

Essentialism in the U.K.

By Theodore Dalrymple

Dark skin may be a necessary condition of being black, but apparently it is not sufficient for some. When Kemi Badenoch



was recently elected leader of the Conservative Party in Britain, London-based Nigerian journalist Nels Abbey posted on X that Badenoch was “the most prominent member of white supremacy’s

Black collaborator class,” claiming that her election—by a significant majority of Conservative Party members—represented a victory for racism. Labour Party member of Parliament Dawn Butler found this assertion worth amplifying and reposted it.

This was not the first time a prominent black Conservative politician was deemed insufficiently “black.” Kwasi Kwarteng, of Ghanaian descent and briefly Chancellor of the Exchequer, was accused of being only “superficially” black by another Labour Party MP of Bangladeshi descent, Rupa Huq.

For Abbey, Butler, and Huq, racism appears as an original sin—permanent, ineradicable, and impervious to virtuous behavior. No amount of achievement or social prominence among ethnic minorities seems to mitigate this perception. After all, as the metaphor goes, only fools would kill the goose

that lays the golden eggs.

The use of the term “collaborator” likely evokes the French citizens who collaborated with the Nazis during the Occupation, suggesting that contemporary Britain, even under Keir Starmer (who graciously congratulated Badenoch on her election), is morally comparable with Vichy France.

The philosophical anthropology underlying this view is worth examining. According to this perspective, individuals of a certain race are obligated—under penalty of being labeled traitors—to think in specific ways. If they deviate, they must be insincere, motivated by personal gain, and serving as tools of their race’s supposed enemies.

This notion echoes Marxist epistemology and moral psychology, where intellectual allegiance is determined not by economic class but by race. To be truly black, one must think and act in a prescribed manner; authentic blackness entails ideological uniformity. Marx argued that being determines consciousness, not the reverse. Similarly, for figures like Abbey and Butler, blackness is a state of being that should—and typically does—shape consciousness, with deviations seen as betrayals. Ironically, this essentialist view mirrors the logic of ardent white supremacists regarding whiteness.

Such thinking divides humanity into immutable racial categories with fundamentally incompatible ways. To adapt Kipling slightly: “Oh, White is White, and Black is Black, and never the twain shall meet.” Badenoch’s election contradicts this rigid framework, which perhaps explains the intensity of the backlash she has faced.

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