, 2007). No Black person escapes racism but being light skinned has offered privileges from being able to "pass" for White, to preferential treatment in employment and other areas of social life. This remains the case today in terms of access to the public sphere - the Caribbean is a perfect example of a pigmentocracy (Law and Tate, 2015) - and in relation to standards of beauty. Light skin is fetishised, whilst dark skin, full lips and Afro hair remains demonised (Phoenix, 2014). It is difficult to maintain the claim that Markle represents either Black women or an entirely new representation within the monarchy when phenotypically she is so distant from a Black aesthetic. The average young Black girl will not be looking at pictures of Markle and seeing themselves. This is in no way an argument that because she is light skinned Markle is less Black. Blackness is defined in politics and not skin tone, with some of the most Black radical activists being light skinned and the worst reactionaries dark in colour (Andrews, 2018). But if the issue is about representation, a large part of this is visual, and Markle looks like an acceptable version of light skinned Black womanhood that is now commonplace in mainstream discourse (Phoenix, 2014). The consideration, or general lack thereof, of Markle's mixed heritage in the rush to look for a progressive symbol is also noteworthy.

In general we should avoid solidifying the category of mixed race. In reality the majority of those descendants of the enslaved are mixed to some extent. Designating

someone as mixed because they have one White parent reifies the idea of race itself: that the mixing of two different heritages creates something new, different and remarkable. It also follows directly from racial definitions from the slave plantations. The child of a slave owner and an enslaved African was designated a *mulatto*, from the word mule. They were considered Black but not in entirely the same way as the “fully” Black, and sometimes received extended privileges because of their parentage (Andrews, 2021). The racial classification of the children of those of mixed heritage was determined by the parent who was not White. If they were Black, the children were classified as *sambos* and treated like the rest of the enslaved. Whereas if they were White, the children would be *quadroon* and able to pass for White (Higman, 1976). In thinking about the representational difference that Markle makes to the royal family, we must consider that the couple’s children will be considered White, and that this is based on the racial logics of enslavement. The “one drop rule” that classified African Americans with a hint of African blood as Black does not apply in this context. Given the history of racial mixing and classification in Britain and her status in an elite institution, it is far more likely that Markle will symbolically “pass” as White, rather than her presence fundamentally shifting how difference is represented in the royal family.

Highlighting a mixed relationship as progress is also an intersectional failure. In societies with mixed populations it should not come as a surprise that there are mixed relationships. Britain has long-standing mixed heritage populations, particularly in port cities like Liverpool and Bristol where those from Africa and the Caribbean working at sea would visit and settle. Following the end of the First World War in 1918 both cities also saw an increase in Black immigration from those who had served in the military. In fact, 2019 marked the hundredth anniversary of race riots in port cities due in part to accusations of Black men “stealing” White women (Fryer, 1984). Today, the fastest growing ethnic group in Britain is those of mixed heritage. But neither the long history of mixed heritage people in



Britain, nor the significant population in the present, reveal anything about the nature of racism. Brazil is often celebrated as a racial democracy because of its large mixed heritage, or *mestizo*, population. More than half of Brazil's population is of African descent due to the extent of mixing, meaning there are more Black people in Brazil than any country except Nigeria. But the reality is that Brazil is one of the most racially unequal societies in the world, where colourism and Whiteness shape the political economy (Nascimento, 2007). All that mixed relationships tell us is that when people live with different groups, colour is not a barrier to forming relationships. These interpersonal decisions are not indicative of changes in structural racism. Racism does not need strict boundaries or the prohibition of racial mixing in order to flourish. The version of racial oppression currently operating has developed beyond these old codes.

If we broke down any individual's relationship to society no one would be a perfect representative of a Black feminist standpoint. That is precisely the problem with the politics of representation, it is not something that any individual is capable of. Markle is a Black woman, but standpoint epistemology is important because it seeks to understand the world through the collective position of Black *women*. As a Black woman Markle will receive certain treatment, but her experience (like any other individuals) can never represent the position of all Black women. It is unfair to expect her to do so.

Post-racialism is an essential mechanism in reproducing racial inequality. It addresses none of the issues of structural racism, but cosmetic alterations in representation are held as sign of progress. In doing so, society fails to understand the nature of the problem or mobilise appropriate resources to tackle racial injustice. Heralding Meghan Markle's inclusion into the royal family is the perfect example of a post-racial delusion that demonstrates how poorly the nation understands racism, and the power of the desire to live in a fantasy of progress rather

than address continuing issues. Racism is deeply entrenched in Britain, with the monarchy and its symbolic image being a key vehicle for maintaining nationalisms that are based on the nostalgia for empire. No addition to the royal family could fundamentally change the institution's complicity in maintaining racial inequality. Seeing Markle as a positive for race relations is the definition of an intersectional failure. If we analyse the marriage fully, we see how problematic it is to take the example of any individual Black woman as representative of the standpoint of all Black women. Rather than representing a radically new development of race relations in supposedly modern Britain, the marriage is perfectly explicable in the context of the racist status quo. If we are serious about fighting racism, we should bury the delusions that the emergence of the Duchess of Sussex had any relationship to our struggle.

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