Government-Backed Report Finds The UK Free From Structural Racism: Why Are We Not Surprised?

On the 31st March the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities published a report on racism after investigating racial and ethnic disparities in the UK. Since its publication, Boris Johnson’s advisor on race has resigned – a senior figure says the timing of Samuel Kasumu’s resignation is not a coincidence.

Lord Woolley, who chaired the Race Disparity Unit’s advisory group from 2018-2020, says Kasumu’s leaving is a result of the “divisive” findings in the report.

“Black people around the country are incandescent with rage that their lived experience of persistent race inequality is being denied and belittled” – Lord Woolley.

A No.10 spokesman maintains that Kasumu had been planning on resigning for a few months, and that him leaving this month was nothing to do with the Commission’s report.

Kasumu has previously talked about tensions in Downing Street over race related policies – he cited fears that the Conservative Party was crafting divisive politics.

The report’s findings claim that the phrase “structural racism” is overused and that socioeconomic, cultural and religious factors have a bigger effect on a person’s life chances.

The government have admitted since the report’s publication, that a “considerable number” of those giving evidence told the commission that structural racism was actually a big issue.

This wouldn’t be the first time that the true sentiments of an oppressed group have been muffled by a formal investigation.

The report comes across as condescending and frankly embarrassingly out of touch. The section devoted to the causes of racial disparity commends the “idealism” of the “well-intentioned young people” involved in last summer’s Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Immediately afterwards it says the “narrative” that white privilege dominates society is not useful for anything other than “alienating” the “decent” people in the centre ground.

The report recommends that the “accusatory tone” of the current mood towards racial issues is unacceptable if we are to tackle what it says the most pressing issue is now – building on past progress.

Interestingly, the report acknowledges that many people in the UK are still “haunted” by racism of previous decades and prior to legislative progress – but it says this is leading to “deep mistrust” and could prevent development. This notion that resentment and helplessness from non-White people is the barrier to success, rather than the discrimination that they face, is dehumanising and invalidates the experiences of thousands of people.

The report is tone deaf. Although the recommendations seem well-meaning, they often ignore the racial aspects of issues. For example, it says that if we find not enough Black students are getting the jobs they desire after graduating, "we need to examine the subjects they are studying and the careers advice they are receiving”.

I’m sure I’m not the only person who reads that and is bubbling with frustration. The report consistently appears more concerned with alienating discriminatory white Britons than it does with improving the lives of racial minorities.

Covid-19 is the latest example of how structural racism dictates the lives of many in the UK. An article published in the British Medical Journal says socioeconomic status has affected the coronavirus’s movement through the population, but that institutional racism also impacts health.

Data from Public Health England found that the mortality risk posed by covid-19 on ethnic minority groups was 2x higher than that of White British patients *after* considering age, sex, income, education, housing status and regional deprivation.

The appointments of those tasked with creating the report were at times, questionable, and yet, predictable.

* Dr Tony Sewell CBE has previously attempted to play down the effects of structural racism and place responsibility on the Black community.
* Mercy Muroki is a senior researcher at the Centre for Social Justice, a right-wing thinktank founded by Iain Duncan Smith.

The report suggested that in terms of racial equality, the UK is a model for other nations with a White majority. British thinktank the Institute of Race Relations says the report is another tool being used by the government, post-Brexit, to paint a picture of the UK as a ray of light in a Western world that has been rocked by police brutality and increased racial tensions.

The report, although ‘independent’ was commissioned and backed by the government. Should we be surprised that they found themselves not guilty?