Brexit - The EU Referendum and Racism

Since the referendum result for Britain to leave the EU, there has been a considerable spike in hate crimes. This has led many to start making claims that, overnight, racism has become legitimate, and Britain has become a 'racist nation' that is no longer safe for racialised minorities or immigrants to live in. However, as the former activities have suggested, the success of the Leave Campaign can be seen as the result of a long history of racism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the UK.

The so-called 'divisive' rhetoric deployed in the Leave campaign, and the sentiments of 'go back home' being used in the hate speech across the nation, have been around far longer – especially at the governmental level. Three examples are relevant here: the rise of Islamophobia, the 'death of multiculturalism', and a racist mass-media.

Islamophobia has become a key area of sociological research. The sociological research focuses on the 'racialisation' of Muslims – how this seemingly diverse group came to be seen as one homogeneous whole to be discriminated against, similar to how anti-Semitism began in the Renaissance period (14th-17th centuries). Sociological research is, thus, of central importance as it demonstrates how racial groups come into being, rather than assuming their pre-existence. The rise of Islamophobia happens in the context of the 'war on terror' and, by extension, the continued fight against Islamic State terrorism. In effect, the policies implemented in the war on terror have criminalised and marginalised Muslims living in the UK ; it has created a whole culture of fear, suspicion, and severe policing of Muslims in the country. An example of this is the ongoing counter-terrorist 'Prevent programme' – implemented by New Labour following terrorist attacks in London, 2005. In the name of this programme, extreme measures have been justified, such as encouraging teachers to regulate Muslim students so young they're still in primary school. In Vote Leave's campaign, this Islamophobia was clear: references were especially made to migrants (or refugees) from the Middle-East being able to come into the UK and spread extremist ideologies. If you are interested in the criticisms of the ongoing 'Prevent' programme, this video is interesting:

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/video/2016/aug/26/prevent-anti-radicalisation-muslims-london-video?CMP=share_btn_tw

This Islamophobia, once more, was justified in what has been labelled the 'death of multiculturalism'. In this death of multiculturalism, there is a recognition that particular groups in the UK are not welcome because they refuse to assimilate with British norms. This is well highlighted in, then Prime Minister, David Cameron's statement in 2011:

> Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged different cultures to live separate lives, apart from each other and apart from the mainstream [...] We've even tolerated these segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter to our values […] when equally unacceptable views or practices come from someone who isn't white, we've been too cautious frankly – frankly, even fearful – to stand up to them.

As can be seen in Cameron's comments, he is reiterating statements made both by Thatcher and Powell, that 'immigrant culture' is not welcome in the UK. He similarly justifies this racism by claiming that it is for the nation's own safety from Islamic extremism – making a broad generalization of Islam and extremism. The EU referendum was largely fought over the issue of 'open borders', and with such fear and hatred of immigrants given political legitimacy, it is no surprise that the Leave campaign had such support.

For an overview of similarities in anti-immigrant racism, read:

https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/oct/27/swamped-and-riddled-toxic-phrases-wreck-politics-immigration-michael-fallon

Task
1. Are there similarities between the racism seen in the aftermaths of the EU referendum and World War Two?
2. To what extent have racist attitudes actually changed since the 20th century?