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All connected? Geographies of race, death, wealth, votes and births

Danny Dorling

Abstract

In January 2010 we learnt that within London the best-off 10th of the population each had recourse to 273 times the wealth of the worse-off 10th of Londoners. It is hard to find any city in an affluent country that is more unequal. This wealth gap did not include the assets of the UK super-rich, who mostly live in or near London. In April 2010 the Sunday Times Newspaper reported the wealth of the richest 1000 people in Britain had risen by £77 million each on average in just one year, to now stand at £335.5bn

Today in Britain we are again as unequal as we last were around 1918. For 60 years we became more equal, but for the last 30 years - more unequal. Looking at inequality trends it is very hard, initially, to notice when the party of government changed. However, closer inspection of the time series suggests there were key times when the trends changed direction, when the future was much less like the past and when how people voted and acted appeared to matter more than at other times.

With all three main parties offering what may appear to be very similar solutions to the issue of reducing inequality it can appear unlikely that voting in 2010 will make much of a difference. However, today inequalities are now at unsustainable extremes. Action has been taken such that some inequalities, especially in education, have begun to shrink. The last two times that the direction of trends in inequalities changed, in the 1920s and 1970s, there were several general elections held within a relatively short time period. Inequality is expensive. The United Kingdom is not as well-off as it once was. It could be time for a change again. Which way will we go?

Introduction: Immigration, migration controls and racism

In early 2010 it became common to suggest the British, if they were to allow more migrants in to Britain, should only allow them in as guest workers:

“I just want to make it plain that one of the most important proposals that the balanced migration group has put forward is that we must break the link between people coming to work here and people being able to settle here. That is key. Of course, they should come here; we welcome them and recognise that they have very important work to do. It is that link between coming to work here and settle here that needs to be broken.”

(Soames, 2010, Column 6WH).

This paper asked how it was that Britain got to this position, a position that many might see as a form of racism, of *them* and *us*. Geographer Ruthie Gilmore has suggested that any deliberate human act that ultimately results in the premature deaths of groups of others can be defined as racism (Goldberg, 2009, p 26). Racism curtails the length of life by inflicting insults ranging from high chances of imprisonment, to lower chances of being treated with respect at school, through to almost any form of discrimination which has effects on health. All this is racist by Ruthie Gilmore’s wider definition. But it is the racist actions that directly lead to death itself that are most shocking. Think again about what happens when you instigate the kinds of geographical migration controls and the extensions to those controls that Mr Soames, Member of Parliament for Mid Sussex (and grandson of Winston Churchill) is asking for.

In the 1990s two children were found dead in the undercarriage of an aeroplane that landed at Brussels. One carried a note which read ‘Excellencies, gentlemen – members and those responsible in Europe, it is to your solidarity and generosity that we appeal for your help in

Africa. If you see that we have sacrificed ourselves and lost our lives, it is because we suffer too much in Africa and need your help to struggle against poverty and wars... Please excuse us very much for daring to write a letter' (Hayter, 2004, p 103). The children were aged 15 and 16. They were just two of thousands who have died trying to enter Europe each year from the 1970s onwards, and of many who will continue to die, attempting to evade immigration controls. Immigration controls have traditionally been of those not seen as coming from the same 'stock'. Children seen as of the same 'stock' are usually welcomed in. Thus official categorisations of ethnicities tend to reflect recent patterns of immigration and an ethnic minority ceases to be seen so clearly as a minority when the group is no longer associated with immigration and the initial poverty that often entails. People not associated with having different ethnicities are often not seen as immigrants. The *greatest* concentration of immigrant children living in Britain is of those born in the US, resident (with their families). They constitute a seventh of all children found near the heart of London, almost all are white and most belong to very affluent families (Thomas and Dorling, 2007, p 46).

In those parts of the popular press interested in stocking up fear almost no distinction is made between refugees and those who are labelled as immigrants (a term which excludes most immigrants and includes many people who are not immigrants, having been born in the country where they reside). Fears of immigration vary dramatically between countries and over time. Such fears can only be kept high by being constantly stoked. When asked in recent years whether it is immigration which most worries them, it was reported as the main concern of 8% of Germans, 11% of Swedes, 12% of the Dutch, 13% of the French, 21% of Australians, 28% of Italians, a third of the citizens of the US. There are almost as many fearful Spaniards as there are fearful Brits, some 46% in 2007 (Green, 2007, p 6). Fear of

immigration is constantly being stoked up by groups that suggest our population should be reduced to some fictional optimum, by others that 'watch migration' as if it were a disease, by fringe political parties that call for UK 'independence or a 'British nationalism'. All of these concepts of belong and not belonging to the land are inherently geographical in nature.

Although there are many Brits living in Spain, the extent of fear listed above bear no resemblance to the proportions of immigrants in each country or any effect these immigrants may have; they simply reflect how well those who want to cause fear (and by doing so inflict suffering) are doing. It is said that people get the press they deserve, but that press is also more thrust on them in unequal countries where a few rich men own much of the media. It may be worth noting who controls much of the press in Australia, Italy, the US and Britain and look again at the list above. It is not just the right-wing lobby groups and parties who can have an interest in stoking up fear of people cast as strangers due to their geography. Some people in business see value in diverting attention from their excesses by fermenting strife among those who are poorer and funding these lobbyist who do not want them to complain about their poverty but to complain about those immigrants, minorities, refugees (Dorling, 2010, 168-171). Fears and belief systems are built up and altered through many media, but the national press have been vital in this in Britain. When they criticise immigrants and bolster celebrities as deserving of riches, it is clear which systems of belief the press is promulgating. It is the wealthy who have more than their fair share of homes, not poor immigrants, not members of ethnicity minorities whose parents were most immigrants, and certainly not refugees.

Premature mortality, the outcome of believing others are inferior

As according to Ruthie Gilmore premature death caused by human harm including indifference provides evidence of the wider extent of racism in a society, and as racism is any act that ultimately results in the premature deaths of others, it is worth looking at trends in premature mortality as indicative of trends in racist behaviour when racism is more widely understood. This definition could be extended to include ‘learnt inferiority’ or ‘deference’, which can only be learnt if others both harbour and display delusions of superiority. Figure 1 shows how the rate of inequalities in premature mortality has changed in Britain over the period 1920-2006. Premature mortality rises when inequalities in mortality rise, as it is then that more people die before it is usual to die. The United Kingdom by 2010 had one of the highest premature mortality rates of any affluent or even semi-affluent country in the world (Triggle, 2010). The data used to draw Figure 1 is given in Table 1 (towards the middle of this paper). The graph shows that inequalities in mortality fell throughout the 1920s, but rose again in the Great Depression as lives again became cheap. You almost certainly do not think of this trend as resulting from a form of racism, but one class of people had to look a long way down on another class of people, *living in different parts of the country*, to allow this to happen in the 1930s in Britain. That dominant class had lost much of its power by the 1940s and the inequalities plummeted thereafter before rising slightly again following the remarkable equality achieved immediately after the Second World War, and probably during it too.

In hindsight it is possible to study Figure 1 and come to believe that the attitudes of most of the rich to the poor changed greatly between 1918 and 1973, although there was not always

progress. Attitudes changed mainly because the rich became less separated from the poor, less wealthy, less segregated and, slowly, a little less ignorant as a result. Health inequalities between areas did increase slightly in the 1950s, but fell throughout the 1960s and early 1970s to reach a minimum around 1969-73 when the best-off 10% could 'only' expect about a one in six (16.6%) lower than average chance of dying before their 65th birthday any year, and the excess mortality of the worst-off 30% was 'just' a fifth (20%) higher than the average. After then, as prejudice grew, so did inequalities in premature death. Today, far more of the people living in the poorest of areas are not White as compared to those living in average or better-off areas. At the start of the period shown in the graph more were Jewish or Irish (ethnicities which were then much more closely associated with recent immigration). What mattered most at both times was that these groups were more likely to be seen and treated as poor. Part of the reason was direct racism: anti-Semitism, skin-colour prejudice and/or religious hatred of Catholics (and today Muslims). Part of the reason was the indirect racism of looking down on those with less in general. Many recent immigrants arrive with little and immediately enter society at the level that is most disparaged.

By the time of the current century the highest mortality rates were often found in places, inner cities, or former coalfields, where few recent immigrants had arrived, but most there were the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of people who had moved there to work, when there was work (in better times). Now their offspring are blamed for there being no jobs.

Figure 1: Inequalities in survival chances to age 65 by area in Britain, 1920-2006



Note: The line marked by white squares shows how much lower the age-sex standardised under age 65 mortality rate of the best-off 10% by area is as compared to the average. The line marked by dark diamonds shows how much higher that of the worst-off 30% is than the average.

Source: Dorling and Thomas (2009), derived from Table 4.3, with interpolation between five year rates in some circumstances.

Inequality Compression, the geographical diffusion of beliefs

Within countries, geographical, social and economic polarisation tends to take place slowly and steadily. You have to look at data over a long time period to see this clearly, partly because we come to accept the divides we currently live with. These forms of polarisation can themselves cause beliefs to become more polarised and, it is argued, damaged the quality of debate in general (Kelsey, 1997). As polarisation rises more people come to believe that others living elsewhere are less deserving creatures than themselves. Within a country like Britain the changing extent of the divide is perhaps most simply illustrated politically by considering changes in how concentrated the votes have been by area for the main political party of government in the 20th century, the Conservative Party. Figure 2 shows how, beginning just after the First World War and continuing right through to the 1960s, Conservative voters became far less spatially concentrated.

Figure 2 depicts a measure of the minimum proportion of those voters who would have to be transferred between a fixed set of parliamentary constituencies if each constituency were to have the same national proportion of Conservative voters at each general election. By the time of the 1960s general elections, just moving some 6% of the national total of Conservative voters from some of the most Conservative seats to some of the least Conservative seats would have had the effect of making the share of the vote which the Conservatives secured in all seats the same. By 2005 that proportion had reached 16%, higher than at any time since just before the 1920s.

Figure 2 is not evidence for social polarisation (there is plenty else of that), but of a geographical polarisation in underlying beliefs. If anything the polarisation shown in Figure 2 is even greater than was social and economic polarisation over this same period. By the late 1980s and through the 1990s middle class voters in the North of England would more and more often vote Labour while working class voters in the South moved towards the Tory Party (Johnston et al., 2002). In the 1960s, when the Conservatives were unpopular, their core vote was spread out. By the late 1990s, when again unpopular, their core vote had become geographically concentrated. A great deal had changed in between in the lives of people living in different places in Britain.

Figure 2: Concentration of Conservative votes, British general elections, 1918-2005



Source: Drawn initially in Dorling (2006), showing the spatial segregation index

Note: Two Elections were held in 1974. An average of the two 1974 figures is shown here; actual figures are graphed in the source and also used for the correlations reported here (they were 8.01% in the February election and 10.74% in the October election of that year, see Table 5).

Figure 2 is reminiscent of Figure 1, of trends in health inequalities and, as is shown below, this also reflects the trends in wealth inequalities shown next in Figure 3. When trends appear similar it can help to check the likelihood that that similarity might arise from chance. Such checks provide no proof of a casual link, but they are helpful in the search for looking for coincidences on which to speculate. One reviewer of an earlier draft of this paper suggested that I go a little further than this and lay out what my interpretation is of these coincidences. So I will speculate on that very briefly next. I include the United States of America in the speculation below because its politics has become is entwined with that of Britain. After Israel (and Iraq) it is hard to name another country, apart from Britain, in which the United States, its politicians, military and its commerce, has such interest. It may be becoming naïve to talk of Britain as if political choices there can be made independently of the interests of the United States. Time will tell.

I believe that as Britain became a more equitable socially from 1918 to 1968, political polarization between areas reduced in recognition that we all had more in common regardless of where we lived. In the United States that reduction in inequality has been called the “great compression” of wealth and income inequalities (Krugman, 2007). It was just as much a compression in Britain. Although Britain was clearly an empire in decline and the USA an empire on the rise, the two countries followed very similar political and economic and social trajectories. At the start of that fifty year era if you had any capital it made sense to be fearful of the (then really new) Labour and Independent Labour party. Similarly in the US the wealthy rightly feared the 1920s American Communists, Socialists and then Roosevelt’s Democrats. There was not enough income to go round for all to be very comfortable in 1918, or 1928 or 1948. In affluent countries we were all poorer then.

Greater equality in the 1920s would have meant suffering for the rich. In Britain their Tory party protected them and the Liberal party was increasingly seen as ineffectual in combating that protection. The Liberals were demoted to become the third political party of British politics in the 1924 general election. After that election the new Chancellor of the Exchequer (and former Liberal) Winston Churchill took what was later acknowledged as the disastrous step of returning Britain to the gold standard, resulting in deflation, mass unemployment, the general strike of 1926 and a final exit from having the pound convertible to a fixed lump of gold in 1931. It is especially worth remembering all this now given the current economic situation in Europe and in case you are tempted to be pessimistic.

In the long term, helped by Winston's and his classes' folly, a change in the trend in the 1920s and 30s occurred from accepting high inequality to permitting a growth in social equality. The election of Franklin Roosevelt in 1932 in the USA was the outcome of similar folly from the political right wing there; from Herbert Hoover's four disastrous years of 1929-1933 Republican rule (the hand over to Roosevelt did not occur until months after the 1932 election as was normal then). As social and economic inequalities were reduced, decade on decade, how you voted became much less clearly linked to where you lived by the end of those fifty years as compared to their beginning.

Political Polarisation, the geographical concentration of beliefs

The ten year period 1968-1978 saw the post World-War-One compression of inequality abate. Geographical inequalities in health and voting reached their minima for the twentieth century. This was partly due to the financial crises of the early 1970s, Nixon ending the convertibility between the US dollar and gold on August 15, 1971, and the Middle East oil nations gaining just a little more freedom to raise prices. In Britain and the United States groups among the affluent became agitated. In most other affluent countries the story was different, these successes were protected and far right-wing agitators were held at bay. In contrast in the United States these agitators took control the Republican Party and the Conservative Party. Ronald Reagan almost won the Republican nomination to stand for president in 1976. In 1979 he secured the nomination easily and won a landslide for the presidency (in 1980 which he held to 1988). Margaret Thatcher became the Conservative Party nominee for Prime Minister in 1975 when she unexpectedly became party leader. She secured the office of prime minister in 1979, and held it until 1990.

It is only because the right-wing have a Conservative tradition of not appearing to want change, of literally being 'conservative', that both these parties did not change their names to New Republican and New Conservatives in 1978, or something more catchy. But these were in effect new parties. Not only did their members later not revert back to their old form, they changed the nature of all politics in their respective countries. This shift changed the form and what was normal in US and UK politics overall. Their electoral success changed what it later meant to be Democrat and Labour. Both Reagan and Thatcher were replaced by grey men from their own parties, George H. W. Bush and John Major, who carried on the new

right policies. Meanwhile ideological coups took place in what had been the major left wing alternatives, which resulted in mild right wing groups taking charge of the supposedly left-wing opposition parties, their leaders being Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. The 1992 election of Clinton (in office until 2000) and 1997 election of Tony Blair (in office until 2007) had little effect in dampening the trajectories of rising inequalities in their respective countries. Their successors: George W. Bush and Gordon Brown, carried out policies that saw social inequalities continuing to rise in both countries with an acceleration in that rise in Britain in the final years of Gordon Brown's premiership (Thomas et al., 2010).

None of these individuals were themselves crucial. Another actor could have been put up as nominee for president in place of Ronald Reagan, another Chemist instead of Margaret Thatcher. What was crucial was that at key moments in that 1968-1978 decade, when things could have gone one way they were pushed the other way. All these trends were so coincident that it is hard to tell which is chicken and which egg. Did the slight rising in inequality at the start of the 1970s lead to a sharp increase in Conservative voting in the south of England in 1974, which in turn helped usher in Margaret, or was it her cabal of thinkers who came to the fore before the polarization? Did voters in California in the 1970s first abandon funding for state schooling when Ronald was governor and that set the pace, or was it his later national electoral victory that was key?

Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficients are 0.72 and 0.75 between the trend shown above in Figure 2 and the two trends shown in Figure 1. The conventional test results are also given in Table 1 and suggest that by one method of estimating probabilities there is less than a one in 10,000 chance that the distribution of voting is unrelated to the proportion of

premature deaths occurring among the worst-off in society, and there is a less than a one in 100,000 chance that the concentration of voting is unrelated to the health advantage of the best-off 10% of society. This clearly does not mean that one causes the other, just that these two great falls and rises in inequality follow a similar periodicity. However, one pattern is not being measured on Mars and the other on Venus. Both almost certainly influence each other; they influenced and were influenced by much else and are part of a more general trend. My speculation above gives a very brief account of what that trend might have been, but it remains speculation. We have only one history. We cannot re-run 1000 simulations of different scenarios for planet earth to ask: “if one of Margaret or Ronald’s teachers had tried just a little harder at school to explain to them what was known about why some people do better than others, who they have no believed so fervently in market forces, and might much misery have been abated”? We’ll never know.

Table 1: Inequalities of health, privilege and wealth, in Britain, 1918-2005

| Year | Mortality inequality of decile groups by area | | Geographical concentration of national Conservative vote by area ³ | National income share of the best-off 1% | |
|--|---|--|---|--|-----------------------|
| | Excess of worse-off 30% ¹ | Advantage of best-off 10% ² | | pre-tax ⁴ | post-tax ⁵ |
| 1918 | 29% | 35% | 19% | 19% | 17% |
| 1922 | 26% | 30% | 14% | 18% | 16% |
| 1923 | 26% | 30% | 12% | 19% | 17% |
| 1924 | 25% | 28% | 11% | 18% | 16% |
| 1929 | 23% | 25% | 9% | 17% | 15% |
| 1931 | 23% | 26% | 9% | 16% | 14% |
| 1935 | 29% | 31% | 10% | 14% | 13% |
| 1945 | 25% | 25% | 7% | 13% | 10% |
| 1950 | 20% | 18% | 7% | 12% | 7% |
| 1951 | 20% | 18% | 7% | 12% | 6% |
| 1955 | 23% | 21% | 7% | 9% | 6% |
| 1959 | 25% | 23% | 6% | 9% | 6% |
| 1964 | 24% | 21% | 7% | 9% | 6% |
| 1966 | 22% | 20% | 8% | 9% | 6% |
| 1970 | 21% | 18% | 8% | 7% | 5% |
| 1974 Feb. | 20% | 17% | 8% | 7% | 4% |
| 1974 Oct. | 20% | 17% | 11% | 6% | 4% |
| 1979 | 21% | 19% | 9% | 6% | 4% |
| 1983 | 23% | 21% | 11% | 7% | 5% |
| 1987 | 25% | 22% | 12% | 8% | 6% |
| 1992 | 26% | 25% | 12% | 10% | 8% |
| 1997 | 30% | 29% | 14% | 12% | 10% |
| 2001 | 30% | 30% | 15% | 13% | 10% |
| 2005 | 30% | 30% | 16% | 16% | 13% |
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients of above (p<0.01 except * p =0.0105) | | | | | |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | |
| 1 | | | | | |
| 2 | 0.91 | | | | |
| 3 | 0.72 | 0.75 | | | |
| 4 | 0.57 | 0.82 | 0.51* | | |
| 5 | 0.60 | 0.86 | 0.58 | 0.97 | |

Note – worse-off and best-off here means those people living in the areas where mortality rates are highest and lowest (in the case of columns on mortality above) or that proportion of the population whose incomes are highest in the case of national income share above.

Sources: Columns 1 and 2, Figure 1; Column 3, Figure 2; Columns 4 and 5: Figure 3. Notes: 1: excess deaths under age 65 of those living in the worst-off 30% of areas by population compared to the national average rate; 2: reduced under age 65 death rates of those 10% living in the best-off areas as compared to the national average; 3: minimum proportion of Conservative voters who would have to move parliamentary constituency if an identical proportion were to vote for that party in every constituency in the general election held that year (in Figure 2 an average of the two 1974 figures is graphed); 4: share of national income received by the best-off 1% of the population before tax; 5: share of that income enjoyed by the best-off 1% post-tax. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients (r) shown above are calculated using the “PEARSON” function in Excel. The p values are calculated by creating a z-score using the Excel function $f = \sqrt{(n-3)} * \text{FISHER}(r)$ where n is 24 the number of observations above. The Excel function “2*NORMDIST(f,0,1,TRUE)” returns the p value. All this assumes, among many things, that the sample pairs are independently distributed, which coming from the same pair of years they are not, but the method remains a useful way of deciding whether to take a high correlation seriously. However, what you take seriously is ultimately up to you. The function PEARSON is named after a man who invented eugenics and harbored racist belief. Karl Pearson’s friends measured skull attributes attempting to correlate them with everything including penis length!

Look again at Figure 2. Figure 2 shows the fall and rise in the geographical concentration of right-wing voting in Britain, as represented by the Conservative Party. Inequalities in health rose postwar when the Conservatives were in power in the 1950s, 1980s and 1990s. They only rose once under Labour, when that party behaved, in terms of statistical correlation (with inequalities rising), as a Conservative Party, following the 1997 General Election. During the 20th century people who were persuaded to vote for representatives of the Conservative Party initially became both less in number and less spatially concentrated. This clearly occurred from 1918 onwards. There were still Conservatives everywhere, but there were fewer and fewer of them, and fewer self-reinforcing clusters of them. However, in hindsight, by the early 1970s it became clear that Conservative sympathies were about to begin to be newly created, concentrating spatially again, and growing in number.

Although Figure 2 shows the slow rise beginning in 1966 and continuing through to 1974, the decisive point is probably 1974. Not shown on the graph, but noted under it, in the February General Election of that year (following the oil price shocks of 1973) voter segregation held steady at 8%. It was only in October that it rose, and rose abruptly. It was almost as if the country, to treat it like some individual, and the Conservative Party in particular, paused for a moment to decide which way to turn. It could choose between the collective path, where all would take a hit together, accept that oil prices had risen, accept that standards of living could not be so high again, that the empire had gone and that the inequalities of the world should be reduced. Or it could turn the other way; a few people could try to make Britain supposedly

‘Great’ again, concentrate on making money, exploit the rest of the world, abandon those parts of the country seen as unproductive, take away financial rules so that banks could make more and more profit out of individuals at home and overseas.

By late 1974 the Conservative Party had still not converted fully to such rampant individualism, but it was the most right-wing alternative available bar the National Front (precursor of today’s ‘British National’ party and successor of previous fascist parties). In October 1974 in the South of England there was a decisive swing in votes towards that selfish alternative, not enough votes to win the election for the Conservatives, but enough to give the signal to set the country steadily on a new route towards almost four decades of rising political, economic and social polarisation.

Tipping points and the unraveling of social cohesion

Why was it just a year after the October 1974 election that the grandees of the Conservative Party chose Margaret Thatcher to be their new leader? Less than four years after that, as their popular vote in the South East and the Midlands of England swelled, the Conservative Party reaped the benefit of having made that choice, and won a landslide victory. The National Front Vote was more than decimated as most of those racists who had supported them voted for Margaret Thatcher. That was the (sort-of) good news, but in almost every other aspect of life the social fabric began – a little and little more each year – to unravel. This was society unraveling rather than being broken, but many things in Britain became worse, particularly for people who were poorer.

The decision taken by so many voters in 1974 and 1979 and not reversed with sufficient enthusiasm thereafter meant that by 2010 Britain had become as socially divided as in 1934 in terms of differences between areas in life expectancy (as shown in Figure 1), in wealth (Figure 3 below), in voting segregation (Figure 2 extrapolated). The trends in Britain mirrored those experienced in the USA and lagged them slightly. For many decades the British had been importing American ideology in a similar way to which the British so readily imported goods such as Coke and the Big Mac, and wars (such as that with Iraq).

In both the early 1920s and again by 2005 the highest income percentile (i.e. 1%) of people living in the US received 17% of all income, and the highest 10%, some 44% of all income. All the years in between (1925-2005) were more equal. The trend followed that same U-shaped distribution which is seen in the graphs here of Britain. It is also worth noting that

inequalities in both Britain and the USA became so great that most of the rich did not feel very rich in 1925 or 2005. The average household *within the top 10th*, but excluding the top 100th, was almost *six times worse-off* than the average within that best-off percentile. Income inequalities between the person placed first in 100 and 5th in 100 were also as great as between those placed 10th and 90th in the US income parades of both 1925 and 2005 (Krugman, 2007, p 16).

Although the Conservatives in Britain in 1979 and the Republicans in the US in 1980 had secured the largest number of votes to put them in power (of those who could be persuaded to vote at all), they did not improve the living conditions of even most of those who voted for them, just the more affluent of their supporters. Thus in the US if people in most of the top 10th of society looked up they saw the top 1% flying away from them. When they looked down they looked in fear to see ghettos forming and neighbourhoods being abandoned, entire rust belt regions being consigned to the scrap heap. Because of this, for a long time many people could be persuaded to continue to vote in support of the selfishness of the rich in what looked like protection from being abandoned themselves. Britain was fortunate in not importing the new ghettos from the United States, but it came close (Peach, 2009)

The implicit threat of electoral abandonment was so powerful on both sides of the Atlantic that it resulted in the Democrat and Labour parties believing they had to begin to mirror right-wing policy to become electable. So when they came to power in the most unequal of rich countries these opposition parties made no discernable impact on the kind of graphs shown in this paper. In fact inequalities overall continued to rise: in health, wealth and (most intangibly) in thinking. In the past key decisions by members of these parties to force

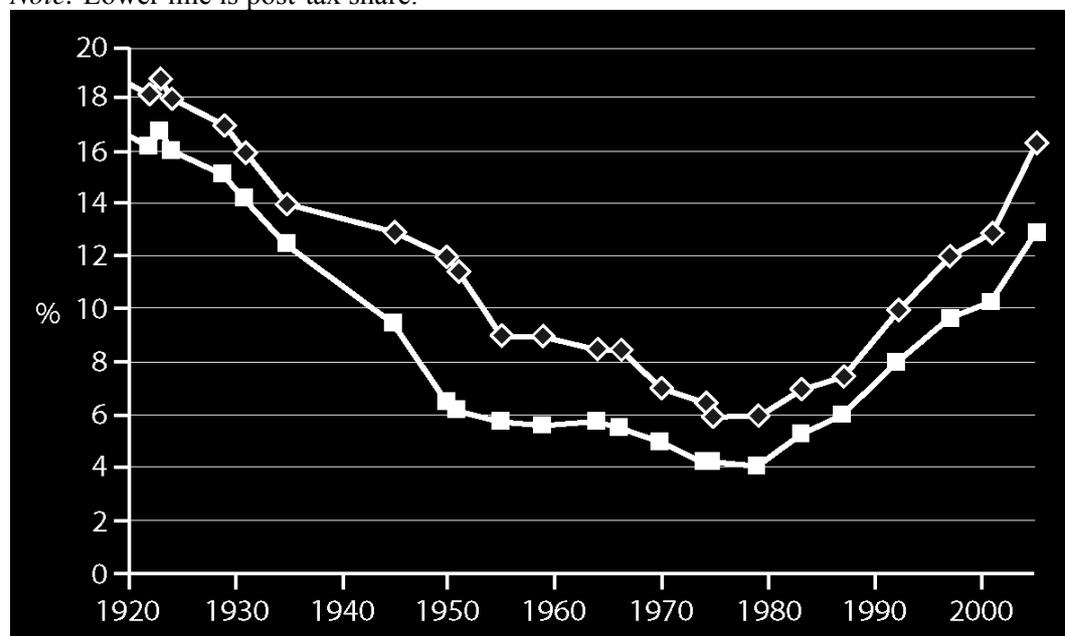
through a New Deal or introduce a Welfare state had been central to projecting the trajectories in the opposite direction. The supposedly progressive parties appeared no longer able to think progressively, at least not effectively.

As with Ronald Reagan, the legacy of Margaret Thatcher and those who brought her to power continued long after she lost office. People living in areas that voted Conservative in 1997 in Britain saw much greater improvements to their life expectancy and living standards over the course of the next 10 years than those experienced in Labour voting areas despite Labour being in power all that time. Similar trends occurred in the US under President Clinton (Dorling 2007, 2008). It is possible that without the Democrats and Labour having secured their victories in 1992 and 1997 the present would be far worse, that inequalities by 2008 would have already surpassed that 1918 maximum, but perhaps inequalities would just have risen higher faster and the market would just have failed a little earlier than 2008?

Knowing Less and less of each other's lives

Figure 3: Share of all income received by the richest 1% in Britain, 1918-2005

Note: Lower line is post-tax share.



Source: Atkinson (2003, figures 2 and 3); from 1922 to 1935 the 0.1% rate was used to estimate the 1% when the 1% rate was missing, and for 2005 the data source was Brewer et al (2008, p 11); the final post-tax rate of 12.9% is derived from 8.6%+4.3%, the pre-tax rate scaled from 2001. See Table 1 above

Figure 3 charts the share in annual incomes received by the richest single percentile of Britons as recorded between 1918 and 2005, both pre- and post-tax. The richest percentile of people in Britain receive some of their income from earnings, but a greater proportion from interest on wealth, dividends and shares, and the returns on investments made in stocks, rent on their lands. At the end of the First World War these one in every 100 people lived on about a sixth of the national income, 17 or 18 times more than the average family, 100 times more money than the poorest 10th saw in a year.

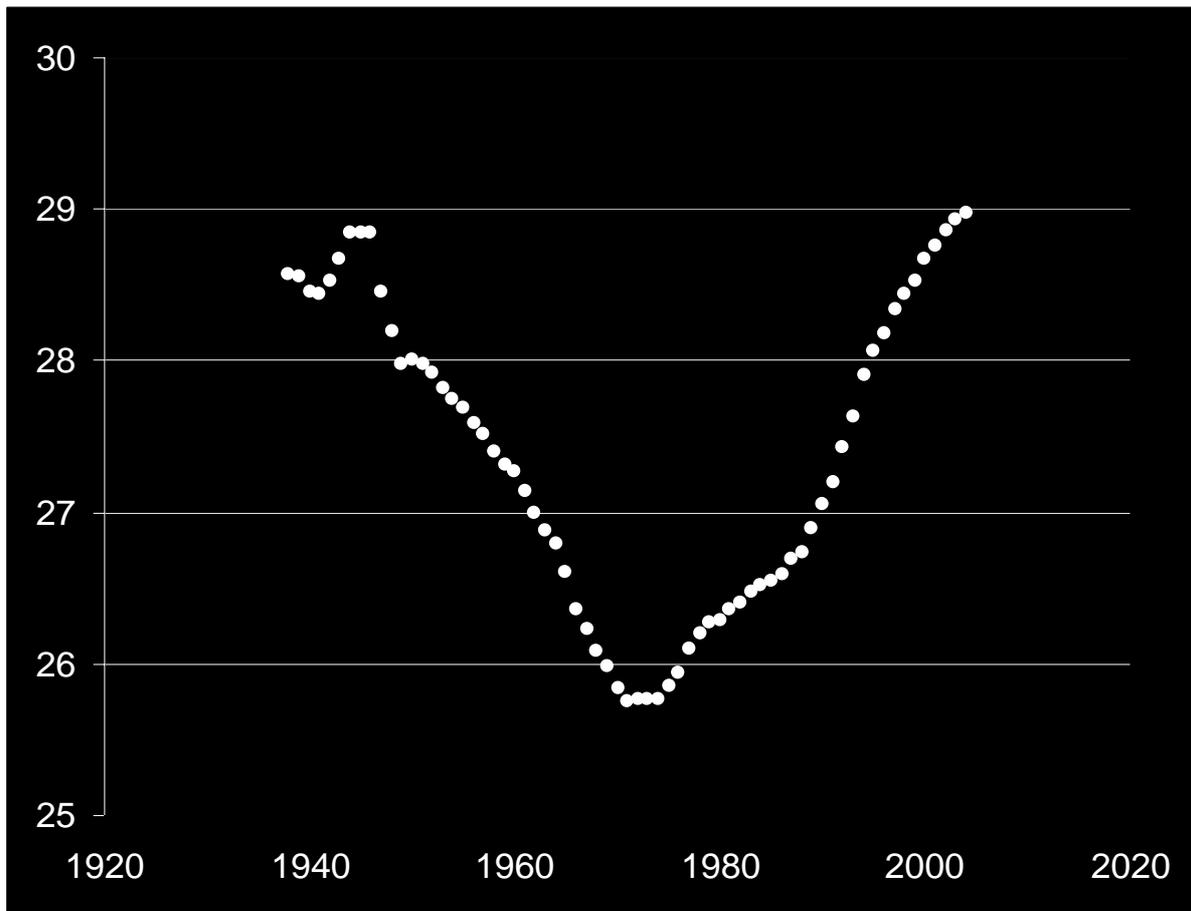
From 1918 through the 1920s, 1930s, 1940s, 1950s and 1960s the share of national income the affluent received fell. As many of the heirs to great estates had died in the Great War, the government taxed the aristocratic families, but just as crucially, the ‘great’ families became just a little more lax over who they slept with and subsequently married. The arithmetic of homogamy (assortative mating) is simple. Should you be a member of a family in the top percentile of income earners in 1918 you might expect to receive around £150,000 a year in today’s money, or 18 times average *individual* incomes. If you are careful and ignore 99 potential life partners in every 100, you might in theory meet and only choose from the one percentile like you. Because social networks were so limited it was not hard to avoid at least 90 of the other 99, or meet and mistreat them only as servants, but the other nine you had to tell yourself were beneath you when you did meet. Then as a couple, and later possibly a family, you will remain in that top 1% of earners.

If you are very rich you are told ‘be careful’, should your eye stray and you find a young man or woman from the bottom of just the top decile more attractive, or caring, or just more understanding or interesting, and you had successfully ignored 90 out of 100 other possible suitors, but not the 91st, and you pair up, then *you as a pair* will drop out of the top percentile. Another couple or individual will enter it but they will not have been as well off as you (or else they would have been in that group already) and so the average income of the best-off falls. Figure 3 shows a combination of many things, but it also includes the effect of that equalising process at work, increased freedom to choose who you love, gaining in strength right through to the 1970s. Note that this is especially true for the very rich as a large proportion of the income of the richest 1% is interest earnings from holding wealth, and high wealth is thus largely maintained over generations by marrying ‘correctly’.

In England debutantes (young aristocratic or upper-class girls) were presented at court at the start of each social season right up until 1958. They were presented to make it clear that they were available for marriage, only marriage into the 'correct' families, of course. It became progressively harder after 1958 to know so exactly who was most 'respectable'. The process carries on today, especially in the United States at various huge 'charity' balls, but is less overtly state-sponsored than when the most suitable of young ladies were regularly presented to the Queen of England at court, just half a century ago. The very same queen as we British remain subjects of today.

A combination of high mortality among even the upper classes in the First World War, increased death duties, and loss of wealth during the depression and later redistribution by increases in income and inheritance taxation all helped to bring down inequalities in income and wealth from 1918 to the end of the 1970s. However, it is also not hard to see, as collars became less starched, as Victorian norms became only a memory, and as the sexual revolution slowly developed, that as wealth became a little more equally spread, there were ways in which it could come about that people could chose a little often more who they might love, and a little less often tolerated those they were expected to tolerate just to maintain the family silver. Figure 4 shows how average age of mums fell and rose too. It was not just better knowledge of contraceptives or better chances for women to have careers that drove this trend up after it first went down. The timing suggests just too much coincidence with the trends described above.

Figure 4: Average age of Mothers giving birth in England and Wales, 1938-2004



Source: Office for National Statistics, Maternities, dataset PBH34A, average age calculated by author.

Figure 4 also shows why it is worth being wary of thinking that casual mechanisms are obvious when you first see two trends that are so similar. Average ages of mother's giving birth initially fell as it became possible to marry earlier and earlier, no longer having to wait until savings were sufficient for a new home to be afforded for the new couple. Greater financial and social inequality and the huge house building program that resulted from the growing beliefs that everyone deserved a home made marrying earlier and then having children earlier much more conceivable. This was not greater promiscuity but the result of having far fewer 'great' houses staffed by armies of mainly childless servants, and far

more small houses built for new working class families. The middle class saw their sexual freedoms grow too as a result and there was much more marrying between classes. Then, as social and economic inequalities rose fewer new homes were built and those we had were more and more inefficiently shared out as market forces grew stronger in housing. Middle class people put off having children to very late ages and working class people did the same, if not so quickly. Age of parenthood both rose and socially polarised at the same time, so that the average age of 29 by 2004 was far less representative than the much lower average just 29 years earlier. Improved access to contraceptives helped people delay parenthood more effectively but were not the reasons why so many did, nor was it increased hedonism although advertising that told you to 'live for today' because 'you're worth it' became far more ubiquitous. Far more young adults talked about not being able to 'afford' to become a parent in the 1990s than 1970s. Why should that happen in a country that was overall so much richer?

Why too, from the late 1970s onwards, should we see individual earnings again concentrating within the best-off percentile in Figure 3? It was not just the progressive tax structure being dismantled after 1979. Earnings before tax (shown in the same figure) follow almost exactly the same trend. The rise is so quick that by 2005 the trend line suggests that we had returned to early 1930s levels of income inequality at the very top end. Add falling actual national wages during 2009, but bankers bonuses continuing and we were back to 1918 levels of income inequality by 2010. Wealth inequalities in 2010 skyrocketed. The Sunday Times 'Rich List' of April that year reporting that the wealth of the 1000 richest people in the UK

had risen by 29.9% in just one year to stand at £335.5bn. The annual rise itself was enough to more than wipe out the UK's newly grown structural deficit to £70bn! But step back in time a little to see how we got to such excesses again.

The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients between the pre-tax income share of the richest percentile and the excess mortality of the poorest 30%, the health advantage of the best-off 10th, and the geographical concentration of Conservative votes over the 1918-2005 period are: 0.57, 0.82 and 0.51 respectively (see Table 1). Again, this is no evidence of a causal link – clearly the health advantages of the rich are most closely connected to their share of wealth. But these are also both in some way related to trends in inequalities in voting and to the fluctuations in the rates of premature mortality suffered by the poor. There is only a one in one hundred chance that even the lowest of these correlations occurred by chance. The correlations with the post-tax income trend shown above are even stronger: 0.60, 0.86 and 0.58 respectively, and they are both larger and even more statistically robust. When the rich take even more of the national income of a country (and almost all of its wealth), the health of the poor suffers and voting in general elections becomes more spatially polarised. Similar trends have been suggested in the US (Krugman, 2007): a kind of growing racism against the poor emerges. Not seeing the poor as like the rest, as people deserving to be treated as you would wish to be treated. How else can you defend holding individual wealth in its billions? You have to think you look after that wealth better than would the poor.

Once we were more equal

We were once more equal. When we compare with today the apparent freedom that people in rich countries had to work fewer hours in the 1960s it appears that the choices of most have been reduced and the choices of a few constrained to almost no choice. That was the freedom, for men at least, to tell their ‘boss to shove it’ (US) or ‘pack their job in’ (UK), if they did not like it, and take another under conditions of near full employment. This required a change in what we collectively came to believe was possible. We did not lose that world of choice overnight; we lost it over several decades.

The curtailing of choice that came with rising income and wealth inequalities also resulted in the revival of old ways of justifying such inequalities. When social inequalities were high in Victorian Britain Charles Darwin’s novel ideas of evolution were drawn on to try to justify the enormous wealth gaps. The rich were painted as the ‘fittest’ who had survived most successfully. Such thinking was rejected in more equitable times, from the 1945 to the 1970s most vehemently. But since the 1970s Darwinian racism has risen again.

It was not just because Margaret Thatcher wanted to deny the National Front votes that she used the term ‘swamping’ on television in 1978; it is that she believed then what she said, that: ‘... we must hold out the clear prospect of an end to immigration ... [because] ... We are a British nation with British characteristics’ (Thatcher, 1978). That racism, and its new wider face of prejudice, fitted the revived Darwinian rhetoric too well to be too strongly

opposed. Unlike Enoch Powell, who spoke out earlier in a way now usually recognised as racist, Margaret did not even suggest allowing in just enough others to meet what she saw as the country's needs.

The racism that arose newly emboldened, in the 1970s came with a geographical nationalist twist. The twist was to see countries as natural units and to suggest that those which were supposedly home to a single racial group tended to be happy places to live where people got on with one another, whereas those portrayed as having had groups brought together, new groups brought in, tended more often to be places of strife, mistrust and inequality. Inequality was the natural consequence of trying to mix people together, it was suggested, people who do not easily mix. By this way of thinking the social problems of the US became the problems of dealing with black people. The US could not aim to be ever as equal as Europe, to have the kind of healthcare systems Europeans have, to have as widespread and respected state schooling as Europeans, because (so this misguided argument goes) the US is not a naturally homogeneous society – the US by this prejudicial thinking is said to lack 'ethnic homogeneity'. This way of thinking and of describing the world is now said to hardly deserve a response by people who look into others' psychological flaws. (James, 2007, page 72). This way of thinking came, in 2010, to result in Britain's' problems being blamed more and more on recent (if rapidly curtailing) immigration from Eastern Europe.

The geographical myths of racial homogeneity

Geographers need to try to understand where this thinking on racial homogeneity came from, and what it leads to, especially as such thinking is at the core of much current racist ideology. To be able to describe a country or a city as ethnically heterogeneous requires thinking of different residents of that place as belonging to a myriad of different ethnic/racial groups. It is possible to describe almost any place as being made up of a myriad of different racial groups if you try. A university campus can often be typified in this way, but usually isn't, because the students have more in common as students than they have differences due to ethnic background.

You could describe the people of a major city in a country like Greece as coming from a huge variety of backgrounds because it is at the crossroads of continents, but national language, identity and a national orthodox religion are often stressed, rather than the huge variety of hair and skin tones of the population. In Greece these are usually simply not remarked on unless the faces are very new. A similar situation occurs in London where a majority of the mothers of new born infants were themselves born abroad, but where this great mix of people also have a huge amount in common (including those from Eastern Europe who hardly stand out in a place so mixed). When people have much in common, they are described using a common term, such as being all 'students', or all 'Greeks', or even all 'Londoners' (especially for those within the middle income bands!). Where identity is less shared, lives less similar, opportunities and outcomes far more constrained by skin tone or family history, then the people in that place are more often called, for example, white, Hispanic, black, Asian or Poles.

You create a homogeneous plurality, the idea of a common identity, by how you describe your aspirations and beliefs. In 2004 one of the Swedish political parties wrote in its election material that ‘... everyone is fragile at some point in time. All Swedes need each other. All live their lives in the here and now, together with others, caught up in the midst of change. All will be richer if all of us are allowed to participate and nobody is left out. All will be stronger if there is security for everybody and not only for a few’ (Bauman, 2007, page 142) Of course there is still much racism in Sweden where some people are not recognised as Swedes, but fewer people are looked down upon for the class they come from than in the UK.

Elsewhere in Scandinavia, in Denmark, in an argument that is as much about countering racism directed towards Muslims as it is about class, it is argued that the population cannot afford not to be egalitarian, not just out of idealism but because securing continuous improvement in human lives and ability is vital to the economy. Minimisation of poverty and insecurity is now becoming widely understood to be a precondition for effective social investment. Recently key members of the British Conservative party were making a similar argument (Wind-Cowie, 2010)! A commitment to social citizenship, pooling risks collectively, is now widely understood to be essential to successful 21st-century living (Gøsta Esping-Andersen’s argument, as described in Irvin, 2008, p 103).

A group of people comes to have a common ethnicity not just by having an identity thrust on them, but by creating one through working for a common identity. If those working for solidarity within Scandinavian countries win, then the homogeneous ethnic image of Scandinavia that is presented will change, become a little less white, both more visually

plural and more socially homogeneous. If they lose then it will be said that there are distinct different and separate ethnicities there: heterogeneity. However, whatever transpires, neither scenario will completely encapsulate the case.

Ethnic heterogeneity and the geography of sameness

Both ethnic heterogeneity and homogeneity are myths. Heterogeneity as a useful concept is a myth because we almost all live in heterogeneous communities; it is just that we often do not recognise that. Our communities are also not ethnically homogeneous because people are not more predisposed to mix better with others of similar skin tone or hairstyle. People are predisposed to mix better with those who society has made them most likely to mix with. (Dorling 2010, 162). Two people in a city in Greece will mix regardless of their skin tone and hair colour and even religion more easily if their families are of similar social status as, in Greece as elsewhere in the rich world, people tend to marry within social classes more even than within religion (Orthodox and Catholic, Christian and Muslim, Abrahamic and Dharmic,) (Ballas, 2010).

Where income, wealth and class differences are narrower, such as in Greece when compared to, say, Portugal (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009), people are a little freer to marry who they like, because more are of a similar social class. It is in countries of great income and wealth inequalities that there is more disapproval of certain groups within that country marrying: whites and blacks in the US, Christians and Muslims in the UK, Dalits and Brahmins in India. In countries with far lower inequalities membership of an ethnic, religious, or caste

group is much less of an issue, and also less likely. It is less likely because in more equitable countries there is more ethnic mixing, religion is less prescribed, and castes cannot mean so much.

Children will mix with other children who live nearby if allowed out of their homes to do so. They will live near a greater mix of children in those countries where people are less scared (Frank, 2007). In a country that is far more tolerant of what is seen as inter-racial mixing, there will be far more inter-racial mixing. This is far from obvious when, as often happens in such countries, almost everyone comes to be defined as a single race, especially by ‘outsiders’. Most people in such places are also seen to belong to a single class (such as the ‘Japanese middle class’). In a very different country, like the US, where such mixing was until recent generations proclaimed as evil, in schools, in bed, even on the same seats on buses, there will be less mixing still.

Mixing of those seen as different occurs most where people have been given a huge variety of racial and ethnic labels and have been put in very close proximity to each other at relatively young ages, preferably in a place where housing is so expensive, and commuting so tricky. It is there where people have to live in whatever home they can afford which is as near to their commuter routes as possible. Thus London is a good place for mixing. Londoners call themselves Londoners, often in preference to British (and certainly in the majority in preference to English) because no other word describes the mix. It is thus not because they live in London (Kaur-Ballagan et al., 2007).

Ethnic homogeneity is almost always a myth that is easily exposed. The supposedly homogeneous group can be found, after a little digging, to have a wide variety of origins, being made up of a collection of people with a far wider range of backgrounds than the myth would suggest. Scandinavian stories of the good of the many outweighing the selfish intent of the few can sometimes come also with the downside of invoking the myth of ethnic homogeneity and then suffering from the danger of excluding those seen as outsiders, those *less Scandinavian* than others. Iceland is a good example, a far flung island where the myth of the supposed purity of its Nordic race, the descendants of Vikings, gained credence over generations of morale-boosting storytelling in an otherwise very beautiful but very cold, desolate and, until recently, extremely poor place.

Genetic testing of the ethnic origins of Icelanders reveals that the Viking past of their island resulted in a somewhat less pure Nordic bloodline than the stories suggest. The Vikings were generally successful at what they did. That is why they are remembered. A large part of what they did was to take slaves from places like Britain, mainly Celtic slaves. And, like all groups who take slaves, they mixed with their slaves, but this wasn't talked of in their stories. We know they mixed because the evidence is in their, as it turns out, very heterogeneous genes (Pálsson, G., 2002, p. 345).

In places more physically isolated by ocean from others, it has been easier to sustain myths of racial homogeneity, as in the case of Iceland. Some academics claim that being a small population aids homogeneity, but large populations can also be presented as homogeneous. Population size is no barrier to myth making. For instance, the Japanese population (127 million people) is usually presented to itself as at least as ethnically homogeneous as the

Icelandic population. Immigration from the Philippines, Korea, China and elsewhere, past and present, is seen as minor and to have somehow disappeared without effect. Internal identities such as those of the *Uchinan-chu*, *Yanato no kuni* or on the island of Okinawa, or within the enclaves of Tokyo, the differences you can see if you wish to imagine them in people's faces, are all rendered imaginary by the myth of the homogeneity of the Japanese. The reason why it is possible to promulgate myths of racial homogeneity on the archipelago of Japan and islands of Iceland is that in both, income inequalities and hence social differences are among the *lowest* in the rich world. On each island the poorest fifth receive just under a third of what the richest fifth receive in income a year (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). That, in 2010, is as good as it gets, the nearest thing to social utopia despite economic slump and crash in both nations respectively.

In contrast, on islands such as Singapore, New Zealand and Britain where inequalities are much wider, ethnicity is seen to matter much more. You might say that the visual indicators of ethnicity are clearer on these other islands, but what constitutes a difference to your eye depends on what you see as a difference in your mind, and that depends on what you have been brought up to view as a significant visual difference. Do singer Björk Guðmundsdóttir and presenter Magnús Magnússon appear especially visually similar to you, or Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi and artist Yoko Ono? I have not picked these pairs because they look so different. I have picked them because they are probably among the best known faces from the islands they were born in. Of course they look no more similar or dissimilar than do any pair of famous Malay or Chinese face from Singapore, *Maori* or *Pakeha* from New Zealand.

Social Darwinism, racism and fantasies of ‘optimum’ populations

What is common to both homogeneity and heterogeneity myths are new forms of social Darwinism. Social Darwinism is the shady movement that grew strong about a century ago suggesting that in humans there is a survival of the individually fittest, that this is a good thing, and that it can be accelerated for the common good. The truth is that there is no such natural thing; there is an enhanced potential for survival of the most sociable in normal times of sociability, and of the most selfish only in times of extreme scarcity and anarchy. For humans, being ostracised by society is usually deadly (Burns, 2007). Humans survive and prosper best in groups. The awful situations where only the ‘fittest’, or to describe them more accurately, the ‘fortunate’, survive, are massacres, famines, or genocide such as that which occurred with the mass transportation of slaves from Africa to the Americas. Belief in social Darwinism and its precursors resulted in just these kinds of situations, not just in genocide, but also in the imposition of slavery and, later, sterilisation on great numbers of people.

Conclusion – what comes around...

What we think of as racism changes over time. It has only been since the 1930s that we began to widely recognise racism as it is currently thought of, and only since the 1960s has the word ‘racism’ appeared in dictionaries (including the word ‘racialism’ and the even the more recent ‘racist’) (Leech, 2005). Just as with poverty, exclusion and elitism, racism has not always been with us as it is with us now, and, as with poverty, only recently have very large numbers of people become committed to its eradication. The currently propagated

mass prejudice, that the poor are somehow inherently inferior, will pass too. But its passing must be aided, and we must be vigilant to recognise what new spite will next be promoted by those who fear a world in which they and theirs are no longer supreme.

The Figures in this paper show that inequalities in health are now again as great as they were over 70 years ago. We may all live longer on average, but again in many places it has become normal to live 10, 15 or 20 years longer than do people in other parts of the country – including locally to you (see Figure 1). In our thinking we have become polarised again, not just intellectually but also geographically between those who promote fear of outsiders and an expanded free market and those who wish for better than that (Figure 2). The wealthy now have incomes as high as they last ‘enjoyed’ in the 1920s, when we were last as unequal as today, and wealth that belies imagination (Figure 3). Across the country we again have children, on average in our very late twenties (as we did in the 1930s) rather than when we are younger and fitter (Figure 4). From the most vital aspects (death) to the most intimate aspects of our lives (sex), how we live, how long, and when we are born, are all strongly determined with how well we have learned or forgotten to live with each other.

Human beings are easily prone to prejudice, to believe suggestions made about great groups of other individuals, to fall under the spell of a single charismatic individual. We have now seen this often enough to learn from our collective experiences. For the first time in human history today a majority of young adults can read and write worldwide. We can now learn and act in ways that our parents could not. Those with less are not a race apart that you should fear living near, mixing with, or your children marrying. It is as simple as that.

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All connected? Geographies of race, death, wealth, votes and births

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