

PART THREE: TAKE A LOOK AT AMERICA

Chapter Nine

“The Developing Darkness”: Martin Luther King and the Intersection of North East, British and US Race Relations in the 1960s.

Martin Luther King’s visit to Newcastle in November 1967 and his murder in Memphis in April 1968 coincided with the climax of a particularly fraught period in British race relations that profoundly shaped local and national reactions to both events. With the Black Power movement in full-swing, it was also an era in which the American racial situation was examined more closely than ever before by journalists, politicians and lay commentators hoping to understand, predict and even shape the course of British race relations. This was a period that marked the end of Empire. The 1956 Suez Crisis had seriously damaged British prestige and power in the Middle-East while a wave of independence movements against former colonial powers in Africa, recognized by Conservative Prime Minister Harold MacMillan in February 1960 as evidence that “the wind of change is blowing through this continent,” meant that Britain had to come to terms with declining influence in world economic and political affairs.¹

With the loss of Empire came the new challenges—and the new opportunities—posed by leadership of a diverse Commonwealth. Immigration from that Commonwealth had increased steadily during the 1950s, not least as a consequence of the 1952 McCarran-Walter Act, which severely restricted the entry of British West Indians into the US and encouraged them to look to Britain for better opportunities. With members of the Commonwealth granted full citizenship rights, as opposed to merely

subject status, by the British Nationality Act of 1948, immigrants from the Caribbean, India and Pakistan made up the bulk of the non-white people who came to Britain. Although there were some tensions with British whites, these citizens of colour were initially courted and generally accepted as a solution to labour shortages and as workers willing to fill the lowest paid jobs in an economy finally beginning to recover after years of austerity.²

In the North East, local business leaders also welcomed a new pool of potential employees and consumers, seeing them as vital to the region's economic prospects. "If the North East's plans for continued economic growth are [to be] realised then it can be expected that greater numbers of immigrants will make their way here," explained J.E.T. Aldridge in the *Voice of North East Industry*. Moreover, Aldridge was careful to pre-empt any racist stereotyping of the new arrivals. "Any conception of other racial groups being inherently inferior in intelligence to our own is unfounded," he insisted. "As with white workers, aptitudes and application to the work situation will vary with the individual."³

In 1962, however, in the midst of a brief economic slump and rising fears that traditional British culture was about to be swamped by continued unregulated immigration from what was known euphemistically as the New Commonwealth (to differentiate it from the "white" Commonwealth of Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and the non-coloured portions of Rhodesia and South Africa), the Conservative government passed a Commonwealth Immigrants Act. This measure significantly restricted the ease of access to Britain for her Afro-Caribbean, African and Asian Commonwealth citizens.

It was not only the Conservative Party that favoured immigration controls. Both major parties initially worked hard to keep serious discussions of race and race relations off the political agenda, fearing that it would exacerbate, rather than alleviate, white popular anxieties and disrupt the relative smooth operation of consensus politics in the 1950s and early 1960s. However, having initially encouraged Commonwealth immigrants, as well as migrant European workers under the European Volunteer Workers Scheme (EVWS), to solve domestic labour shortages, Labour and Conservatives alike increasingly viewed the entry of British Commonwealth citizens of colour as a “problem.” That problem was to be solved principally by more rigorous policing of national borders, ideally without jeopardising the many economic and geo-political advantages that the Commonwealth offered Britain.⁴ Once again in power, in 1964 the Labour Government upheld the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act. In August 1965, it presented a White Paper calling both for the further tightening of entry controls and for the Home Secretary to be given discretionary powers to deport illegal aliens. Eventually, on March 1, 1968, again under Labour, another Commonwealth Immigrants Act was passed, this one far more stringent than the 1962 version. In its focus specifically on restricting the entry of coloured Commonwealth immigrants, the 1968 Act was, as the European Convention on Human Rights later declared, both an affront to human dignity and overtly discriminatory on racial grounds.⁵

If one impulse in British race relations legislation in the 1960s was clearly towards immigration restriction, another was directed toward the protection of immigrant rights against the effects of habitual and

institutional racism. Whereas successive administrations had initiated a range of social, publicity and educational programs to help ease the way for continental workers entering Britain after World War Two under the EVWS, coloured immigrants from the Commonwealth received no such assistance. At the national level there was little government investment in helping the white British population understand, respect or accept their new neighbours; little was done to help the migrants settle into a challenging and at times hostile new world. Consequently, as Kathleen Paul writes, “social pressures and conflicts, especially between working-class whites and migrants were allowed to fester...policy makers manifested their own conviction that the ‘coloured immigrants’ were a problem simply because they were in the country in the first place.”⁶

In this context, even the more progressive anti-racist legislation of the 1960s was still conceived primarily as a way to solve, or at least to mitigate the “problems” posed by an increasingly diverse population. In 1965, the Labour government, having carefully paraded its restrictionist credentials in a White Paper calling for limits on immigration, succeeded in passing a Race Relations Act. Modelled on the 1964 Civil Rights Act in the US that had ended statutory, *de jure* racial discrimination while leaving a good deal of structural, *de facto* discrimination in place, the 1965 Race Relations Act created a Race Relations Board to conciliate between those accused of discriminatory practices and their victims.⁷ Unfortunately, the Board had few powers of enforcement. The Act provided nothing in the way of protection against discrimination in crucial areas such as housing and employment. Even before its passage, minority organisations and

sympathetic politicians were calling for a new Race Relations Act, with a much wider brief to combat racial discrimination and imbued with far more effective powers of enforcement and punishment.

Meanwhile, reactionary forces in Britain became ever more vocal and, thanks to groups such as the British National Party (BNP), the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL) and the Racial Preservation Society (RPS), better organized. Most of these new groups demanded the repatriation of all coloured immigrants and complained that the Race Relations Act threatened basic freedoms of expression, which usually meant the freedom of British whites to express their racial views, even if that meant insulting or discriminating against people of colour. Just ten weeks after the 1965 Act went into effect, a *Daily Mail* report on the newly founded RPS exposed the toxicity of its racist views. Founded by James Doyle of the Brighton Kemp Town Conservative Association and Robin Beauclair, the RPS spread its message via a four-page newspaper that the *Mail* denounced as “grotesquely lopsided. They concentrate on disease, murder, rape, prostitution and vice, frequently citing American reports.”⁸

That was not the RPS’s only debt to the US. It also promoted the ideas of Professor Wesley Critz George, a North Carolina eugenicist who believed in the innate biological inferiority of all non-whites. Following the Supreme Court’s landmark 1954 *Brown* school desegregation ruling, George became an important figure in the propaganda wing of the southern white campaign of Massive Resistance against integration. George’s pseudo-scientific ideas about white superiority and the threat to health and morality posed by contact with non-whites permeated RPS ideology. “We should not have them

in from the health point of view. We quarantine dogs yet we let in people with leprosy,” Beauclair explained before launching into a diatribe about the dangers of transmitting genetic deficiencies, of which Africans had plenty, he claimed, through cross-racial blood-transfusions – a fallacy which the *Daily Mail* exposed with a statement from the National Blood Transfusion Service. Migrant Poles and Hungarians, Beauclair generously admitted, had turned out to be “jolly nice people...They’re good English people now.” But they were white; there was no such capacity or prospect for Asians and West Indians coming to Britain. “The race struggle is a struggle for breeding grounds,” Beauclair pontificated, in language of which George would have been proud. He added ominously that “In North America the Negro is winning...Good luck to him. But, please, not in this little island.”⁹ This was both a figurative and literal appeal to a “Little Englander” mentality historically associated with xenophobia, excessive nationalism, and a fear of cosmopolitanism. It conjured up a beguiling vision of ethnic, racial and cultural purity, unsullied by centuries of migrations, conquests and imperial adventures and the intricately mixed-lineages they produced. This, David Olusoga points out, was “a vision of England that did not match the realities of the nation as it was...and a vision that required much of the history of the past four hundred years to be set aside.”¹⁰

Just as progressive forces in Britain looked to the US and the civil rights struggle for clues as to how to avoid or minimize racial conflict through the recognition and protection of minority rights, so some of the rising stars of white British nationalism also looked across the Atlantic and saw a cautionary tale, where the health, integrity and privileges of the “white

race” were being compromised by African Americans and the sort of backsliding white sympathisers the RPS dismissed as “Lefitist”, “race-mixers”, “communists” and “do-gooders.”¹¹ In February 1967 members of the RPS joined members of broadly similar nationalistic groups such as the BNP and the LEL to form the National Front (NF). The NF was destined to become the most vocal, conspicuous and well-supported British anti-immigrant organization of the next decade or so. In the North East, however, despite trying to recruit support, periodically offering candidates in local elections and conducting or condoning a series of terrifying attacks on non-white residents and their property, the NF struggled to gain significant traction. That failure was due, in part, to the emergence of an array of ad hoc and more formal anti-fascist and anti-racist groups. These local organizations, the latest custodians of the region’s “cultures of welcome,” heirs to those who had mobilized against the Oswald Mosley’s BUF in the 1930s and his post-War Union Movement, included the union-backed Anti-Fascist Committee, founded in North Shields in 1972, and local branches of the national Anti-Nazi League established in late 1977 and early 1978.¹²

A decade earlier, King had arrived in Newcastle at a moment when overlapping debates about the wisdom of a new Race Relations Act and the desirability of far tighter immigration controls were well and truly joined. In April 1967, a widely publicised report by the independent Political and Economic Planning Ltd (PEP) had exposed the pervasiveness and intensity of discrimination against coloured citizens in Britain. In the same month, the Race Relations Board also published its annual report, in which it stated that “no effort should be too great to prevent the development of American

patterns of *de facto* segregation in this country. Similarities in housing patterns and employment already exist in fact.”¹³

It was not just the Race Relations Board that invoked the deteriorating racial situation in America as a portent of what might soon happen in Britain if immigrant grievances were not addressed. Throughout 1967 and 1968, the British government and media repeatedly referred to the stalling of the civil rights movement, the emergence of Black Power and the escalation of racial tensions as a cautionary tale. In late July 1967, as Newcastle University was trying to finalize arrangements for King’s visit, the Tyneside press joined the national electronic and print media in reporting a summer of rioting in Detroit, New York, Birmingham, New Haven, Newark, and other urban centres. “Race Wars Flare Across America,” screamed the front page of the *Journal* on July 24, 1967. Coverage of the Detroit riot, the worst of the 1960s with 43 fatalities and an estimated \$40-45 million worth of property damaged or destroyed, continued for days as the military was deployed to “crush rioters.” The following week, the same paper reported that in Washington “Mobs Riot Near the White House.”¹⁴ Even in the generally temperate Tyneside press, the tone of the reporting was increasingly apocalyptic.

The Detroit riots coincided with a visit to England by Stokely Carmichael, one of the most charismatic and controversial of the Black Power leaders who provided a militant alternative to King and the mainstream civil rights movement in America. At a time when CARD, the foremost British civil rights organisation, was splintering into broadly identifiable moderate and radical “black power” factions, Carmichael met

with several black British radicals. These included Michael de Frietas, also known as Abdul Malik or Michael X, in deference to the African American black nationalist Malcolm X, who had himself visited England twice, in late 1964 and early 1965.¹⁵ In 1965 Michael X had founded the Racial Action Adjustment Society (RAAS), a loose alliance of British citizens of West Indian, Guianese, African, Pakistani and Indian heritage. Whereas King, his nonviolent protest methods and overarching vision of universal brotherhood had provided the initial inspiration for activists in CARD and other civil rights organisations—not least Catholic civil rights campaigners in Northern Ireland—by the late 1960s, figures like Carmichael offered compelling new role models for many young black British radicals.¹⁶

One of those figures was Obi Egbuna, the Biafra-born writer who in 1967 founded Britain's first putative Black Power group, the Universal Coloured People's Association (UCPA). Egbuna had met with Carmichael and under his influence published a British reworking of the American's seminal *Black Power* manifesto. Like Carmichael, with his growing interest in Pan-African solidarity, but also like King, with his increasing emphasis on the global interplay of racism, economic injustice and war, the UCPA had a genuinely transnational vision, taking inspiration from struggles against colonial oppression in Africa, Asia and the Middle-East. Because, as Stephen Tuck explains, Britain "did not have formal Jim Crow segregation...the classic tactics of the American civil rights movement, such as mass confrontations with white-supremacists sheriffs, were not readily transferrable...Black Power, with its explicit international vision was a better fit for those angered by immigration restrictions and frustrated by the

moderate response of major black equality organizations.”¹⁷ The British situation for non-white citizens in the late 1960s was not really analogous to that facing African Americans. As Tuck points out, in Britain, non-whites still constituted less than 3 per cent of the British population, and half of them “were from Asia with their own long-established cultural traditions, and virtually none owned guns.”¹⁸ Nevertheless, the UPCA, like other British ethnic militants, took much of its language and ideology, and some of its tactical cues from the Black Power movement in America. Meanwhile, other minority groups continued to draw inspiration from the nonviolent direct action tactics and integrationist goals popularly associated with Martin Luther King. As Tuck puts it, “In short, American styling was a strategic choice by British activists to strengthen their campaigns and to legitimize their own complaints.”¹⁹

In the summer of 1967, the British government viewed Carmichael with much the same suspicion as did its American counterpart. Carmichael’s espousal of black pride and Pan-African identity and his influence on the community activists he met in London drew an almost hysterical response from the British press, which consistently reduced his pro-black sentiments to anti-white hatred and thus fuelled mounting public concern about the growth of nominally Black Power groups in Britain. Those concerns often bled into a wider white resentment whenever British minorities drew attention to racial injustice and discrimination.²⁰ Questions were raised in Parliament about Carmichael’s allegedly subversive presence and Labour Home Secretary Roy Jenkins decided to withdraw his entry permit. “Having considered a report on this man's recent activities,” Jenkins

explained, “I have decided that his presence here is not conducive to the public good. He has now left and I do not propose to allow him to re-enter the country.”²¹

The combination of Carmichael’s visit, the distressing images of racial conflict beamed in from urban America, the radicalisation of many existing British immigrant organisations and the formation of others with avowedly radical and occasionally revolutionary programs had several consequences for British popular and governmental opinion. One was that Martin Luther King was increasingly depicted as a voice of reason and moderation amid the incendiary rhetoric and occasionally violent manifestations of Black Power.²² This perception was more a matter of tactics and tone than of goals, since by 1967 King was committed to fighting militarism, economic injustice and racism through a form of democratic socialism. Nevertheless, unlike some more nationalistic Black Power militants, he continued to espouse the virtues of interracial cooperation and nonviolence in pursuit of his radical goals. In November 1967, King’s enthusiastic reception, particularly among whites, nationally and in the North East, turned on a keen understanding of this contrast.

King’s perceived moderation was pressed into the service of many, sometimes quite contradictory arguments in British debates about race and immigration. Immediately following King’s trip to Newcastle, the House of Commons debated the new Race Relations Bill. Sir Cyril Osborne was a veteran Conservative MP who had represented the rural Louth, Lincolnshire, constituency since 1945 and spent much of that time railing against foreigners of one sort or another. Osborne informed the House

that “Yesterday a most moderate coloured leader from America—Dr. Martin Luther King—received an honorary degree from Newcastle University...he said, ‘All our troubles could soon be yours.’ He said that we had the makings of a Selma or a Watts situation in this country. This is the thing that should worry Honourable Members on both sides of the Committee.” Osborne continued, “Let me quote exactly what Dr. Martin Luther King said about this problem. He said: ‘Britain is in the same situation as many of the northern cities of America were at the turn of the century. They did not have legal segregation, but there were latent prejudices in the white community.’” Instead of focusing on King’s call for education to counter the ignorance that bred such prejudices or legislation to minimize its discriminatory impact on minorities, Osborne quoted from a brief press conference King had given in London the day after his Newcastle visit to support the case for further restrictions on immigration. “I beg the Government to place greater restrictions on immigration because otherwise it will automatically cause the situation to arise that has occurred in America and which no one there seems to be able to solve at the moment.”²³

David Winnick, the Labour MP for Croydon South, took a rather different message from King’s words and example. “Does not the honourable Member agree that to a large extent the trouble in America has been caused by years or even centuries of discrimination against non-whites, and that this is part of the trouble at the moment? Only now are the Negroes in America beginning to get their legitimate legal rights as human beings.” Osborne did not deny such discrimination existed, but he fell back on the mantra that the real problem in Britain was that there were simply too many

immigrants of the wrong colour and, therefore, of the wrong pedigree entering the country. “The more colour that is brought into the country, with its poverty and its background, the greater the danger that the tragedies that did so much harm in America will be repeated here. It is because of this that I have pleaded all these years for some restriction.”²⁴

Osborne had, indeed, been making such pleas for years. A few months earlier, as Carmichael’s trip and the Detroit riots captured the headlines, he had asked the Home Secretary if “in view of the half million unemployed, and the danger there will be over one million unemployed next winter...he will introduce legislation to amend the Commonwealth Immigration Act, and forbid all immigration until Her Majesty's Government's policy of full employment has been achieved.”²⁵ Roy Jenkins rejected the premise of Osborne’s question—that unemployment would double over the next year—and stated simply that he had no intention of amending the Commonwealth Immigrants Act at this time. Instead, he joined David Winnick and others, mainly but not exclusively on the British Left, in arguing for further legislative safeguards for minority rights. Again with one eye on America, Jenkins contended that legislation to outlaw discriminatory housing and employment practices, if vigorously enforced, might obviate the need for black power militancy in Britain and prevent racial violence along American lines. As early as 1966, in a May 23 speech to the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants in London made to welcome Mark Bonham Carter as the first chairman of the Race Relations Board, Jenkins had promoted a progressive vision of a multicultural Britain in which both “host” and “migrant” cultures could flourish and strengthen each other. In a

phrase that subsequently found its way into countless sociology textbooks, Jenkins explained how he did “not regard [integration] as meaning the loss, by immigrants, of their own national characteristics and culture...I define integration, therefore, not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance.”²⁶

Jenkins had put the finishing touches to this speech, which some of his aides dubbed his “We Shall Overcome Speech,” while visiting King’s College in the University of Cambridge. In it he argued that any self-respecting modern British university should be at the forefront of helping to create this kind of diverse, mutually respectful society. “Where in the world,” he asked rhetorically, “is there a university which could preserve its fame, or a cultural centre which could keep its eminence, or a metropolis which could hold its drawing power, if it were to turn inwards and serve only its own hinterland and its own racial group?”²⁷ Jenkins’s remarks were widely praised and even more widely publicized. He even repeated them, almost verbatim, in another House of Commons debate on immigration on November 8, 1966. This was just over a month before his Labour party colleague and Newcastle University chemistry professor Lord William Wynne-Jones formally proposed that his University should offer Martin Luther King an honorary doctorate.²⁸

There is no definitive evidence connecting Jenkins’s speech and Wynne-Jones’s nomination of King for an award shortly afterwards. Still, Vice Chancellor Bosanquet certainly intended to use honorary degrees to signal Newcastle University’s engagement with the great social issues of the

day—and recent events in America and Britain had combined to make race relations one of the most pressing of all those issues. In a similar vein, Jenkins had suggested that universities could do much to allay public fears of multiculturalism and demonstrate the social, cultural, intellectual and economic benefits of immigration and labour mobility. The Home Secretary concluded his speech on May 23, 1966 by conceding the existence of widespread “community prejudice” in Britain, “whether it springs from fear or inadequacy or less reputable motives.” He pledged to support further legislation to outlaw discrimination, once more invoking the US to explain his position. “American experience, though it can sometimes be misleading in this field, shows clearly that this is not a problem which solves itself without positive action.” He admitted that “unless we can solve it this will be a major blot on our record for the rest of this century, a constant source of weakness abroad, a handicap to full economic development.”²⁹

Roy Jenkins helped to prepare the way for what in October 1968 eventually became a new Race Relations Act. One of the foundations for the new legislation was another PEP report, prepared by a committee chaired by Professor Harry Street and published just days before King visited Newcastle. Street and his team of researchers had conducted an international survey of anti-discrimination legislation to advise the government on how best to extend and improve the old 1965 Race Relations Act to address discrimination in housing, employment, financial institutions, and various other public accommodations and services. The majority of case studies in the Street Report came from the US; 59 pages, or nearly half of the report, drew on examples from the US and Canada.³⁰

Everywhere one looked in the run up to King's visit it seemed as if British responses to its own racial problems were being formulated in the context of understandings and misunderstandings of the American situation. As a *Guardian* editorial summarized on the day King flew into London, the civil rights leader's presence "coincided with an upheaval in the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination...with the sentencing of Michael X, Britain's main black power spokesman to a year in prison, and with the Street Report on the necessity of strong laws to fight racial discrimination. All three phenomena—CARD, Michael X, and the Street Report—have their links with America's own experience of race relations."³¹ King recognized and went out of his way to encourage this sense of interconnectedness, of entwined destinies. Commenting briefly to the press on his arrival at Heathrow Airport on November 12, he said "England has to be eternally vigilant and extremely concerned so that the problem will not grow and develop in greater dimension, because it could become as serious as in the United States."³²

In Newcastle the following day, as he presented King for his Honorary Doctorate, J. H. Burnett, the University's public orator, also made very explicit use of the American analogy to emphasise the relevance of King's work for a nation struggling to resolve its own racial problems and pondering the wisdom and nature of further legislation:

Every one of us will, I am sure, realise the parallel between Dr. King's present concerns in America and the situation in Britain today. Despite this country's great public traditions of freedom, ghettos are springing up in our cities,

discrimination is daily exercised in employment, those activities which the Englishman regards as the least lucrative and attractive are becoming the tasks of the non-English, and we have had to enact a Race Relations Bill in an attempt to regulate our behaviour.

Burnett then called upon the Chancellor to bestow the award on King, “not only because this University wishes to honour a great and good man, not only because in so doing we are acting on behalf of all universities and of all right-thinking men and women in Britain, but because every one of us shares with him the common problem of living with our neighbours and of ensuring the dignity and freedom of all men.”³³

This noble commitment to the common cause of eradicating prejudice and ending discrimination took place in a city which still had a relatively small immigrant population, certainly compared to places like Birmingham, Bradford, High Wycombe, Huddersfield, London, Nottingham, Slough, West Bromwich and Wolverhampton, where absolute and/or proportionate numbers of “New Commonwealth” immigrants were much higher.

Nevertheless, Tynesiders were hardly indifferent to or isolated from rapidly escalating national debates on restriction and protection, particularly as the local Asian presence continued to rise. In late 1966, Sudha Telang, a local Indian woman, was appointed on a fixed-term temporary contract to research “immigration problems in the city” for the Newcastle City Planning Department.³⁴ In 1967, her report estimated that there were around 3,400 “coloured immigrants” on Tyneside, including roughly 400 students

studying at Newcastle University—a figure that begs the question of why the University found it so difficult to find a more diverse group to meet with King for coffee on November 13. This was almost double the number recorded by the 1961 Census. A subsequent report compiled by Sheila Patterson put the number of “New Commonwealth Migrants” in Newcastle in 1967 closer to 5,000 out of a population of 260,750. By way of comparison, a similar-sized city such as Leicester in the East Midlands had 6,000 migrants out of a total of 267,050; Bradford in West Yorkshire, a particular magnet for Asian immigrants, had some 12,500 migrants among a population of 298,220. On Tyneside, Telang found the areas of greatest non-white concentration were in “Jesmond, the west end of the City and, to a smaller extent, Heaton.” Most came from India and Pakistan; around 400 were from the Caribbean; others had origins in Yemen, Somalia and West Africa—descendants and heirs of the Arab and African seamen who had first found homes in South Shields during the early 20th Century. Telang’s report concluded that “Commonwealth and Colonial immigrants” represented only 0.9 percent of the total Newcastle population, less still on the south bank of the Tyne in Gateshead. Even Patterson’s higher figure of 5,000 constituted less than 2 percent of Newcastle’s inhabitants.³⁵

Reviewing Telang’s demographic and sociological survey, Wilfred Burns, the City’s Chief Planning Officer, was unequivocal in stating that in Newcastle,

The coloured immigrant, like certain other groups in society, is discriminated against either consciously or unconsciously...the fact of underprivilege (sic) for the

majority of the immigrants is indisputable. Their housing standards are low...and for one reason or another they do not have ready access to the widest choice of housing area. Similarly, the widest opportunities of employment do not seem to be available, although it is fair to say that unemployment is not a problem. There may be prejudice too in the field of education, motor insurance and so on.³⁶

Burns' recognition that racial prejudice and discrimination were still genuine problems on Tyneside was typical of local government responses during the 1950s and 1960s. Newcastle City Council sometimes struggled to offer effective leadership and find appropriate solutions to rising interracial tensions, or to address the particular problems faced by immigrant communities in the region. It could also be tone deaf to intra-communal differences within minority groups as well as to struggles for power among them. Dave Renton, the foremost historian of post-World War Two race relations in the North East, is probably right to argue that while local government agencies "often played a more positive role than that of national agencies...their priority was still not to support migration but to manage it."³⁷

Nonetheless, Newcastle City Council and its specialist agencies such as the Special Committee as to Commonwealth Immigrants (SCCI) and the Tyne and Wear Community Relations Commission (CRC), the local iteration of a national network of CRCs, worked consistently hard to combat discrimination and reduce racial conflict. Generally speaking the Council

honoured the region's more progressive traditions of racial and religious tolerance in testing times. In early 1961, for example, the Council had returned policy recommendations from its Parliamentary and General Purposes Committee for dealing with racial and religious discrimination in clubs and recreational facilities in Council-owned properties, arguing that it was not stringent or extensive enough. The Council wanted the regulations extended to outlaw discrimination in any businesses or accommodations on land leased from or operated by the Newcastle Corporation. In March 1961, the Committee revised and strengthened the language in accordance with the Council's wishes.³⁸

The Newcastle City Council also consulted with and gave practical support to a plethora of increasingly active local community organizations. Indeed, one of the key developments in Tyneside race relations during the course of the 1960s was the growing significance of voices from within migrant communities themselves. At its September 1966 meeting, the SCCI resolved to enlist more minority representatives, initially inviting Dr. Basu (Indian), Neville Pierre (Trinidad and Tobago) and Mr. M. Khwaja and Mrs. Ahmad (both Pakistani) to join the Committee.³⁹ Whether involved with the SCCI, or the local CRC, or in grassroots community organizations such as the Indian Forum, the Pakistan League, Tyneside CARD or Jamiat al-Muslimeen, a presence in the city from the mid-1930s, Tyneside's racial and religious minorities became increasingly prominent actors in the fight against discrimination.⁴⁰

In September 1967, the Council created the Commonwealth Immigrants Working Group (CIWG) to replace the somewhat ad hoc and

under-resourced SCCI. In introducing the new provisions, Basil McLeod, a Councillor from the city's St. Nicholas Ward and CIWG chair, cautiously revisited the familiar notion that race relations on Tyneside were basically very good and might even prove inspirational to other parts of the country. "Newcastle upon Tyne is not faced with the intense racial difficulties such as are experienced in some other big cities in this country," McLeod suggested. "It has, however, a substantial immigrant population and it has the opportunity to secure a high degree of racial integration that could be a model for other areas where the problems are more difficult."⁴¹ There was, however, a break with the past in the Council's greater acknowledgement that good race relations needed to be actively nurtured, not passively awaited: as an elected body sworn to serve the entire community, the Council also accepted that it bore some responsibility for securing equal rights and opportunities for minorities until such time as discriminatory practices, and perhaps ultimately, prejudice itself, disappeared. Nobody in 1967 was holding their breath for the latter.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Labour-dominated Council echoed the sentiments of Home Secretary Roy Jenkins in its conception of how to handle local race relations. "There are often conflicting views as to what integration means and it is as well to set down clearly the goals that should be pursued," McLeod explained. "Integration does not mean uniformity or the abandonment of group cultures. It accepts that all people have equal rights and this includes the right to be different. It means creating a relationship between different sections of the community in which these differences are accepted as contributing to the life of the community in

general.”⁴² It was this emphasis on the potential benefits of immigration and diversity, rather than a relentless focus on its challenges and problems, that aligned the Council, not only with Roy Jenkins’s thinking, but also with Tyneside’s historic cultures of welcome.

The CIWG comprised “six members of the Council, 1 member of the Newcastle Council of Social Services, 1 representative of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination and 4 members of the immigrant community (1 Indian, 1 Pakistani, 1 Sikh, 1 West Indian), all with equal voting rights.” With a budget of £2,000, most of which was earmarked for a full-time community liaison officer (an appointment the Council struggled to make), the Group was dedicated to securing fair and equitable treatment for all citizens of Newcastle, regardless of colour. It focused particularly on housing, employment, social and cultural provisions and education, where special provisions was provided “to ensure that the language difficulties are overcome to the maximum extent possible.”⁴³ Although somewhat mechanistic in its “diversity by numbers” approach to membership, the CIWG represented a sincere effort by city leaders to embrace Tyneside’s growing multicultural identity and encourage the local population to do the same.

This commitment was further in evidence when the Council enthusiastically received Sudha Telang’s 1967 report on immigrant life on Tyneside at a meeting held just three weeks after King’s visit. The Council focussed on the Report’s evidence of prejudice, discrimination and social and economic marginalization, rather than complacently pointing to the often quite positive picture of harmonious race relations, immigrant

achievement and upward mobility that Telang presented. The Council reaffirmed its determination to intervene against discrimination in housing, health and employment practices and to address the particular educational, health and recreational needs of migrant communities.⁴⁴

Benwell Councillor Connie Lewcock tapped into the longstanding belief among Tyneside progressives that education and publicity were the best ways to expose social evils and rally action to confront them. Lewcock, a former Suffragette and veteran of the anti-Fascist mobilisations of the 1930s, personified the enduring significance of women in Tyneside's progressive politics. She urged widespread distribution and serious contemplation of Telang's findings. "I hope the people of Newcastle will avail themselves of the information in this report and will make it known amongst themselves and amongst their neighbours." Then suddenly, in the middle of a fairly staid Council meeting, Lewcock switched to an entirely different, more passionate, almost homiletic, register. "I am quite sure that if we accept this report as a formality and we do not accept it in our hearts and in our actions every day the report will be a failure and all that we have said here today will be valueless," she warned. In almost preacherly mode, Lewcock concluded with words of which Martin Luther King would doubtless have approved. Indeed, he may even have inspired them when, just a few weeks earlier and less than a mile away from the Council chambers which were then located at the Town Hall on the Bigg Market, he had spoken of the "inescapable network of mutuality" which bound together all mankind and of his vision of a "beautiful symphony of brotherhood" throughout the world. "If we believe in the brotherhood of man," Lewcock insisted, "we have got to

start living it the next time we meet our brother whatever he is like and wherever he lives.”⁴⁵

Newcastle City Council’s attempts to improve the economic and social prospects for Tyneside’s migrant communities dovetailed with broader efforts to deal with economic problems that continued to afflict the region and provided such potentially fertile ground for interracial strife. It was no coincidence that Sudha Telang’s Report emanated from the City Planning Department, the division of the Council most intimately involved in trying to halt and reverse the area’s declining economic fortunes. Economically and to some extent culturally and socially, the region seemed off-the-pace, out of step with the boom-times enjoyed by many sections of British society. By the mid-1960s, London was swinging and, as Dominic Sandbrook evocatively exaggerates, “Britain was enjoying a reckless surge of growth and prosperity, and as shoppers strolled down their local high streets...they were surrounded by all the trappings of the affluent society: car and television showrooms, crowded supermarkets, teenagers chatting over their mopeds, radios blaring out the latest hits by the Beatles and the Rolling Stones.”⁴⁶

The North East had not greatly benefitted from this fitful, unevenly shared and ultimately quite precarious economic boom. Five days after King appeared in Newcastle, Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson had to devalue the worth of the British pound by 14 percent to make British goods more attractive overseas and address both a crippling balance of trade deficit and mounting government debts.⁴⁷ The new levels of prosperity undoubtedly enjoyed by many in the 1960s were driven mainly by a mix of new service, creative, leisure, financial and technological industries, not by the older

heavy industries, notably mining, shipping and shipbuilding, that had traditionally underpinned the regional economy. In 1961, for example, 29 percent of Newcastle's population was still employed in manufacturing of one sort or another, but the proportion was rapidly dwindling and three decades later it stood at just 13 percent.⁴⁸

The loss of jobs in shipbuilding and related trades was devastating, especially on Tyneside where roughly one in five workers were employed in the industry in 1962 as opposed to one in ten across the region. Between 1959 and 1966, six North East shipyards closed as a result of overseas competition from Japan, Germany and Sweden. Although the region still launched 51 percent of all British ships, the total tonnage under construction was falling and the industry in the North East effectively shrank by 25 percent between 1959 and 1966.⁴⁹ In fact, on the same day that King arrived in Newcastle, the Tyne and Blyth district committee of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions was making plans to go to London to lobby the government to protest the sacking of 600 workers at two Vickers shipbuilding works in Elswick and Scotswood.⁵⁰

It was a similar story in another of the region's signature industries: mining. Although the coal industry, which had been nationalized in 1947, remained important, between 1950 and 1960 22,000 miners left work in the North East's pits. By 1954, no coal was being exported to customers outside Europe; a decade later, no coal was being sent to France or Germany, while London, one of the greatest consumers of North East coal, had begun cleaning up its act, getting rid of its famous smog by developing smokeless zones. As demand and production fell, the first major round of pit closures

hit the region. The number of collieries in the Durham coalfields dropped from 127 in 1947 to 38 by 1969 and there were other closures in Northumberland. As a consequence, the number of coal berths on the River Tyne similarly fell from 34 in 1946 to 16 by the mid-1960s.⁵¹ Although unemployment in the North East in the late 1960s remained quite low, averaging 2.6 percent, this was still considerably above the national average of 1.6 percent. Even more telling, the average weekly income in the North East was just 80 percent of the national average. Poor wages and the threat of further job-losses in key employment sectors created a climate of economically grounded anxieties that intensified the likelihood of racial friction with newcomers amid the scramble for a job and a living wage.⁵²

It was in this context of escalating economic woes that Newcastle's City Council launched a major programme of urban redevelopment and economic modernization. The programme was spearheaded by Wilfred Burns in the City Planning office and the visionary, if sadly corrupt, T. Dan Smith, Council Leader from 1960 to 1965 and from 1966 until 1970 Chair of the North East Regional Planning Council.⁵³ A 1963 White Paper prepared for the Board of Trade by Lord Hailsham with a good deal of input from North East planners and businessmen, had identified the area from the Tees to the Tyne as "a growth zone" and authorized special development funds.⁵⁴ Two years later, a 1966 government report on the nation's shipbuilding industry generated further financial support for North East economic regeneration schemes.⁵⁵

On Tyneside, the reforms initiated by Smith and Burns continued into the early 1970s. Results were decidedly mixed. While old dilapidated slums

and outdoor lavatories gradually disappeared from tightly packed and unsanitary terraced streets, so too did long-established communities, with many residents rehoused in soulless tower blocks. Dozens of elegant city centre Georgian and Victorian buildings, admittedly many of them in awful disrepair, were razed to make way for new shopping outlets and office blocks as the planners sought to rebrand Newcastle as “the Brasilia of the North.” Beyond the city centre, new suburbs grew, as did new towns such as Killingworth and Cramlington which became home to large numbers of displaced former miners. Across the greater Tyneside area, transportation links were improved and the old Woolsington Airport was expanded to cater to intercontinental freight and holiday traffic. Meanwhile, the Council itself, housed from 1968 in an impressive new Civic Centre near the Haymarket, became one of the city’s major employers, overseeing a 71 percent increase in the number of staff employed in public administration.⁵⁶

Few of these developments addressed the worsening plight of the city’s already embattled West End. Once the site of many engineering works and armaments factories, the area had become home to growing numbers of South Asian immigrants attracted by the low cost of the housing stock. They shared the neighbourhood with a frustrated, disillusioned and increasingly impoverished white community. With local government and private sector resources devoted mainly to city centre renewal and suburban development, this part of the city, one where economic revitalization was vitally needed, was poorly served. Rising non-white migration into this area at a time of deepening economic distress and social deprivation created a potentially explosive situation.⁵⁷

Whatever the ultimate verdict on the urban planning and economic redevelopment schemes of the 1960s and early 1970s, the crucial point here is that the number of non-white immigrants on Tyneside rose, not rapidly but unmistakably and, in certain sections of the city quite significantly, during a period of profound and deeply disconcerting social and economic change for many white residents. This was a moment when old communities, old patterns of employment, even the old places in which people had lived, worked and played for many years, were vanishing. Such disruptions would have been unsettling at any time, but especially when compounded by relatively high levels of poverty and worries about future employment prospects. In the late 1960s, this sense of dislocation, deprivation and loss among many local whites could easily manifest itself in resentment of newcomers and strangers, especially those who appeared to be doing quite well—and even more especially when they appeared to be getting special attention from local government to address their particular needs.

In this environment, Tyneside's brittle tradition of better than usual race relations was severely tested. In 1967, the Tyneside branch of CARD under the leadership of Chris Mullard produced its own report on *Colour Discrimination in Newcastle upon Tyne* based on a study of 88 Asians living the West End. The Report found that most of the immigrants questioned "didn't seem to regard discrimination as a problem." Paradoxically, however, it catalogued multiple examples of discrimination at work, on the street, in securing loans, and when trying to buy or rent property. The Report concluded that problems for Tyneside immigrants were probably greater

than those questioned were willing to admit and speculated that tensions with local whites were likely to increase in the future. The real test of Tyneside's reputation for racial tolerance, CARD suggested, would come when the next generation of immigrants tried to take their place in the mainstream of Newcastle's economic and social life, rather than forging their economic, cultural and social lives largely within relatively circumscribed racial and religious enclaves: that was when local white willingness to support genuine equality of opportunity in the face of palpable racial and cultural differences would become clearer.⁵⁸

The City Planning Officer's 1967 Report, informed by Sudha Telang's findings, made much the same point. Addressing whites on Tyneside, clearly cast as the chief potential source of any racial difficulties, Wilfred Burns and his colleagues insisted that "if we are to accommodate immigrants of a different culture from our own then we have to be prepared to see flexibility in our own social system." The Report also reiterated that "integration...does not mean that new cultures should, as matter of social policy, be assimilated into the blood stream of native British society so that the new elements are diffused (although some assimilation is bound to occur with second and future generation immigrants). It does mean, however, that social policies should be so framed to allow minority groups to continue to express themselves and so add to the enrichment and variety of city life."⁵⁹

In 1967, then, Burns and the majority of Newcastle City Council welcomed and tried to promote the kind of multiculturalism espoused by Roy Jenkins, who hoped that passage of the latest Race Relations Bill would end racial discrimination and encourage the development of a more tolerant

and equitable society. Not everyone on Tyneside was quite so enthusiastic. Just six days before Martin Luther King's visit, D. C. H. Fulton wrote to the *Journal* insisting that he was "opposed to persecution in all its forms. I deplore the bigotry, fear and sometimes hatred that motivates thousands – possibly millions – of British citizens who discriminate against coloured people." Yet, like many others Fulton questioned the wisdom of a new Race Relations Act which would attempt to "legislate against prejudice." This was, he felt, the "equivalent of saying, 'Love these people or I'll break your arms.'" There was a danger, he claimed, that any act designed explicitly to protect immigrants from discriminatory practices would mean that "in the U.K. the coloured immigrant will have more rights at law than the natural-born Englishman."⁶⁰

The arguments that minority rights necessarily came at the expense of white rights and it was not possible to legislate away folkways and deep-rooted racial attitudes were ones with which Martin Luther King was all too familiar. Both had been touchstones of white southern resistance to legislative attempts to end segregation and disenfranchisement in the US and would later animate white objections to affirmative action policies designed to redress the effects of centuries of racial discrimination. That is why in Newcastle, King, who according to Vice Chancellor Charles Bosanquet appeared well informed on the British situation, was at such pains to extol the virtues of stringent laws to curtail the worst practical manifestations of racial prejudice. "While the law may not change the hearts of men, it does change the habits of men if it is vigorously enforced," he

explained. “And through changes in habits, pretty soon attitudinal changes will take place and even the heart may be changed in the process.”⁶¹

King believed that in the absence of formal segregation Britain was in danger of becoming inured to the devastating effects of latent racism and structural discrimination. “Britain is now in the position that the northern cities of America have passed through,” King said, echoing the warnings of the Race Relations Board’s Annual Report just a few months earlier. “There is no legal segregation, but there is a latent prejudice leading to discrimination in housing and jobs. It is from this that a black ghetto is developing in Britain.”⁶² King had emphasized the same theme at his breakfast meeting with the Vice Chancellor, counselling, in Bosanquet’s words, that the British “should bestir ourselves to ensure early and full acceptance of coloured people in Britain as completely equal citizens. If we delayed, then we should see the creation of areas of coloured poverty and the lightning flashes of mistrust and intolerance that might be the first signs of the coming storms of violence.”⁶³

Clearly, King felt that this was a crucial message to bring to Britain in 1967. He repeated it again at the brief press conference immediately following the degree ceremony, when he warned that British racial problems might “get much more acute if there is not eternal vigilance on the part of the Government and of people of goodwill in dealing with the problems before they explode.”⁶⁴ Responding to a question about recent US race riots, King reminded Tyne-Tees reporter Clyde Alleyne that it was only ever a tiny minority of African Americans who were involved in violence and that “violent revolts grow out of revolting conditions.” If gross inequalities in

wealth, housing and education persisted, King feared that “despair and deep bitterness” would drive more to violence. To prevent the likelihood of a similar catastrophe in Britain, King urged his hosts to “take a look at America, so to speak, and avoid some of the problems that have developed there. Because I think there are similarities and through strong legislation, vigorously enforced on the housing question, the jobs question, and the schools question, England could avoid many of the dark nights we have passed in America.”⁶⁵

Back in London en route home to Atlanta, King spoke ominously to journalists of the “developing darkness” of racism in British society where he saw “some ghettos emerging and some prejudice existing.”⁶⁶ The *Daily Mail* reported King’s warnings about the “prejudices and half-truths” regarding British immigrants that needed to be corrected by “strong legislation and a determined education policy.” Reverting to the sort of language he used to denounce some of the more violent and nihilistic expressions of black power militancy, King insisted that “We must not yield to the politics of despair.” But he admitted that “If we cannot change the breeding grounds of prejudice—the slums, the poverty and inadequate education—then violence and chaos will result.” King concluded by “urging the policy makers in Britain and every individual in the country to deal with the problem now.” If they did not, he warned, “All our troubles could soon be yours.”⁶⁷ By the time he was murdered in April 1968, these words would sound grimly prophetic.

In Newcastle, King’s message sparked an immediate response. A lengthy *Evening Chronicle* editorial acknowledged King’s exemplary

credentials for speaking out against the evils of discrimination based on either race or religion. The paper feared that “it is possible that, because we have seen little that even remotely resembles the explosive American reaction to the evils of segregation and second-class citizenship, proper weight will not be given to the warning which he delivered when he received an honorary degree at the hands of the Duke Of Northumberland.” The editorial continued, “Tynesiders in particular may not be prepared to concede that racial ghettos are beginning to develop possibly because few have any real appreciation of what the term ‘ghetto’ implies, but in the main because they have failed to perceive what has grown up gradually and quietly in the absence of active intolerance or discrimination on a measurable scale.” Without a major immigrant population on the scale of cities such as Wolverhampton, Bradford or London there was, the paper suggested, a complacency bordering on smugness about the region’s reputation for racial tolerance that blinded many whites to the travails of immigrants and to the prejudice and discrimination they endured. “Tyneside has its ghettos. Make no mistake about that. How else can areas of generally sub-standard accommodation occupied almost exclusively by immigrant minorities be described!”⁶⁸

So far, so enlightened. But the editorial then proceeded to identify the immigrants themselves as one of the main reasons for the emergence of these nascent ghettos: “They owe their existence more to the reluctance of minorities to make the effort to adapt to a new environment and their passive acceptance of inferior conditions than to any positive discriminatory activity on the part of the rest of the community.”⁶⁹ As social historian Kevin

Myers points out, for some non-whites, particularly a new generation who came of age in the late 1960s and 1970s, “liberal and radical attempts to promote a more pluralist Britain had limited appeal...Faced with discrimination and racist hostility at school, on the streets and in the labour market, increasing numbers of young black Britons were dissatisfied with those who preached piecemeal progress through patient communication with white society or else explained racism as a secondary phenomenon of capitalist relations.”⁷⁰ Notwithstanding that there really was a certain amount of voluntary insularity among Tyneside’s immigrant groups, who sometimes did prefer to live, worship, study, work, and play in the safety of their own neighbourhoods and viewed the rhetoric of multiculturalism with some suspicion in the face of racist realities, the *Evening Chronicle* veered dangerously close to blaming the victims of racism for their own marginalisation.

In its final comments, however, the paper tentatively retreated from disavowing the role of underlying social and economic structures, coupled with the attitudes of many local whites, for creating most of the problems faced by immigrant communities. Somewhat defensively it still insisted that “active racialism does not account for the plight of these minorities,” but accepted that this “does not absolve the community from its fundamental responsibilities.” Going further, the paper argued that “A clear racial conscience involved accepting a duty to encourage full integration by recognizing the possibility that latent prejudice may have contributed to the situation which exists and taking steps to redress it.”⁷¹

This call to action and conscience connected the paper to the better angels of white Tynesiders' complex responses to centuries of encounters with outsiders: "Simply to tolerate racial or religious minorities can never be fully satisfactory. We need many more manifestations of their unreserved acceptance than we have so far seen if we are to overcome their innate diffidence towards coming to terms with strange, sometimes bewildering conditions." The editorial concluded by urging white Tynesiders to answer King's plea to do better by their fellow citizens. "We may not have tried to deprive them of their right to dignity and parity, but if we have not involved ourselves in showing them the way to complete integration we have failed in our duty as sorely as if we had been guilty of the worst type of discrimination."⁷²

Of course, the underlying assumption here was that the eventual assimilation and acculturation of immigrants to "traditional British" culture was the best possible outcome for both migrants and the host nation. There was little sense in the editorial that multiculturalism might actually be a positive force in British society as Roy Jenkins and some City Council leaders had suggested and as King always insisted with regard to the contributions of African Americans to the history and culture of the US. In the decades after World War Two official and white popular conceptions of how a variety of Commonwealth migrants related to concepts of "Britishness" invariably drew a clear distinction between those immigrants popularly considered to be of "real" British stock—whites from Australia, New Zealand and southern Africa—and migrants of colour who, notwithstanding their citizenship status under the 1948 Nationality Act,

were often still considered as merely British subjects. As Kathleen Paul explains, whether living overseas or in Britain, “Dark-skinned Africans, West Indians or Asians...[were] considered members of the political community of Britishness only”; they were not generally considered part of “an exclusive familial community defined by blood and culture” which consisted of “white skinned resident of the United Kingdom, who were always presumed to be of European descent.”⁷³

In all of this, there remained little appreciation that “British identity” was an elusive, decidedly mongrel and multicultural affair: its characteristics were largely an act of white imagination. Not only was British-ness in an awkward, ever-evolving relationship with English, Irish, Scottish and Welsh identities, but it was also cross-cut by differences of class, status, gender, religion, region, and sub-region. Moreover, many of the most cherished “British” values, ideas, and institutions were relatively modern traditions, invented in the Victorian era precisely to promote or consolidate a decidedly fragile sense of nationhood and common purpose. Many of the cultural symbols that by the 1960s had come to symbolize British culture had roots in places that were, or at least began life as, emphatically non-British, often imported or imposed as the result of imperial and colonial manoeuvres of one sort or another. Even the name “Britain” was foreign, a variation on the Latin term used by the Romans; tea was from India or China; Jewish immigrants from Spain first brought to Britain the practice of frying battered fish, although Italians in London may have been responsible for adding fried sliced potatoes to make that British culinary staple fish and chips; Queen Elizabeth II was mainly of German

extraction, her husband Prince Phillip was Greek and their grandsons, William and Harry would have Indian blood through their mother, the iconic “English rose” Lady Diana Spencer; historically vast numbers of British citizens were of French-Norman, Norse, and, whisper it gently, African, Asian and Middle-Eastern lineages, among many other racial, ethnic and religious heritages that mingled messily to create the British population.⁷⁴ Such historical and biological truths had relatively little influence on popular attitudes or governmental policy towards immigration which, in Kevin Myers phrase, “slowly became racialised and then ethnicised.” By the late 1960s, he argues, “ideas about races and ethnicities, about skin colour, language and cultural traditions,” were fast becoming “key markers for identifying those who belonged in Britain and those who did not.”⁷⁵

As the issues raised by King’s remarks entered the realm of public debate, Rev. John Muir responded to the *Chronicle* editorial by suggesting that the Newcastle community-at-large was rather more responsible for the ghettoization of its immigrants than the paper had allowed. He, too, raised the spectre of racial unrest in America to make his appeal to white Tynesiders in words that virtually paraphrased what King had said at when he arrived at Heathrow on his way to Newcastle: “Unless all sections of the community make positive efforts to achieve integration, the situation could very well become just as serious and violent as in the United States.”⁷⁶

While some Tynesiders, like Muir, used King’s visit to consider the problems of how to protect minority rights and encourage full and equitable immigrant participation in a society with many different core beliefs, customs and values, others were already of the opinion that such efforts

were doomed to failure. Immigrants were and always would be undesirable aliens. Restrictions on further arrivals and possibly repatriation of those already in Britain were the only appropriate responses in the midst of increasingly apocalyptic warnings about the imminent arrival of thousands of new immigrants who would swamp British society, take British jobs and houses and generally destroy “traditional British values.”

Sometimes local antagonisms towards immigrant communities took novel form. There had been a tiny, somewhat transient Chinese presence on Tyneside since at least the 1880s when the Armstrong-Whitworth shipyards at Elswick prepared four vessels for the Chinese navy. The Chinese population in the North East slowly increased after World War Two as British passport holders and students began to arrive from Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, as well as mainland China and Taiwan. In 1949, Newcastle’s first Chinese restaurant, the Marlborough Café, opened on the Scotswood Road; in 1962 there were 15 such establishments in the city. By 1967, Tyneside’s still modestly sized, but quite well-established Chinese community was working hard to make a success of its laundry, restaurant and other businesses.⁷⁷

But not everyone was happy. One local took such exception to the cost of a Chinese meal containing what he described as “the ‘miniest’ king prawns I have ever seen,” that he felt moved to share his anger with readers of the *Evening Chronicle*. C. Arthur criticized the inability of the “Chinese gentleman in charge,” to understand his complaint and quickly moved on to a more general rant against the Chinese, their cuisine, and their apparent financial success. “These bland, prosperous, conveyors of Oriental ‘cooking’

have lost my custom,” he fumed. “It’s too much to hope, I suppose, that they might make a contribution from their exorbitant profit to some fund to encourage a higher standard of literacy.”⁷⁸ A few days later, however, Mrs. J.K. Moffat leaped to the defence of the Chinese and their restaurants against Arthur’s charges of usury, rudeness and mix of linguistic and culinary incompetence. She commended Tyneside’s Chinese restaurateurs for their “efficient and courteous service,” and insisted that the “lavish, well-cooked and hot” helpings represented extremely good value for money.⁷⁹

And so it was in the months after King’s visit that white Tynesiders continued to debate the merits and faults, great and small, of their new and not-so-new neighbours. As so often in the region’s history, for the majority of the 1960s, the ebb of racial prejudice was quickly followed by the flow of racial tolerance. When bigotry raised its head, there were still strong countervailing voices raised in opposition to it. Racial stereotypes were certainly in play—how could it be any other way when the *Black and White Minstrel Show* was still a fixture on British television, with its barely updated version of the kind of blackface minstrelsy that had been wildly popular in the region a century earlier? Or when “Gollywogs” still adorned the labels of Robertson’s marmalade jars? Or when you could still buy Darkie Toothpaste and, as an appalled Andrew Young noted on his return to America from Newcastle, “a shoe polish called ‘Nigger,’” adding that the English “have no sensitivity on this question.”⁸⁰

There were always concerted efforts to counteract such demeaning racial stereotypes and misrepresentations on Tyneside, not least from within migrant communities themselves. The local press and local government also

continued to work sincerely, if not always with a sure touch, to offer constructive, progressive leadership in the field of race relations. They grappled with, rather than ignored the existence of racial prejudice and discrimination and tried to understand and address those phenomena in the context of the economic and social problems affecting many parts of the region. The fabled cultures of welcome just about endured, generally winning out over more reactionary forces. In the spring of 1968, however, it seemed as if the polarities were suddenly reversed: it was prejudice and discrimination that appeared to be ascendant with understanding, compassion and tolerance in retreat. Martin Luther King was again involved in the chain of events that dramatically raised the intensity of “restriction versus protection” debates and sparked yet another soul-searching re-examination of Tyneside’s race relations.

1. Harold MacMillan, “Wind of Change” Speech, February 3, 1960, Cape Town, South Africa. Available at BBC Archive, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/apartheid/7203.shtml>. Accessed January 31, 2016. See, Richard Owendale, “Macmillan and the Wind of Change in Africa, 1957–1960,” *Historical Journal*, 38, 2 (June 2005), pp.455–477.

2. There are many fine books on British race relations in the post-World War Two period. This account of national developments in the 1950s and 1960s is especially indebted to Nicholas Deakin, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society* (London: Panther, 1970); Peter Freyer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), pp.372-399; Paul Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black In The Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*

(London: Unwin Hyman, 1987); Randall Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-War Britain: The Institutional Origins of a Multicultural Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (c.1971. Revd. ed London: Grafton, 1991); Colin Holmes, *John Bull's Island: Immigration and British Society, 1871-1971* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), pp.209-274; Charles Husband (ed.), *Race in Britain: Change and Continuity* (London: Hutchinson, 1982); Kathleen Paul, *Whitewashing Britain: Race and Citizenship in the Postwar Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kennetta Hammond Perry, *London is the Place for Me: Black Britons, Citizenship and the Politics of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp.48-248; Mike Phillips and Trevor Phillips, *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), pp.120-263.

3. J.E.T. Aldridge, "Workers with Different Coloured Skins," *Voice of North East Industry*, December 1964, cited in Dave Renton, *Colour Blind?: Race and Migration in North East England Since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2007), p.70.

4. Anthony Messina, *Race and Party Competition in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, pp.156-7. See also, Jodi Burkett, *Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, "Race" and the Radical Left in the 1960s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

5. Hiro, *Black British, White British*, 215, 323, n.13.

6. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, p.157.

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7. Keith Hindell, "The Genesis of the Race Relations Bill," *Political Quarterly*, 36, 4 (1965), pp.390-405.
 8. "The New Voice of the Racialists," *DM*, February 21, 1966, pp.1, 4. See also, Mark Pitchford, *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), pp.137-138.
 9. Robin Beauclair, quoted in "The New Voice of the Racialists," p.4. George Lewis, "'Scientific Certainty': Wesley Critz George, Racial Science and Organised White Resistance in North Carolina, 1954-1962," *Journal of American Studies*, 38, 2 (2004), pp. 227-247.
 10. David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Macmillan, 2016), p.12.
 11. "The New Voice of the Racialists," pp.1, 4.
 12. On the birth of the National Front, see Richard Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain: From Mosley's Blackshirts to the National Front* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), pp.247-255. On the National Front in the North East, see David Renton, *Colour Blind?*, pp.162-169.
 13. Political and Economic Planning Ltd., *Racial Discrimination* (London: PEP, 1967); *Report of the Race Relations Board For 1966-67* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1967), p.16.
 14. "Race Wars Flare Across America," *Journal*, July 24, 1967, p.1; "Crush Rioters, Paratroopers Told," *ibid.*, July 26, 1967, p.1; "Negro Rioters Blitz a City," *ibid.*, July 28, 1967, p.1; "Mobs Riot Near White House," *ibid.*, August 2, 1967, p.1.

15. For the transnational significance of Malcolm X's visits to Britain, particularly his December 3, 1964 appearance at the Oxford Union, see, Stephen Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke at the Oxford Union: A Transatlantic Story of Antiracist Protest* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

16. For the impact of King on the campaign for Catholic rights in Northern Ireland, see Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight For Civil Rights in Northern Ireland & Black America* (London: Pluto, 1998); Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast; Blackstaff Press, 1990), pp.2-3, 91-93, 134, 156-57, 216-217, 231, 244-245.

17. Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke*, p.184. Robert G. Weisbord, "Black Power with a British Accent," *Negro Digest*, May 1969, pp.29-33. See also, R.E.R. Bunce and Paul Field, "Obi B. Egbuna, C. L. R. James and the Birth of Black Power in Britain: Black Radicalism in Britain 1967-72," *Twentieth Century History*, 22, 3 (2011), pp.391-414; Benjamin W. Heineman, *Politics of the Powerless: A Study of the Campaign Against Racial Discrimination* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1972), p.181.

18. Tuck, *The Night Malcolm X Spoke*, pp.184-185.

19. *Ibid.*, p.186.

20. Hiro, *Black British, White British*, pp.47-48; Heineman, *Politics of the Powerless*, pp.180-184.

21. Roy Jenkins, House of Commons Debate, July 27 1967, *Hansard*, v. 751, p.214,

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1967/jul/27/mr-stokely-carmichael#S5CV0751P0_19670727_CWA_158. Accessed December 1, 2016.

22. King's personal stock also rose among certain sections of the American press when he was compared favourably with firebrands like H. Rap Brown and Carmichael. In the States, however, this admiration was often tempered by reservations about King's anti-Vietnam stance, which in Britain carried no stigma. Richard Lentz, *Symbols, Newsmagazines and Martin Luther King* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), pp.308-337.

23. Sir Cyril Osborne, House of Commons Debate, November 15, 1967, *Hansard*, v. 754, p.519.

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1967/nov/15/acts-continued-till-end-of-december-1968#S5CV0754P0_19671115_HOC_362.

Accessed December 1, 2016. As he was speaking on November 15, Osborne was mistaken to say that King had received his award in Newcastle "yesterday."

24. David Winnick and Sir Cyril Osborne, House of Commons Debate, November 15, 1967, *Hansard*, v. 754, pp.519-20,

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1967/nov/15/acts-continued-till-end-of-december-1968#S5CV0754P0_19671115_HOC_362.

Accessed December 1, 2016.

25. Sir Cyril Osborne, House of Commons Debate, July 26, 1967, v. 751, p.167,

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/written_answers/1967/jul/26/commwealth-immigration-act#S5CV0751P0_19670726_CWA_190.

Accessed December 1, 2016.

26. Roy Jenkins, "This is the Goal," May 23, 1966, in Brian McArthur (ed), *The Penguin Book of Great British Speeches* (London: Penguin 1999), pp.362-363.

27. Ibid., p.364.

28. For more on the circumstances in which Jenkins's speech was composed, see John Campbell, *Roy Jenkins: A Well Rounded Life* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2014), pp.270-272. Roy Jenkins, House of Commons Debate, November 8, 1966, *Hansard*, v. 754, p.1235, http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1966/nov/08/schedule-acts-continued-till-end-of#S5CV0735P0_19661108_HOC_392.

Accessed December 1, 2016.

29. Jenkins, "Goal," p.365.

30. "Report on Anti-Discrimination Legislation (Street Report)," November 1967, BT 64/5354, Board of Trade: Industries and Manufactures Department: Correspondence and Papers, National Archives, Kew. See also, B.A. Hepple, "Reports of Committees: The Street Report on Anti-Immigration Legislation and Report of the Committee on Immigration Appeal," *Modern Law Review*, 31, 3 (May 1968), pp.810-821.

31. "Racial Integration British Style," *Guardian*, November 13, 1967, p. 8.

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32. "Luther King Warns Britain," *MS*, November 13, 1967, p.3.
33. "Speech delivered by the Public Orator (J.H. Burnett) when presenting a candidate (Martin Luther King) for an honorary degree at a Congregation in King's Hall on Monday, 13th November 1967," MLK-Reg.
34. Minutes, November 9, 1966, Commonwealth Immigrants Working Group of Newcastle Planning Committee, Minutes, 1966-1968, MD.NC/149, TWA.
35. Sudha D. Telang, *The Coloured Immigrant in Newcastle upon Tyne: Research Report* (Newcastle: Newcastle City Planning Department, September/October 1967), pp.6-7, 14, LSC-N. The higher figure for Newcastle's "New Commonwealth Migrants" comes from Sheila Patterson, *Immigration and Race Relations in Britain, 1960-1967* (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1969), p.12.
36. "Report by City Planning Officer," incorporated in Telang, *Coloured Immigrant*, p.28.
37. Renton, *Colour Blind?*, p.20.
38. Council Minutes, October 19, 1960; January 4, 1961; April 5, 1961; April 19, 1961, *Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne for 1960-1961* (Newcastle: Cooperative Printing Company, 1961) pp.402-403; 746-747; 1075; 1148-1153, LSC-N.
39. Minutes, September 19, 1966, Commonwealth Immigrants Working Group of Newcastle Planning Committee, Minutes, 1966-1968, MD.NC/149, TWA.

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40. Renton, *Colour Blind?*, pp.106-123. For Jamiat al-Muslimeen, see, Antoine Sfeir (ed.), *The Columbia World Dictionary of Islamism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), p.96.
41. Council Minutes, September 5, 1967, *Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne for 1967-1968* (Newcastle: Cooperative Printing Company, 1968), p.463, LSC-N.
42. Ibid., p.464.
43. Ibid., pp.464-465. See also, Commonwealth Immigrants Working Group of Newcastle Planning Committee, Minutes, 1966-1968, MD.NC/149, TWA.
44. Council Minutes, December 6, 1967, *Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne for 1967-1968* (Newcastle: Cooperative Printing Company, 1968), pp.1022-1026, LSC-N.
45. Connie Lewcock, in *ibid.*, p.1024. For Lewcock's past, see Nigel Todd, *In Excited Times: The People Against the Blackshirts* (Whitley Bay: Bewick Press/Tyne & Wear Anti-Fascist Association, 1995), p.48. Martin Luther King, "Acceptance Speech on Receipt of an Honorary Doctorate at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne," November 13, 1967, MLK-Reg. The Council's new home in the purpose-built Civic Centre at the Haymarket was completed in 1967, but not formally opened until November 1968.
46. Dominic Sandbrook, *White Heat: A History of Britain in the Swinging Sixties* (London: Little, Brown, 2006), p.56.
47. Ibid., pp.400-408.
48. A.W. Purdue, *Newcastle: The Biography* (Stroud: Amberley, 2011), p.295.

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49. John W. House, *Industrial Britain: The North East* (Newton Abbot: David & Charles, 1969), pp.163-164; Renton, *Colour Blind?*, p.92.
50. "Tyne Jobs Lobby Gets London Backing," *MS*, November 13, 1967, p.3.
51. Figures drawn from House, *Industrial Britain*, pp.106-111; Purdue, *Newcastle*, pp.293-294; Renton, *Colour Blind?*, p.92.
52. House, *Industrial Britain*, p.23.
53. In 1973, Smith was sentenced to six years in jail for corruption as it emerged that his companies and those of his friends and associates had financially benefitted from the urban renewal through kick-backs and the preferential awarding of contacts.
54. Board of Trade, *The North East: A Programme for Regional Development and Growth*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963).
55. *Shipbuilding Inquiry Committee, 1965-1966: Report* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1966).
56. Purdue, *Newcastle*, pp.297-303; House, *Industrial Britain*, p.111; N. Vall, "The Emergence of the Post-Industrial Economy in Newcastle, 1914-2000," in Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2001), pp.64-66.
57. It was not only the redevelopment schemes of the 1960s and 1970s that struggle to deal effectively with some of the West End's economic and social problems. See, Fred Robinson, "Regenerating the West End of Newcastle: What Went Wrong?" *Northern Economic Review*, 36 (Summer 2005), pp.15-41.

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58. Tyneside Campaign Against Racial Discrimination, *Colour Discrimination in Newcastle upon Tyne* (CARD: Newcastle, 1967), LSC-N.
59. "Report by City Planning Officer," pp.28-29.
60. D.C.H. Fulton, letter to the Editor, *Journal*, November 7, 1967, p.6.
61. King, "Acceptance Speech"; C.I.C. Bosanquet, "Vice-Chancellor's Address at the Memorial Service for Martin Luther King," April 26, 1968," MLK-Dup.
62. This portion of King's speech is not in the surviving film, but was reported in "Luther King Warns of 'Black Ghetto'," *E-Chronicle*, November 14, 1967, p.4; "A Degree of Admiration," *Journal*, November 14, 1967, p.3.
63. Bosanquet, "Vice-Chancellor's Address."
64. "Johnson Should Admit Mistake – Luther King," *MS*, November 14, 1967, p.3.
65. Martin Luther King-Clyde Alleyne Interview, November 13, 1967, British Film Institute, <http://player.bfi.org.uk/film/watch-13-november-1967-martin-luther-king-interview-1967/>. Accessed January 15, 2017.
66. "Dr. King's Warning on Racialism," *Guardian*, November 15, 1967, p.5
67. "Britain Could Be Next Says King," *DM*, November 14, 1967, p.5.
68. "Integration," *E-Chronicle*, November 14, 1967, p.6.
69. Ibid.
70. Kevin Myers, *Struggles for a Past: Irish and Afro-Caribbean Histories in England, 1951-2000* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p.128.
71. "Editorial."
72. Ibid.

73. Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, p.26.

74. Alistair Moffat, *The British: A Genetic Journey* (Edinburgh: Berlinn, 2013), pp.234-239 (on the Indian/Armenian bloodlines in the Spencer family), p.255 (on fish and chips). See also, Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

75. Myers, *Struggles for a Past*, p.4. This trend played out in a succession of increasingly restrictive Immigration Acts, including one in 1971 that redefined British citizenship by stipulating Commonwealth citizens had the right of abode only if they, their husband (if female), their parents, or their grandparents were directly connected to the United Kingdom. The provision meant some British nationals could be denied entry into their country of nationality if they were deemed undesirable—the criteria for which was sometimes, if not always and rarely simply, determined along racial lines. See, Evan Smith and Marinella Marmo, “The Myth of Sovereignty: British Immigration Control in Policy and Practice in the Nineteen-Seventies,” *Historical Research*, 87, 236 (May 2014), pp.344-369.

76. Rev. John Muir, letter, *E-Chronicle*, November 22, 1967, p.8.

77. Renton, *Colour Blind?*, pp.125-6.

78. C. Arthur, letter, *E-Chronicle*, November 27, 1967, p.6.

79. J. K. Moffat, letter, *E-Chronicle*, December 1, 1967, p.14.

80. Stanley Levison, Martin Luther King and Andrew Young, telephone conversation, November 19, 1967, MLK-FBI.