

Race relations in Britain and the USA**Aufgaben**

Der vorliegende Vorschlag enthält in Aufgabe 3 alternative Arbeitsanweisungen.

1 Outline the author's stance on being British. (Material 1) **(20 BE)**

2 Relate Braithwaite's experiences of being black to more recent experiences of minority groups in the UK dealt with in class. **(40 BE)**

3 Choose one of the following tasks:

3.1 "Each violent episode, though greatly to be deplored, has invariably preceded some change, some improvement in the American Negro's position." (Material 1)
Assess the validity of this statement with regard to American history.

or

3.2 The professor of the "Race relations"-seminar you are attending in your semester abroad at an American university has asked all students to contribute to his university blog called "Good intentions are never enough". Taking the cartoon (Material 2) as a starting point, write a blog entry commenting on the notion of good intentions in race relations, especially in the USA, also referring to material dealt with in class. **(40 BE)**

Material 1

E.R. Braithwaite: To Sir, With Love (autobiographical novel, 1959)

After the war, Braithwaite is invited for a job interview in the field of electronics. He possesses a science degree and is highly experienced in this field. However, it soon becomes evident that in spite of his qualifications, he will not get the job because he cannot be placed in a position of authority over other English workers employed in the company.

I had just been brought face to face with something I had either forgotten or completely ignored for more than six exciting years – my black skin. It had not mattered when I volunteered for aircrew service in 1940, it had not mattered during the period of flying [...]; it had not mattered when, uniformed and winged¹, I visited theaters and dance-halls, pubs and private houses.

5 I had forgotten about my black face during those years. I saw it daily yet never noticed its color. [...]

Belief in an ideal dies hard. I had believed in an ideal for all the twenty-eight years of my life – the ideal of the British Way of Life.

[...] The majority of Britons at home have very little appreciation of what that intangible yet amazingly real and invaluable export – the British Way of Life – means to colonial people; and they
10 seem to give little thought to the fantastic phenomenon of races so very different from themselves in pigmentation, and widely scattered geographically, assiduously identifying themselves with British loyalties, beliefs and traditions. This attitude can easily be observed in the way in which the colored Colonial will quote the British systems of Law, Education and Government, and will adopt fashions in dress and social codes, even though his knowledge of these things has depended largely on
15 secondhand information. [...] Yes, it is wonderful to be British – until one comes to Britain. By dint of careful saving or through hard-won scholarships many of them arrive in Britain to be educated in the Arts and Sciences and in the varied processes of legislative and administrative government. They come, bolstered by a firm, conditioned belief that Britain and the British stand for all that is best in both Christian and Democratic terms; in their naiveté they ascribe these high principles to all Britons,
20 without exception.

I had grown up British in every way. Myself, my parents and my parents' parents, none of us knew or could know any other way of living, of thinking, of being; we knew no other cultural pattern, and I had never heard any of my forebears complain about being British. As a boy I was taught to appreciate English literature, poetry and prose, classical and contemporary, and it was absolutely natural for me
25 to identify myself with the British heroes of the adventure stories against the villains of the piece who were invariably non-British and so, to my boyish mind, more easily capable of villainous conduct. The more selective reading of my college and university life was marked by the same predilection for English literature, and I did not hesitate to defend my preferences to my American colleagues. In fact, all the while in America, I vigorously resisted any criticism of Britain or British policy, even when in
30 the privacy of my own room, closer examination clearly proved the reasonableness of such criticism. [...]

To many in Britain a Negro is a “darky” or a “nigger” or a “black”; he is identified, in their minds, with inexhaustible brute strength; and often I would hear the remark “working like a nigger” or “laboring like a black” used to emphasize some occasion of sustained effort. They expect of him a
35 courteous subservience and contentment with a lowly state of menial employment and slum accommodation. It is true that here and there one sees Negroes as doctors, lawyers or talented entertainers, but they are somehow considered “different” and not to be confused with the mass.

¹ winged – having a badge that identifies you as a member of the Royal Air Force

I am a Negro, and what had happened to me at that interview constituted, to my mind, a betrayal of faith. I had believed in freedom, in the freedom to live in the kind of dwelling I wanted, providing I was able and willing to pay the price; and in the freedom to work at the kind of profession for which I was qualified, without reference to my racial or religious origins. [...]

I reflected on my life in the U.S.A. There, when prejudice is felt, it is open, obvious, blatant; the white man makes his position very clear, and the black man fights those prejudices with equal openness and fervor, using every constitutional device available to him. The rest of the world in general and Britain in particular are prone to point an angrily critical finger at American intolerance, forgetting that in its short history as a nation it has granted to its Negro citizens more opportunities for advancement and betterment, *per capita*, than any other nation in the world with an indigenous Negro population. Each violent episode, though greatly to be deplored, has invariably preceded² some change, some improvement in the American Negro's position. The things they have wanted were important enough for them to fight and die for, and those who died did not give their lives in vain. Furthermore, American Negroes have been generally established in communities in which their abilities as laborer, artisan, doctor, lawyer, scientist, educator and entertainer have been directly or indirectly of benefit to that community; in terms of social and religious intercourse they have been largely independent of white people.

In Britain I found things to be very different. I have yet to meet a single English person who has actually admitted to anti-Negro prejudice; it is even generally believed that no such thing exists here. A Negro is free to board any bus or train and sit anywhere, provided he has paid the appropriate fare; the fact that many people might pointedly avoid sitting near him is casually overlooked. He is free to seek accommodation in any licensed hotel or boarding house – the courteous refusal which frequently follows is never ascribed to prejudice. The betrayal I now felt was greater because it had been perpetrated with the greatest of charm and courtesy.

I realized at that moment that I was British, but evidently not a Briton, and that fine differentiation was now very important; I would need to re-examine myself and my whole future in terms of this new appraisal.

(996 Wörter)

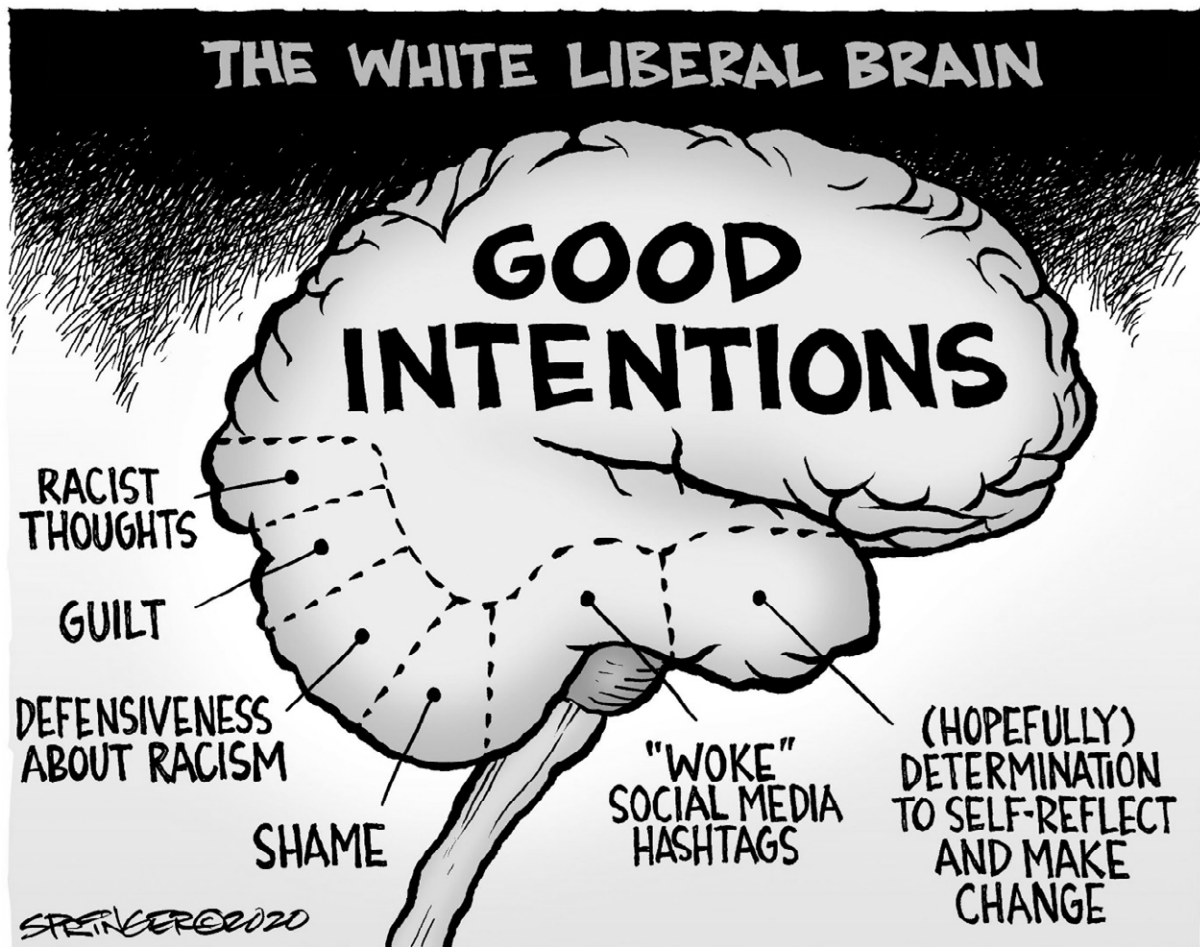
E.R. Braithwaite: *To Sir, With Love* (1959), in: *The Penguin Book of Migration Literature: Departures, Arrivals, Generations, Returns*, New York 2019, S. 110–115.

Hinweis

E.R. Braithwaite (1912–2016), born in the former colony British Guiana in the West Indies, moved to Great Britain in 1939, after studying in the USA and working in Venezuela for two years. He worked as a fighter pilot in the British Royal Air Force during the Second World War.

² to precede sth. – to come before sth., to introduce sth.

Material 2



CartoonStock.com

Jesse Springer: The White Liberal Brain, 17.06.2020, URL: https://www.cartoonstock.com/directory/s/subconscious_racism.asp (abgerufen am 17.09.2022).

Hinweis

woke – aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice)