

PRESS RELEASE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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On the 30th anniversary of the first Brixton Riot, we ask: DOES RACE HAVE A PLACE IN THE BIG SOCIETY?

We know that cuts to public sector services and jobs will impact particularly heavily on ethnic minority people. Meanwhile the organisations that fight for racial equality in our society are to lose financial support, leading to doors being permanently shut. So we ask: how can the Big Society be a racially just one?

We believe that there are opportunities for us to make sure that it is. But to keep race equality on the agenda will mean finding new ways to approach the same problems and, perhaps, learning from societies elsewhere.

That is why we will screen *Number Games*, a short documentary exploring how Big Society ideas have already played out in the US, **on Monday 11 April 2011**.

The film premiere, held at the Channel Four Building, will mark 30 years since the first Brixton Riot in 1981: a watershed moment in the history of race relations in the UK.

The 25-minute film, which is the brainchild of leading race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust and independent filmmakers Feedback Films, explores how we can ensure that the Big Society is also a racially just one.

Set in London and Chicago, the documentary follows Runnymede director Dr Rob Berkeley as he travels to the US for the largest race equality event in the world. Rob speaks in particular to community organisers, learning how their brand of activism has been used to fight for racial justice.

The film follows the progress of community organising group Action Now as they support local resident Terri Richards, whose home is under threat of repossession.

Michelle Young, president of Action Now, says: "We can't promise you we're going to win, but we'll fight. You either stand up for what you believe, or you'll fall for anything."

Community organising has a big following in the US and has been used to effect change on issues large and small. This type of proactive, volunteer-based citizen involvement fits perfectly with the Big Society paradigm. But can community organising really achieve change? And how does race equality fit in?

In the film, Anna Coote, head of social policy at the UK-based New Economics Foundation, says: "Ethnic minorities have to get involved and take action because, if they don't, goodness knows what will happen."

Big Society policies, which are yet to be wholly implemented in the UK, already have real world equivalents in America that have been in practice for decades. The premise of free schools, for example, is not dissimilar from that of Charter Schools, of which there are already thousands in the US.

Chicago, the country's second largest city, is also recognised as its most racially segregated. People in Chicago have been living with Big Society policies, such as low government expenditure in public services, publicly elected police commissioners and greater reliance on voluntary sector organisations, for years.

How has this shaped their communities and what can we learn from their experience? *Number Games* tackles these questions head on and looks at positive ways – devastating funding cuts notwithstanding - for us to move the struggle for race equality onwards.

Why must we continue to find new ways to achieve racial equality in the UK?

- There will be higher numbers of council job losses in areas with higher proportions of black and minority ethnic residents
- Black people are stopped and searched by the police at seven times the rate of white people
- If your surname sounds African or Asian you can expect to write twice as many job applications before you secure an interview
- Since the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993, 89 more people have been killed by racists

Watch the Number Games trailer now: <http://bit.ly/NumberGames>

Watch the full documentary online on the Runnymede Trust YouTube channel from 12 April 2011: www.youtube.com/runnymedetrust

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NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The film premiere event is by invite-only. If you are interested in attending or would like to preview the film online, please email Nina Kelly at nina@runnymedetrust.org or on 020 7377 9222.

2. Rob Berkeley is available for interviews, if you would like to arrange one contact Nina Kelly as above.

3. The Runnymede Trust is a social policy research organisation focused on race equality and race relations. We work by:

- Identifying barriers to race equality and good race relations
- Enabling effective action for social change
- Influencing policy at all levels through providing thought leadership and robust evidence

Further information is available on the Runnymede website: www.runnymedetrust.org

4. Feedback Films was set-up in 2010 to provide simple, dynamic and cost-effective video communication solutions to small and medium-sized businesses, charities and not-for-profit organisations. Feedback Films has a wealth of experience in high-end corporate communications, broadcast television, documentary films and music videos. *Number Games* was produced and directed by Johnathan Tetsill and edited by Jamie Coward, both of Feedback Films.

Further information is available on the Feedback Films website: www.feedbackfilms.co.uk.

5. The first of three civilian uprisings known collectively as the Brixton Riots began on 11 April 1981 and was named by the Metropolitan Police Service as the 'first serious riot of the 20th century'. Hundreds of people were injured in the uprising, both ordinary citizens and police. The violence has been put down to rising racial and socio-economic tensions, fuelled in large part by the massively unpopular Sus laws. This legislation, brought in by Margaret Thatcher's government, allowed discrimination in police stop and search practice, which was felt keenly by the black community in Brixton. The Scarman report, which was produced after an inquiry into the events, found that the Sus laws were being used disproportionately and indiscriminately against black people, which led to protection in the form of a law: The Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984.