

## Dual Heritage

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A concerned white person asked me recently: "Is it true you sometimes describe yourself as mixed-race? Don't you know, we don't use that term any more."

I find myself in the same boat as my white gran, whom I ticked off for calling black people "coloured". But I'm probably worse than my gran, because she was born in 1908, left school at 13, worked in a cigarette factory, and didn't sit around discussing race and multiculturalism. I have no such excuse. "So what am I these days?" I asked, curious for my identity to be revealed.

"You're dual-heritage." It sounds like a stately home off a minor motorway. It's completely wrong, but it'll do, at least until the 2012 Olympics. Why 2012? Why link race and identity to sport? Because no matter what language we speak, sport speaks to us all. Moreover, the Olympics, preceded by the South African World Cup in 2010, provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help forge a new model of British multiculturalism.

So how can these two events help redefine our multicultural British identity? The answer lies in the eternal conundrum: what makes people happy? Ancient Greek philosophers expounding the "good life" wouldn't be surprised that 21st-century politicians desperately seek an answer. No 10 launched an investigation. After all, it is the government's responsibility to stop people behaving badly and to promote well-being. This is the province of the new Institute of Community Cohesion.

The communities under greatest strain in Britain today are the ones where inequalities are high, trust is low, change is feared, groups are marginalised, people live parallel lives, and extremism takes root - whether it be the far right or Islamic extremists. These communities now ask: what can we do to reduce conflict? Sport is an answer. It can be used to illustrate our commitment to integration (not assimilation), fairness and ambition. More than that, it can physically bring together members of neighbouring communities who would otherwise never meet.

Working with other groups, the institute is backing a brilliant idea to link every UK school with schools in the developing world ahead of the 2010 World Cup. Closer to home, the London Olympics give us a chance to create new relationships within the country and abroad. Our Olympic bid was a celebration of Britain's diversity. It is why we won. These must not be hollow words simply to impress the International Olympic Committee, but words that fashion a new sense of who we are - one that celebrates our astonishing multiculturalism while uniting us around a core British identity.

I shall now break it gently to the white people reading this: I have reason to believe that you are dual-heritage - just like my gran, though she never knew it. Her father was Scottish, her mother Irish. Though I often describe myself as black, I recognise some truth in the term "mixed". Apart from Irish and Scottish, I have African, Hungarian, American, Jewish, Geordie and Native American blood. Not to mention my defining identity, which is British.

I am not ignorant of the significance of language. I grasp that words can be as influential or abusive as actions. A trivial example was the Zidane-baiting in the World Cup final; a bigger example is the use of hate-language as a precursor to genocide. But, on balance, I'm bored by linguistic shadow-boxing.

Gordon Brown is right to reject the narrow cricket-test approach and to replace it with a patriotic national identity that stands for tolerance and inclusion. Patriotism and inclusion are not mutually exclusive, and it is time progressives grasped this fully.