

ROYAL WEDDING

A mixed-race princess who could change Britain

Can Meghan Markle change the UK's attitude towards race? She is poised to become the first biracial royal—an important milestone for a country with a growing mixed-race population.



Mixed reactions: Meghan said she finds some of the media's focus on her race "disheartening".

In many ways, Meghan Markle is not a traditional British princess. She is American, for one thing, and divorced, and an actress who earned her own fortune of around **£3.5 million**.

She is also mixed-race: her father is descended from a lord who was beheaded by Henry VIII, her mother from an American slave. That will make her Britain's first mixed-race royal in at least **200 years**.

Meghan has spoken movingly about being mixed-race. In 2015, she wrote: "As a biracial woman, I watch in horror as both sides of a culture I define as my own become victims of spin in the media, perpetuating stereotypes and reminding us that the States has perhaps only placed bandages over the problems that have never healed at the root."

She also explained how she struggled to define her own identity as a child, and then struggled to find acting jobs because she was "racially ambiguous".

Eventually, she learned to embrace her

heritage and has voiced her "pride in being a strong, confident mixed-race woman".

Unfortunately, she has still faced racism in Britain since her relationship with Prince Harry began. Back in 2016, Kensington Palace released a statement condemning the "racial undertones" of some media coverage of her. In February, the police began investigating a package sent to the couple as a "racist hate crime".

Clearly racism is far from over in Britain. Just last week a United Nations (UN) representative said that Brexit had unleashed "explicit racial, ethnic and religious intolerance" in the country. She also criticised the **Windrush** scandal and the **disproportionate** number of people from ethnic minorities in prison.

However, attitudes have improved in the long term. The proportion of white people who say they would mind if a relative married a black or Asian person has **dropped** significantly over the last 30 years. Meanwhile, the UK is becoming more racially diverse: **at least 2.2%**

of the population is mixed-race, including around one in 16 children under five.

Will Meghan change more minds?

The royal melting pot

Yes, say some. The fact that she has been warmly welcomed into the royal family sends a clear signal to the rest of Britain: racism is simply unacceptable, from the top to the bottom of society. She will also be a great role model. "It's comparable to when Barack Obama became president," one young woman told the BBC. "People were like: 'wow.'"

It is not the same, argue others. Obama was elected by ordinary people, not chosen by a wealthy prince. Even then he could not change minds about race: **46%** of Americans think race relations got worse during his presidency, not better. As a royal, Meghan will not even be allowed to speak up about the issue. One woman cannot change society alone.

Q & A

Q: What do we know?

A: Meghan will be the first non-white member of the royal family since 1818 — possibly ever, as Queen Charlotte's African heritage has never been confirmed. She is moving to a

country where (according to the 2011 census) 86% of people are white, 7.5% are Asian, 3.3% are black and 2.2% are mixed. One percent checked the box for "other".

Q: What do we not know?

A: Whether Meghan will have a positive (or indeed any) effect on race relations in Britain.

When the engagement was first announced, the polling company YouGov found that 69% of Britons thought a royal marrying someone of a different ethnicity would be acceptable, while 14% said it would not be acceptable. (The remaining 16% did not know.)



RAINFORD
HIGH

READING HOMEWORK

1. Will Meghan Markle change people's minds about race in Britain? Explain.

2. Has Britain become a more racist country since the Brexit vote? Explain.
(You may need to research this answer)
