



Black and Blue All Over

More than ten years on from Stephen Lawrence, and the UK still doesn't quite know where it stands on race. Sure, we can talk the talk, but when Tony Blair is doing his typical third-way walk (aka can't make up his mind) between backing David Blunkett's radically pro-immigration views, and ducking Michael Howard's race-question curve ball, how do we know what we think?

Trevor Phillips at the Commission for Racial Equality may be convinced that the liberal commitment to a multi-racial Britain is wilting. (What else will the organic-food-obsessed classes have to talk about while they wait by their SUVs to collect Freya and Isaac from their after-school circus-skills class?) But the thing that got people – OK, Jewish people – about Stephen Lawrence was a liberal concern that such a terrible thing should happen to a boy from such a *balabatish* family.

However much we feel that our own immigrant experience precedes and even informs that of the Black and Asian communities, and so we *understand*, there's a crucial difference. Obvious but significant – it's all about what we choose to reveal. We can choose when and how to disclose our predilection for Woody Allen, interrupting our colleagues or overeating bagels and cream cheese.

Imagine for a moment a world where Jewish people are blue. You know, the Jewish blue that's the corporate colour of Jewish charities. The blue of the Israeli flag; related to the Tesco's blue, and not dissimilar to motorway-blue (significant for wandering Jews).

Market segmentation conferences discuss the rainbow hues of the Pink Pound, the Black Pound and the Grey Pound, but what they're really targeting is the Blue Pound.

In a meeting at work, you realize that you're the only Blue person in the room. In a tube carriage, you notice other people noticing that you're the only Blue person and sense them wondering if you're going to try to sell them something or make them some lunch. When you prepare for a job interview, you can't agonize for hours about how and when and whether to out yourself as Jewish – your Blueness is the first thing people notice when you walk in, and with it comes the panel's anti-Blue prejudice.

Self-haters are called anti-Blue Jews. They have the anti-Jew blues.

The police stop Blue people double-parking in Golders Green. There's a diverse range of Blue-haircare products. When you walk down the street, people stare. You'll never be asked to go on the company fun-run again: your co-workers will say: 'Oh, don't ask her. You

know that Blue people never exercise.' Pale-Blue people think that you are too Bluish. Your parents want you to go out with someone nearer navy whereas you are a more middle-of-the-road hue.

There's a magazine called *Blue and Funky* and it's not about soul music. The mantra of your childhood was 'Blue and insecure' and everyone knows the Blue Power symbol of a slightly balding guy with round glasses shrugging his shoulders. When you go out to a bar with your Blue crowd, the other customers feel uncomfortable, and it's not just because you've drunk all the diet coke.

Experiencing Blueness gives you an outside-in perspective on ethnicity. It's the difference between having no option and an underlying yet compelling low-level anguish. When you're Blue, gone are the hours of angst about whether to say that you don't eat pork at a business lunch. Having a standing meeting every Friday afternoon in the winter. Just saying you're taking holiday when it's Yom Kippur.

Sure, for every Jew who wants to conceal his or her identity, there is the 'hello, I'm Jewish' Jew, but the point is that we can choose. When to reveal our difference. How to tell the truth. Whether to play at being white and Anglo or not.

I've only had two experiences where I really understood the tyranny of being part of a choice-free minority.

Mid-Nineties, working in Singapore, living in the non-expat area, I am uncomfortable at how often people stare at my fair hair. Getting a cab home after a night out, before I even state my destination, the cab driver says 'Victoria Street'. Perturbed, I ask him how he knows, and when he says rather spookily that he has 'seen me there', I realize that I am the only non-Asian in that part of town.

Seeing *Malcolm X* at the Streatham Odeon with a group of Black friends. There's a scene in the movie where two white girls rush up to Malcolm on a college campus to ask how they can help with the struggle. And when Malcolm responds 'keep out of it' and everyone cheers, I suddenly realize that I am the only white person in the cinema.

Maybe sensing my own *Bluekeit* has given me more of an insight into how other immigrant groups feel. The privilege of having an option where or not to be a minority – a privilege specific to Jews – implies a particular obligation. The obligation to build Black-Jewish relations, the obligation to look without as well as within, and the obligation to stand up and be counted when we see racism in action. 10