

## Black British Intellectuals

**Interviewer:** Sam Walter (Interviewer, Ideas Lab)

**Guest:** Dr Paul Warmington

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**Intro VO :** *Welcome to the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast from the University of Birmingham. In each edition we hear from an expert in a different field, who gives us insider information on key trends, upcoming events, and what they think the near future holds.*

**Sam:** We're here today with Dr Paul Warmington who's a Senior Lecturer and Deputy Director of the Centre for Research in Race and Education. Hello Paul.

Paul: Hi.

**Sam:** So can you tell us a bit about what you do here at the university?

Paul: Yeah, I'm based in the School of Education, I've been here for about ten years working on a number of aspects of education and social justice, looking for instance at access to higher education and again, a large strand of my work, one which is increasing, has been looking at equalities and specifically at race equalities in education and I'm part of a new Centre in the School of Education called the Centre for Research into Race and Education and therefore a lot of my current research is focusing on that field.

**Sam:** So in February 2014 we'll see the release of your book, *Black British Intellectuals and Education – Multi-Culturalism's Hidden History* (<http://www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415809375/>). Can you tell us a bit more about why you wrote the book and what it's about?

Paul: Yeah. Black British Intellectuals and Education, well really the book does what it says on the tin. What it looks at is the history of race and education in Britain really through the work of black intellectuals - meaning educators, activists, campaigners - from the 18th Century to the present day.

**Sam:** We're used to sort of thinking of black intellectuals as kind of Malcolm X and perhaps Obama. So who are the black British intellectual characters and what have they contributed to academia?

Paul: You're absolutely right, Sam. If you ask most people to name a black intellectual they will come up with an American name, Malcolm X or Tony Morrison, whoever, but it's very very important to understand that Britain has its own very very robust black intellectual tradition and this really goes right back to the 18th Century when you had black anti-slavery campaigners such as Equiano (Olaudah), the most famous, through the early 20th Century when again you had vast activity amongst anti-colonial agitators such as George Padmore and really a lot of what the book focuses on is the post-war period of course where you had what's often described as a black explosion in British schools when during the 50s, 60s, early 70s, you had the children of people who'd come to Britain from the Caribbean, from Africa, from Asia after the Second World War and their children were entering the schools in large numbers. You had activities such as John La Rose, such as Gus John who's still around. Again, people like Eric and Jessica Huntley who really campaigned very very strongly and in many, many ways were ahead of the policy curve because they were campaigning against some of the very very unequal racist conditions that black children encountered in British schools in the 60s and 70s. But in doing so they were arguing against crude IQ testing, they were arguing against some of the crudities of setting, they were arguing against the mono-cultural curriculum and they were arguing for much more democratic and fairer relationships between policy makers and schools and communities and really a lot of what they argued for now is kind of taken for granted. But what I find is that it's often forgotten how much of what we now find in terms of curriculum, in terms of home school relations, in terms of understandings of equalities, really came out of a long period of struggle on the part of Britain's black communities.

**Sam:** So the education system is kind of the start of the conversation.

Paul: Yeah.

**Sam:** Why is that important?

Paul: I guess because I work in education, I would argue very strongly that it's really in the sight of education that black Britain as we know it today has in a large part come into being, that the schools, that the colleges were one of the places where an understanding of first being black and British really began to cohere in the post-war period. And also of course it's around education that many of the political positions, many of the philosophical positions amongst black thinkers had been defined and differentiated. So what I mean by that is that very often when we see documentaries on post-war black Britain, we see people coming off the ships, we hear about the Empire bringing Jamaicans to England for the first time, but actually I would argue that a lot of the building of black British community and identity actually happened in one sense in a much quieter way in the paint-peeling classrooms of London, Manchester, Birmingham, where mothers were dragging their children along and where teachers who were often unprepared for this new intake of children, of this new generation of black pupils, again had to interact with and negotiate with these black children in British schools.

**Sam:** So what were the key black British intellectual movements?

Paul: Well I've titled the book *Black British Intellectuals and Education* but it's very important to get across that I'm not looking at education just in the narrow sense of schooling. There's a much wider definition of education in the book. Also what I want to get across is that movements in schools, but also in academia, the black publishing industry, all of which I regard as being educational, those developments, those innovations were also part of much wider sets of changes in black thought and politics. So the book stretches from the 18th Century where I look at the work, for instance, of the black abolitionists, people like Equiano, who were also very very concerned with what they called 'the black poor' in London during the 18th Century, early black communities in the port cities and so forth. But, it's very important also to understand that when I look at black intellectual movements, it's not only about, if you like anti-racist movements and anti-racism in schools. Also you had in the 80s and 90s a very very creative burst of academic activity, not least here in the University of Birmingham where you had Stuart Hall's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies and you had a whole generation of important internationally known social and cultural theorists like Paul Gilroy, like Hazel Carby, working with Stuart Hall. So in the book what you have is education at the level of the streets, the buses, the schoolrooms, over to the seminar rooms and back again, that constant back and forth between street and seminar room if you like.

**Sam:** Who's the audience for the book? What's the message you're trying to get across here?

Paul: Well, I spoke there about the relationship if you like between street and seminar room and I think what I very much hope is that the book will find an audience beyond academia. I mean I think it will be of tremendous use to undergraduate and postgraduate students, but what I'm really really hoping is that a lot of parents out there who aren't academics, who aren't directly involved in education, and a lot of students in schools, sixth forms, that they will hopefully get hold of the book, have it on the shelf in the front room because what I regard the book as more than anything else, it's not about me as an author, it's a kind of signpost and it's a kind of digest. What I'm doing in the book is saying look, there are really important people who've come out of British black politics and educational theory, you know, why don't you go and find out more about C.L.R. James or about George Padmore and hopefully just having this digest, this signpost, might be a useful kind of first stopping point if you like for young people and parents who want to find out more.

**Sam:** It sounds fantastic. Well Dr Paul Warmington, thank you very much for joining us today.

Paul: Thank you, Sam.

**Outro VO :** This podcast and others in the series are available on the Ideas Lab website: [www.ideaslabuk.com](http://www.ideaslabuk.com) (<http://www.ideaslabuk.com>). There's also information on the free support Ideas Lab has to offer to TV and radio producers, new media producers and journalists. The interviewer and producer for the Ideas Lab Predictor Podcast was Sam Walter.

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