



EMBARGOED UNTIL: 00:00 18 April 2008

Press reporting of violent crime fuels racism

A new report from the Runnymede Trustⁱ has found that the print media's reporting of violent crime stirs racist tension. The researchers analysed reporting of violent crime in 2007 and identified different approaches to reporting of crime dependent on whether the victim or perpetrator are Black or White. The authors argue that these approaches serve to influence public opinion and policy, and contribute to the reinforcement of racist stereotypesⁱⁱ.

The tragic and disturbing patterns of violence between young people are a legitimate cause for concern and for media coverage. Too many young people are victims or perpetrators of violent crime in our towns and cities. Yet an analysis of the reporting of violent crimeⁱⁱⁱ for two months of 2007 shows that the deaths of Black victims are of less concern to the print media than those of White victims. When Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Ian Blair, pointed this fact out in January 2006 he was accused of 'crass insensitivity'.^{iv}

Further, the report shows that the way in which violent crime is reported when the perpetrator or victim is from a minority ethnic background reinforces stereotypes:

- Gang, gun and knife violence is regularly identified as 'cultural' and then attached to particular ethnic groups. The effect is that entire 'communities' are criminalized on the basis of their 'cultures'.
- While it may be true that certain groups are responsible for a disproportionate amount of certain types of crimes, it does not logically follow that most members of those groups are involved in offending behaviour. However, this logical leap is often made.
- Anecdotal evidence is too often treated as conclusive proof. For example, an inconclusive and brief Metropolitan Police report on the London gang profile was employed as evidence that the majority of young refugees are committing violence on the streets of Britain.
- The media's reporting of teen-on-teen crime has been influential in defining the direction of crime policy in 2007. However, policies based on the assumption that black 'culture' creates crime, or that 'black crime' is qualitatively different from 'white crime', are unlikely to be effective. Indeed they may fuel racist responses and hold back effective work to tackle the scourge of violent crime in our neighbourhoods.

Michelynn Lafèche, Director of Runnymede, said:

"The press is in a key position to provide information about people, places and events of which individuals and groups may have little first-hand experience. Needless to say, this power can be used to promote understanding and open-mindedness, or conversely, feed into vulgar prejudice. Therefore, it is alarming to think that while the language used in the press may have changed in the last 30 years, many assumptions linking minority ethnic groups to violent crime remain intact."



NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. The report is part of Runnymede's Perspectives series, the aim of which is to engage with government – and other initiatives – through exploring the use and development of concepts in policymaking, and analysing their potential contribution to a successful multi-ethnic Britain.

2. Michelynn Lafleche, Director of Runnymede is available for interviews and comment. To arrange an interview, please contact Michelynn Lafleche on 020 7377 9222 during office hours. Outside of office hours, contact Rob Berkeley on 07764 935 770.

3. The report will be published online at 10am 18th April. Preview copies are available for press by contacting Runnymede on 020 7377 9222.

ⁱ The Runnymede Trust is an independent policy research organisation focusing on equality and justice through the promotion of a successful multi-ethnic society. Founded as a Charitable Education Trust, Runnymede has a long track record in policy research, working in collaboration with eminent thinkers and policymakers in the public, private and voluntary sectors. Since 1968, the date of Runnymede's foundation, we have worked to establish and maintain a positive image of what it means to live affirmatively within a society that is both multi-ethnic and culturally diverse. Runnymede continues to speak with a thoughtful and independent public voice on these issues today. For further information visit www.runnymedetrust.org

ⁱⁱ 'A Tale of Two Englands: 'Race' and Violent Crime in the Press' is available for download without charge at www.runnymedetrust.org from 10am 18th April 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ All the national newspapers and a selection of regional papers were monitored for a period of two months, spanning May and June 2007. All articles, leaders and comments on violent crime (excluding sexual and domestic violence) in England were read and analysed. The sample was chosen based on readership numbers and to represent the various English regions. A total of 413 articles from national newspapers were analysed, and 390 from regional papers.

^{iv} 'The crass insensitivity of Sir Ian Blair', *Daily Mail*, January 28, 2006