

# MYTHS ABOUT RACE AND

A new book sets out to explode the many myths associated with immigration. It's time to pay more attention to hard facts, say authors **Ludi Simpson** and **Nissa Finney**

There is a litany that equates immigration, diversity and neighbourhood segregation, labels them all as challenges, and presents them as barriers to integration.

Although often associated with the right wing anti-immigration campaigns including Migrationwatch UK, New Labour also makes these claims, through parts of its community cohesion policy and through Trevor Phillips' leadership of the government equalities bodies. Many journalists have all too often uncritically joined the same chorus.

The litany goes like this: 'Immigrants are a burden, taking jobs and resources, living piled together in segregated areas; segregation prevents integration, clashes with British culture, heightens tension and breeds violence.' It is rightly described as a litany, because of the way the dangers are repeated as a guide to policy, without reference to reality.

We challenge this equation on the basis of the evidence which shows each claim to be a myth. Take increasing race segregation as a case in point. The history of immigration is usually settlement in available cheaper housing followed by slow dispersal as integration has proceeded. There are many reasons why separation might be expected to remain or to increase over time – racist or xenophobic hostility to newcomers, new immigration of family members, strong loyalty to family and to the place of one's upbringing, minority disadvantage in the housing and labour markets, the natural growth of immigrant populations through births, and the litany itself, which suggests to people who do not live in them that minority concentrations are particularly dangerous places.

Yet despite all this, the evidence shows very clearly that minorities and the white populations are more evenly spread than in the past. Migration of minorities away from immigrant settlement areas and increased mixing are occurring despite all those reasons for separation. Government migration statistics show clearly that Pakistanis are moving away from Bradford, Indians are moving away from Leicester, Caribbeans are moving away from Lambeth, and Bangladeshis are moving away from Tower Hamlets.

The litany ignores a great deal of other evidence. Britain's non-white areas are diverse, very rarely mono-ethnic. The white group is the most separated in Britain, in the sense of living in areas with no other groups.

The best indicator of integration is the size of the



mixed ethnic population, which is the fastest-growing minority. Ethnic minority groups are as likely to enter a family union outside their own group as white people are with minorities. The same goes for Muslims, who are as likely to enter a family union with non-Muslims as are Christians with non-Christians. Individual choice in work, education, family and household are the basis of liberal notions of creativity and development; differences abound in Britain and are defined as much by class, age and location as by one's ethnicity or religion. For example, when parents choose to send children to state schools that are not their closest, this sorts children more by income than by ethnicity, as found by the Department for Children, Schools and Families.

'White flight' is a myth except as an observation of the movement of white people out of urban areas with concentrations of ethnic minority communities; the rate of movement out is the same for minorities. Indeed, white movement out of cities preceded immigration.

**Right: Children in a classroom in Leicester, where *The Sunday Times* and the Commission for Racial Equality came under fire over segregation claims (see overleaf)**

# MIGRATION



The commentators who insist that segregation is a problem refer to no more evidence than the growing minority populations in inner urban areas. They have got this right, but perhaps haven't realised that almost every neighbourhood of Britain, urban or not, has a growing minority population. This is simply a result of young adults having families for a decade or two before they are themselves reduced in number by mortality, and it is a long-known feature of immigrant populations who settle. Britain is indeed becoming more diverse.

This natural growth is noticed most, and indeed is most, where there are most immigrants, for it is here that there are fewer houses for new families to move into. Continued immigration both of family members and from new origins adds to the population growth, but it is the expansion of young populations already in Britain that is now known to be the main source of changing ethnic composition. This growth is one reason why both white and minority families tend to move out of most neighbourhoods which have been settlement areas for immigrants – but not all of them, as the table below shows. Other reasons are aspirational, to find better accommodation and environments, and to move a discreet distance from parents: there is plenty of interview-based research to show these motivations for young adults of all ethnic heritages.

## ETHNIC MIX AND HOUSING POLICIES

So making ethnic mix a policy target by lowering the proportions of minorities in neighbourhoods is very unlikely to work. Few regeneration programmes explicitly make such a target but many work with the expectation that a successful programme will reduce the movement of white people out of ethnically diverse areas. They are likely not only to be frustrated in that expectation, but also risk demotivating residents and planners alike with such unrealistic aims, and could end up stigmatising areas with relatively few white residents.

That's not to make light of ethnic mix and the need for a more flexible housing market to give more people a better choice of accommodation. But local policy is

## Migration within the UK from minority white areas within local authorities

	Minority movement out	Minority movement in
White movement out	<b>Minority movement out greater than white movement out</b> Ealing, Newham, Birmingham, Blackburn & Darwen, Brent, Pendle, Tower Hamlets, Southwark, Burnley, Sandwell, Slough, Lewisham, Peterborough, Bolton, Derby	Harrow, Waltham Forest
	<b>White movement out greater than minority movement out</b> Redbridge, Luton, Hounslow, Croydon, Oldham, Haringey, Hyndburn	
White movement in	Leicester, Bradford, Wolverhampton, Coventry, Lambeth, Wycombe, Manchester, Merton	Trafford, Hackney, Preston

35 local authorities had minority white wards at the time of the 2001 Census. From the least white ward in most of these districts, both white residents and other minorities were moving out on balance to other parts of the UK, and in most cases more minorities left than white residents. In eight districts including Leicester and Bradford, minorities moved out of their concentrations within the district, but white people were moving in.

most likely to be effective in helping residents to move to better environments, because this meets the majority of young people's aspirations and needs. Recognising the pressure on housing in the suburbs surrounding diverse neighbourhoods is key. This is precisely where fear of change from existing residents may be greatest, and where hostility to new minority families may take an organised form of racist politics. It's here that integrated support for new and existing residents is most needed.

**CHALLENGING MYTHS**

The litany of dangerous segregation is not just based on a misreading of the facts. It satisfies anxieties about world change in much the same way as the older and now less acceptable 'playing the race card' in politics did. Concerns for housing, jobs and crime, opposition to wars abroad, continuing racial inequality in the workplace, have all been met at some point by the bogey of too many immigrants or minorities with unacceptable beliefs and behaviour.

That the myths continue to be propagated speaks to the ability of politicians and the media to persistently repeat unsubstantiated claims when it suits their needs for a particular policy or for publicity. We can only hope that the media's uncritical adoption of Migrationwatch UK as a source of comment is stemmed by their exposure for 'choosing the figures that suit their story'. Similarly if the falsehood and fabrication behind claims of growing segregation and accelerating white flight is sufficiently known, Trevor Phillips may be discouraged from making sweeping, unsubstantiated and scaremongering claims in the future.

There is a role for better statistical support in politics and the media. The detective work that lays bare trails of false claims repeated in newspapers, government agencies and academic reports may not prevent all shoddy reporting in future but it will give ammunition to those sceptical of the litany and give pause for thought to politicians and journalists who strive to combine integrity with deadlines.

**FIND OUT MORE**

Ludi Simpson is professor of population studies and Nissa Finney is a research associate at Manchester University. They are the authors of *Sleepwalking to segregation? Challenging myths of race and migration*. In it they



challenge a series of widely made claims, including 'Britain takes too many immigrants'; 'so many minorities can't be integrated'; 'minorities don't want to integrate'; and the existence of 'minority white cities'. Published by Policy Press, priced £14.99, it's available in good bookshops or from [www.policypress.org.uk](http://www.policypress.org.uk)

**How false claims are sustained**

*The Sunday Times* and the Commission for Racial Equality in 2006 defended a news story that government statistics showed growing race segregation and that within five years the white population would be a minority in Leicester.

Government statistics actually showed segregation was decreasing. The commission defended its 'news' about Leicester by quoting nine other sources:

- ◆ Three were reports that made no claim about future population.
- ◆ Four, including a government report, made a claim of Leicester becoming minority white in 2011 or 2012 but gave no source.
- ◆ The eighth, a government-sponsored doctoral student's report, claimed that Leicester 'is to become the first "minority-majority" city in the UK' but sources a newspaper article that refers not to population but to school rolls.
- ◆ The final report was an academic article stating that 'the anticipated demographic changes are taking place at a lower rate than some of the more alarmist projections would appear to suggest'.

This is the way in which unsubstantiated claims are passed from news story to government report and back again. The news story and its defence were one element of a complaint to the Statistics Commission about the cavalier use of statistics by senior officers at the Commission for Racial Equality.



Research suggests Britain's non-white areas are diverse, and very rarely mono-ethnic