

When Will We Even Begin to Talk About Inequity — And Who Gets to Decide When That Conversation Is Allowed?

By Sheila

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On the 22nd of February 2026, Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo walked onto the stage at the BAFTA Film Awards at London's Royal Festival Hall to present the first award of the evening. Two of the most celebrated Black actors of their generation. Two men who had given extraordinary performances in *Sinners*, a film that itself speaks to the weight of Black history, Black pain, and Black survival. They stood at that podium composed, professional, and dignified — and then the N-word was shouted from the audience.

Delroy Lindo looked stunned. They both paused. And then, because that is what Black people have always been required to do, they carried on.

I want to be absolutely clear about something before I go any further. John Davidson, the man who shouted that word, has severe Tourette's syndrome. His condition is real. His pain is real. His struggle for recognition and understanding is real and legitimate. The film *I Swear*, inspired by his life, is a powerful piece of work, and the conversation around Tourette's that has followed this incident is one that the world genuinely needed to have. Nobody at Blossom Group — and certainly not I — would seek to diminish that.

But here is what I will not accept. I will not accept that understanding must flow in only one direction. And I will not accept the BBC making editorial decisions that reveal, once again, exactly whose pain this country considers acceptable to broadcast, and whose pain it considers convenient to edit out.

The Editorial Decision That Cannot Be Explained Away

The BBC broadcast the BAFTA ceremony on a two-hour delay. That delay exists precisely to allow for editorial decisions. They had two hours to listen to what went out. They had two hours to decide what the British public would hear.

They chose not to edit out the N-word. It went out to the nation unbleeped, broadcast into the living rooms of Black families, Black children, people who have lived their entire lives in the shadow of that word and everything it has been used to justify.

And yet — in that same broadcast, with that same delay, with those same editorial tools — they chose to cut other material. Content where Davidson spoke about Sudan, Nigeria, and Free Palestine was removed. That content did not make it to air.

So we are expected to believe that the BBC, in possession of a two-hour editing window, heard a racial slur directed at two Black men and decided it did not require the same attention as political commentary. We are expected to believe this was simply a mistake. A technical oversight. That the editors in that TV truck simply didn't hear it.

I have worked with communities across East London for years. I have sat with impoverished white British families, with refugees and asylum seekers, with people managing neurological conditions and mental health crises, with elders from South Asia and East Africa carrying the scars of colonial histories. I have learned, above all else, to recognise the machinery of institutional power when it operates. And that machinery does not malfunction equally for everyone. It malfunctions consistently — consistently — in the same direction. Always at the expense of Black and brown pain.

The Oldest Tool in the Book: Divide and Rule

What has happened in the days since the BAFTAs is not new. It is not surprising. But it must be named.

Two disadvantaged communities — the disabled community and the Black community — have been placed in opposition to each other. Not by the individuals involved. John Davidson did not choose this. Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo did not choose this. Hannah Beachler, the Oscar-nominated production designer for *Sinners* who also reported being subjected to slurs that night, did not choose this.

This was chosen by institutions. By BAFTA, who invited Davidson knowing his tics could include racial slurs and seated him near a microphone. By the BBC, whose editors made choices about what mattered enough to cut. By a media landscape that spent days teaching the public to understand Tourette's syndrome — which is important — while offering comparatively little examination of what Michael, Delroy, and Hannah actually experienced standing on that stage and walking through that room.

The message, delivered as it always is through tone and omission rather than explicit statement, was this: understand the person who caused the harm. As for the people harmed — we thanked them for their dignity and professionalism. We trust they will move on.

Dignity and Professionalism. Again.

BAFTA thanked Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo for handling the situation with 'incredible dignity and professionalism.'

There it is. The phrase we have heard so many times it has become a kind of ceremony in itself. Black people praised not for their art, not for their humanity, not for their right to stand in a room without being racially abused — but for their restraint. For absorbing something that should never have happened and continuing to function.

What choice did they have? What choice has any Black person ever had in a room full of power, cameras, and an audience waiting to see how they react?

And yet nobody — not BAFTA, not the BBC in their initial statement, not host Alan Cumming in his carefully worded apologies — centred what Michael and Delroy and Hannah actually felt. There was no 'we failed them.' There was 'we apologise if you were offended.' If. You. Were. Offended.

The N-word. And the question put to the public is whether someone might have found it offensive.

When Does the Conversation About Inequity Get Permitted?

At Blossom Group, we ask this question constantly. We ask it when we work with communities who are told their experiences are anecdotal, or that more data is needed, or that now is not the right moment to discuss systemic racism. We ask it when the same communities have been waiting for the right moment for generations.

Here is what we know. The conversation about inequity is only ever permitted when those who benefit from the current arrangement decide it is permitted. It is allowed when it can be managed, framed, and ultimately contained. It is allowed when it does not require those in power to actually change anything.

When the conversation cannot be controlled — when it might implicate institutions, challenge editorial decisions, or demand accountability rather than apology — it gets redirected. Complexity gets invoked. Nuance is suddenly very important. Experts are found. The focus shifts.

We watched it happen in real time. The story that dominated was about Tourette's syndrome. The story that deserved equal weight — the BBC's editorial choices, the institutional failures of BAFTA, the experience of Black professionals in that room — received a fraction of the attention. And when it did surface, it was framed carefully, so as not to seem unreasonable, so as not to seem like it was attacking a disabled man.

Nobody was attacking John Davidson. The question was never about John Davidson. The question was about the BBC. The question was about BAFTA. The question was about why a broadcaster with a two-hour delay and a moral obligation to its entire audience decided that a racial slur did not require the same editorial care as political content.

What If It Were Someone Else?

Our members at Blossom Group have asked a question that I think every journalist, every broadcaster, every policymaker should sit with.

What if the person in that audience was not someone with Tourette's, but a migrant? A refugee? An immigrant? Someone from one of the communities we work with every day — people who face hostility, suspicion, and dehumanisation as a matter of routine?

Would the BBC have aired what they said unedited and then asked the public for understanding? Would Alan Cumming have asked the audience to create a respectful space for that person? Would Tourettes Action have issued a statement asking people not to abuse them online?

We all know the answer. The perspective — the empathy, the education, the depth of feeling — only arrives when the person causing harm is deemed sympathetic by those in power. When colour enters the picture, the language changes. Suddenly we need nuance. Suddenly context matters. Suddenly it is complicated.

For Black people, it is never complicated. The N-word is not complicated. Its history is not complicated. Its impact on Michael B. Jordan, Delroy Lindo, Hannah Beachler, and every Black person who heard it broadcast into their home is not complicated.

We Are Not Asking for Sympathy to Be Withdrawn. We Are Asking for It to Be Shared.

I want to end where I began, because it matters. Tourette's syndrome is a serious neurological condition. John Davidson has faced stigma, isolation, and a lifetime of misunderstanding. His story deserves to be told and his condition deserves to be understood.

But Michael B. Jordan and Delroy Lindo also have a story. Hannah Beachler has a story. Every Black person who grew up in Britain knowing what that word meant, knowing what it was used to justify, knowing the doors it was used to close — they have a story too.

And the institution that chose to broadcast one story into people's homes unfiltered, while quietly removing another story entirely, owes a far more searching account of itself than it has given.

BAFTA said the N-word carries 'incomparable trauma and pain for so many.' They said it in a statement. They wrote it down. And then they thanked the men it was directed at for their professionalism and moved on.

We at Blossom Group work with thousands of people across diverse communities — people who have been told to move on their entire lives. People who have been carrying pain that

institutions like the BBC have historically helped to create, through decades of racist programming, exclusion, and the gentle, persistent message that some stories matter more than others.

You cannot ask people to get over generations of discrimination and hatred while the systems that produced that discrimination continue to make the same choices. You cannot call it healing. You cannot call it progress.

So I ask this plainly, and I intend it as a real question, not a rhetorical one: when will we even begin to talk about inequity? Not as a concession. Not as a managed, contained conversation allowed at the pleasure of those who benefit from the status quo. But as a genuine reckoning.

Because right now, that conversation is only permitted when those in power deem it fit. And they have not yet deemed it fit. Michael and Delroy stood on that stage and told us so — not with their words, but with the pause before they carried on.

Sheila is a contributor at Blossom Group, a community organisation based in East London supporting thousands of diverse communities through advocacy, health, education, and belonging. To learn more or connect with Blossom Group, visit www.blossom-group.net