RACISMS 'OLD' AND 'NEW' AT HANDSWORTH, 1985

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ABSTRACT
In the nearly thirty years following its publication, Martin Barker's *The New Racism* has stimulated much debate concerning racial ideologies within post-war Britain. Only recently, however, have Barker's conclusions been questioned in a sophisticated fashion. Most specifically, Phil Cohen has posited the inability of the "new racism" paradigm (and, indeed, any such binary designation of racist thought) to describe accurately the impact and characteristics of racism as it is experienced. This essay takes up Cohen's criticism via an attempt to provide just such a nuanced presentation of elite racism within one specific context – that of the 1985 violence in Handsworth, Birmingham. Although these events have rarely been seen as significant in and of themselves (generally being fudged into general narratives of 1980s 'race riots'), the essay argues that discourses surrounding Handsworth were indeed of considerable importance. Most notably, the interplay between specific presentations of Asian and Black communities is of great originality, and is perhaps unique. The nature of this unique discourse of 'race' is described in detail, its stress upon 'difference' being noted in particular. It is argued that Barker's paradigm is useful in understanding elite presentations of Handsworth's events, but that the form of racism under discussion is not wholly (or perhaps even primarily) 'new'. Ultimately, a general trend towards demarcation of racist 'epochs' is destabilised via a suggestion of the continual and fluid (rather than atomistic) nature of racial ideologies.

KEYWORDS
Racism; race; ethnicity; riots; Britain.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since its publication in 1981, Martin Barker's *The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* has greatly affected the discourse regarding racism in post-war Britain. Barker describes the fomentation of a new variety of racial prejudice within the context of a burgeoning New Right. This racism, he says, is an ideology intended to repudiate those Social Darwinist notions of biological inferiority and superiority which had become discredited both scientifically and politically by the end of the Second World War. The catastrophic consequences of institutionalized biological racism had by that time left few in Europe unmoved. Over a longer term, a growing academic literature assured readers that 'there is no such thing as race.'[2] Within Britain, Social Darwinism became simultaneously associated with the foreign ideology of Nazism: biological racism was not only abhorrent; it was a quite 'un-British' mode of thought.[3] The 'new racism' abandoned this biological register and instead posited a 'fixed human nature' in which the meeting of distinct racialised groups possessing disparate cultures causes 'a disruption of homogeneity' and, thenceforth, conflict.[4]

A large number of works have since built upon Barker's framework.[5] Only rather more recently has the paradigm of 'new racism' received more critical attention. In their essay 'Race, the New Right and State Policy in Britain', Mark Mitchell and Dave Russell questioned the degree to which 'race' was a central ideological concern for the politicians and theoreticians associated with the New Right.[6] At a more general level, Phil Cohen has argued that binary distinctions between racisms 'old' and 'new' are flawed because they 'reintroduce ideal typical distinctions that no longer (if they ever did) correspond to the complexity of what is happening on the ground.'[7] This comment appears in a volume entitled *New Ethnicities, Old Racisms?* – its title a clear statement of intent to problematise Barker's work (almost twenty years old by the time of Cohen's writing). Within the collection, those essays

which portray most vividly the nuanced and multifarious nature of British racisms are either contemporary in focus or situate their topic in periods prior to the twentieth century. This may lead to a false assumption that the 1980s were a time of unqualified 'new racism': that only at the turn of the millennium did previously valid binary distinctions between 'epochs' of racist thought break down.

An historical case study focusing closely upon the 'thick description' of one particular event relevant to the study of racist ideology would be an effective means of critiquing this assumption. Such is the aim of this essay, as it interrogates the 'racial' components of elite discourse during the 1980s, ultimately showing that such assumptions would be invalid. This interrogation makes use of the discourse surrounding the violent protest demonstrations in Handsworth, 1985, in order meticulously to sketch the contours of and distill the 'signs' employed by racism in 1980s Britain.

Section II provides a brief exposition of the events of September 10 – 12. Section III establishes that these events were presented by elite actors as examples of a problem in British society with 'Black criminality'. This picture is then complicated by an account of the ways in which elite discourse overlaid readings of gender, age and class onto this ethnic mapping. The means by which this orthodox 'explanation' for the violence in Handsworth was able to become hegemonic within print media discourse is considered. Section IV describes and deconstructs specifically the ethnic component of elite discourse, with a view to destabilizing Barker's paradigm. Finally, a series of concluding thoughts recapitulate the preceding argument and offer suggestions regarding consequent historiographical projects.

II. HANDSWORTH IN CONTEXT

Over the course of three nights in September 1985, roughly three hundred residents of Birmingham's multi-ethnic suburb of Handsworth came into violent contact with the local police force.[8] Following a dispute between a young Black man and a police officer regarding a parking ticket, the unrest spread to cover the main thoroughfares of the suburb and developed into something of a 'pitched battle'.[9] Yet despite offering vivid images of urban violence, and precipitating debate on issues from affirmative action to community policing, the Handsworth violence of 1985 is rarely seen as a distinctive moment in British social history. Its proximity and superficial similarity to the 'race riots' of 1981, and that in Brixton particularly, prevent it from easily being presented as a unique event. In his initial response to the event, Home Secretary Douglas Hurd declared that central government would not conduct an inquiry into the causes of the disturbance, since '[a]ll this ground has been ploughed over quite a lot and I am not sure there is a lot of good soil to be turned up.'[10] Lord Silverman, who chaired West Midlands County Council's own investigation of the social causes of violence in Handsworth, explicitly noted his great debts to the *Scarman Report* produced after Brixton.[11] This conception of the violence in Handsworth as essentially an ersatz event has been implicitly reconstituted by relevant scholarship.[12] Yet this does the events of Birmingham in 1985 insufficient justice. Unlike Brixton, Handsworth possessed a large and visible British Asian population.[13] As will be shown, a two-pronged presentation of race relations within the suburb was central to elite discourse: there existed much fixation upon the 'tension' between Asians and Blacks.[14] In a social context apparently much affected by the 'new' ideology of cultural racism, it is surprising that scholars have not focused more upon the discourses surrounding Handsworth: discourses which made much of supposedly irreducible and vitiating cultural differences amongst local inhabitants.

III. ELITE DISCOURSE REGARDING HANDSWORTH

Handsworth's violence was initially presented by the government as a solely criminal event. Douglas Hurd's assertion that the disturbances were 'not a social phenomenon but crimes' constituted a peculiarly blunt expression of a widespread feeling.[15] Acting in the shadow of Scarman, Hurd quickly denied the linkage between urban violence and social deprivation, protesting that '[t]o suppose that the people who burned shops, looted, burned [sic] and, in fact, brought about the death were driven by despair is, I think, absurd.'[16] Later government presentations showed a change in attitude and revealed a bipartisan convergence, even if Hurd's statement on the October 18th that the violence had 'shown once again the tension and fragility which exist in some of our inner cities' was careful in linking social factors to Handsworth's demonstrations.[17] But by this time, the 'initial definers' within British political discourse had established Handsworth's events as a criminal 'riot'. [18] With an investigation into Handsworth's social problems declared unnecessary by Hurd, the government preferred instead to endorse the West Midlands Police report that identified drug dealers as the instigators of the violence.[19] With Handsworth's events 'established' as essentially 'criminal', the event was thus seen primarily as another manifestation of the disintegration of consensus standards regarding 'law and order'.

But this supposed criminality was not located in the community as an undifferentiated whole; rather it was taken to exhibit a specific ethnic character. Both the media and political treatment of 'race' in discourse relating to the violence was ambivalent and inconsistent, but 'race' was nevertheless accepted as a valid social category with great explanatory power. Media outlets as diverse as the *Guardian* and the *Daily Mail* argued, whether explicitly or via an acknowledgement of the participants' multi-racial composition, that 'this was not a race riot'.[20] Yet this rhetoric was balanced by regular assertions that the rioters had been 'mainly Black' or similar.[21] These arguments were reproduced within the Government. Hurd denied that the events had constituted 'race riots'; but nevertheless spoke of 'young Black tinder' that had been set alight in Britain's inner-cities.[22] Thereby, the crude presentation of the disturbances as matters of 'race' was circumvented; but neither the media nor the Government left the public in any doubt as to where the blame lay. Moreover, the violence was not just seen as being a 'Black' event due to the statistical composition of the rioters. Rather, these were events that took on a 'Black' character – the *Sunday Telegraph* spoke of 'the West Indian riots', whilst *The Times* argued that 'it is not the answer to say that some criminal elements among white youths *joined in* the rioting and the looting and therefore it is not a matter of black hatred against the police and whites.'[23] This argument sees whites as only incidentally participating in violence: they do not provide its origins and, if the presence of their Black neighbours were removed, local whites would presumably behave peaceably.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the entire Black community was described as a locus of 'trouble'. Instead, divisions were frequently made between the 'respectable, law abiding' (usually older and/or female) Black people in Handsworth, and the 'criminal element' (almost exclusively young males). The assertion made by the *Observer* that the violence 'was led by a relatively small group of youths' was rarely critiqued.[24] Indeed, it was frequently expanded upon and provided with new dimensions via assertions that (for example) 'the majority of respectable West Indians, who are often employed in public service, are horrified by the behaviour of the wild, undisciplined youths.'[25] The police inquiry was particularly forceful in advancing this argument, suggesting the existence in Handsworth of 'a hard core of individuals whose activities give cause for concern to the police and the law abiding citizens of the area.'[26] These 'unclubables', the report argued, were completely divorced from Handsworth's communal and social life. [27] Numerically speaking, the notion that only a 'small minority' of Handsworth's residents took part in the unrest is true to the point of being trite.[28] Comparative work on global collective violence also suggests that

there is some truth in the notion that participants are usually young and male.[29] Whatever the statistical accuracy of these claims, however, this matter is of secondary importance to the manner in which such statistics were mobilised rhetorically. Appearing on *ITN News*, West Midlands Police Chief Constable Geoffrey Dear asserted that the participants were 'so unrepresentative of the vast majority of people in Handsworth [who] want to dissociate themselves from [the violence].'[30]

This was by no means accurate. Many non-participating Black residents were keen to emphasize the role of social conditions in precipitating violence. As sixty-three year-old Iceline Jackson commented: '[t]he young people are not getting a fair deal. We contributed to building this country. They should get a fair deal at work and at school.'[31] Attempts to divide Handsworth's residents into 'angry youths' and 'passive elders' abstracted away family and community relations between the young and old. Mrs. Jackson's own son had been taken in by police for 'routine questioning' and, apparently, subsequently beaten.[32] This is not to say that such residents necessarily advocated violence; Mrs. Jackson's remark suggests that local attitudes remained ambivalent on this matter.[33] It must also be recognised that white residents are not sealed-off from their Black neighbours. As a white schoolteacher commented: 'I can't think like an Afro-Caribbean. I wouldn't be up the road throwing bricks, but I can understand how people feel when they are discriminated against.'[34] Residents did not, with one voice, speak out to reject violence: indeed, they expressed a variety of opinions and levels of support for the participants. In his classic analysis of moral panic in print media, Stanley Cohen has called this stress upon a particular sub-division of a larger group the 'Lunatic Fringe theme'.[35] Cohen offers two explanations for this fixation upon a 'troublesome' minority: it can function as reassurance for those 'endangered' by the deviant phenomenon and can legitimise tougher sanctions against that phenomenon (since it has now been glossed as particularly exceptional).[36] In the context of Handsworth, we might add that ascribing this violent criminality to a monolithic 'Black community' would be too crude a formulation for 'quality' newspapers to stomach. It might even, with its overtones of essentialisation, appear to reconstitute devalued, if by no means abandoned, 'old' racisms.

Having established that Handsworth's violent protested demonstrations were interpreted as criminal events with 'racial' overtones, but also that these overtones were interpolated into an explanatory framework which also made clear reference to both age and gender, it may now be useful briefly to consider the means by which elite discourse (and specifically that of the print media) marginalized dissenting explanations. Although Government actors frequently provided the most salient assertions that of the events in Handsworth were 'just crimes', this should by no means be taken to suggest that left-wing political figures presented a more coherent explanation. Indeed, quite the opposite is true – representatives of the Left frequently denounced the 'criminal' aspect of Handsworth's events even more emphatically than did those on the Right. Local Labour M.P. Jeff Rooker was quick to describe the violence as 'a barbarous act of criminality'.[37] Another Labour M.P. with local connections, Clare Short, was forceful in her belief that '[s]uch a riot is a mindless and destructive cry of rage'.[38] More common amongst those associated with the Labour Party was an explanation that synthesized criminal and social elements. Of this manner of response, party leader Neil Kinnock's statement that 'unemployment was a factor' but that this could not excuse 'senseless and indefensible' behaviour was typical.[39] Thus, actors on the Left attempted to present such incidents as intelligible without appearing to endorse them.

To fully explain this rhetorical emphasis, it is necessary to consider more generally the constitution of print media discourse. Explaining the formation of discourses relating to political events, Stuart Hall has argued that:

> [T]he structural relationship between the media and the primary institutional definers [works] to establish the initial definition or *primary interpretation* of the topic in question. This interpretation then "commands the field" in all subsequent treatment and sets the terms of reference within which all further coverage or debate takes place. Arguments *against* a primary interpretation are forced to insert themselves into *its* definition of "what is at issue" – they must begin from this framework of interpretation as their starting point.[40]

Here, the initial definers (largely Government spokespeople and representatives of the police) combined to define the disturbance as a 'criminal event' demanding a response couched in terms of 'law and order' to be formulated by a police inquiry. Once established, such definitions are difficult to resist without the consent of initial definers since 'if they do not play within the rules of the game, counter-spokesmen run the risk of being defined out of the debate [and] labelled as "extremist" or "irrational".'[41] Such an analysis makes the comments of figures such as Rooker far more comprehensible. In the eyes of the *Daily Telegraph*, his statements proved his worthiness to partake in the 'debate':

> *To his credit*, Mr. Jeff Rooker, *whose political sympathies are emphatically Left*, declares the riot was a disgrace to the city and the people of Handsworth. He does not take the view, he says, that people have to riot to prove they are deprived. *Others will be less forthright*.[42]

The results of a Leftist figure failing to make such conciliatory comments can be observed by examining the right-wing press' treatment of Bernie Grant, Labour leader of Haringey Council during the Broadwater Farm Estate 'riot'. His comment that "[t]he youths around here believe the police were to blame for what happened on Sunday and what they got was a bloody good hiding" was mercilessly criticised by much of the press (most notably by *The Sun*, which christened him 'Barmy Bernie'), and repudiated by Kinnock.[43]

The search for alternative explanations (as well as alternative presentations of Handsworth's residents) was thus left to cultural projects outside the mainstream. Most noteworthy in this regard is the Black Audio Collective's *Handsworth Songs*. The film presents an articulate theory of causation regarding the unrest; yet, even if it did not, its very aesthetic subverts the visual grammar underpinning much television coverage of the violence.[44] The explanatory space afforded to local residents within national coverage was divided up largely between the 'angry Black youth' and the 'distraught Asian shopkeeper'. Repudiating this binary opposition, *Handsworth Songs* forces such actors to share discursive territory with more marginal informants. Black women, portrayed in the mainstream media (when portrayed at all) almost exclusively as concerned mothers, are here given the opportunity to voice criticism of the police and Government.[45] The film's most trenchant critique of local government comes from an Asian resident; this strikes back at the orthodox presentation of that community as docile and entirely opposed to the violence. Older Black males are shown to express sympathy with their younger neighbours. Unlike in the stories featured by national newspapers or television channels, Black residents share space with representatives of authority –a group of Black males express arguments to Jeff Rooker that he has misrepresented the unrest on television. Salman Rushdie has criticised the film for presenting 'blacks as trouble; blacks as victims.'[46] This fails to acknowledge that *Handsworth Songs* presents Blacks subjects which transcend the status of victimhood by providing alternative analyses for their situation and by expressing a will and ability to change it. As an Asian interviewee says in the film, 'the only time I saw the police run, or terror in the hearts of the people responsible for the way the ghetto is, was on that Monday.'[47]*Handsworth Songs*

presents Black and Asian subjects powerfully aware of their agency, yet, at the same time, does not simply repeat the orthodox assurance that British society is innocent of racism.[48]

IV. THE ETHNIC COMPONENT

Much of this racism was indeed of the variety termed 'new' by Martin Barker. For many analysts of the unrest, it appears that criminality begins at home: the Black family is a flawed entity. In his 1981 report, Lord Scarman posited the failure of the Black family system to adapt to British conditions, and attributed this to the increasing need for Black mothers to work; thereby undermining the 'matriarchal' nature of West Indian families.[49] Julius Silverman quoted and endorsed these comments in relation to Handsworth four years later.[50] Such ideas also gained headway in the popular press. The *Guardian* commented on the day following Handsworth that the family life of those participating was 'a fractured nullity.'[51] Both Hurd and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher were explicit in connecting a breakdown in family values to the unrest. Hurd commented that 'we put more emphasis on the decline, sometimes the collapse, of family life, the relaxation of discipline and the disappearance of a spirit of community.'[52] Speaking less than a week later, Thatcher offered the similar comment that 'natural authority starts in the home. In the family and beyond the family it runs through school, church, work and our many institutions. But some parents opt out of their duty to their children…'[53] Though neither remark is explicitly racialised, the timing of the comments and their obvious relation to urban disorder, regarded by the Government as a 'mainly Black' problem, is highly suggestive.

Beyond the family, Black youths faced the prospect of coming under the thrall of an even more threatening influence: Rastafarianism. By outwardly presenting their belonging to a spiritual movement and culture that is 'un-British', Rastafarians pose a visible 'threat' to British society. It is notable that many stories in the popular press concerning Rastafarians and their beliefs focus extensively on physical appearance.[54] The association of Rastafarianism with crime was made extremely closely by Detective Superintendent Dick Holland of Bradford in 1981, when he asserted that concentrating on young Black males of 'typical Rastafarian appearance' is 'the sort of discrimination and prejudice we want from police officers. That is what clears up the crime'.[55] This discrimination against Rastafarians is further justified by the assertion that the culture includes an 'illegitimate' sub-group. As Silverman commented, 'then there are the dreadlocks, the people who call themselves Rastafarians, but whom it would appear are disapproved of by "genuine" Rastafarians.'[56] Above all, Rastafarianism is regarded with suspicion due to its link with the smoking of cannabis. In a way that is overtly 'new racist', Rastafarianism is treated as a key piece of evidence of conflict between Black people and 'native' Britons that is unavoidable. After all, as the *Guardian* asks, how can Britain hope to accommodate 'the West Indian community that regards drugs as part of its culture'?[57] For the *Daily Telegraph*, the simple problem is that 'Rastafarians and others *claim* to have a culture which tolerates drugs. Drug abuse and drug trafficking in Britain are against criminal law.'[58] This situation represents not even a meeting of two 'different but equal' cultures, since Rastafarians can only lay disputable 'claim' to the possession of a culture. 'New racist' thinking resonates throughout the popular press' treatment of Rastafarianism: it is a 'cult' with members professing values inalienably at odds with 'the British way of life'.[59] Conflict, it follows, is ineluctable.

The growing popularity of Rastafarianism was not the only piece of 'evidence' to support the notion of a dangerous permissiveness within Black culture. Indeed, the violence itself was seen as stemming from the 'un-British' notions of what Black people might consider as 'entertainment'. During the unrest, Geoffrey Dear asserted, the participants 'were having a very good time by their standards'.[60] This discovery of joy in destruction hints at the indelible

stain of primitiveness present in Black culture. The disturbances were described as an 'orgy'[61] and a 'celebration'[62]; Neil Kinnock saw them as demonstrating a 'tribal spirit'.[63] A common juxtaposition was made between the violence and the carnival of the weekend before as in the *The Times'* statement that 'the violence that flared in the streets of Handsworth on Monday night came in stark contrast to the cheerful carnival of the weekend before…'[64] Going further, the *Daily Mail* likened the violence to 'some sort of appalling carnival'.[65] Both events are simply reifications of the primitive, tribal character of Black culture. In these presentations, expounded by actors covering a large area of the political spectrum, Black people are portrayed as moving inexplicably between emotions, but at all times expressing emotions in a way that is aggressive. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon's comment that Algerian 'natives' were seen by French colonials as possessing 'mental puerility, without the spirit of curiosity found in a Western child.'[66] Indeed, this ambivalent emotionality, always expressed with an inappropriate fervour, is the stuff of childhood.

These 'psychological flaws' were most saliently evoked in relation to the belief of Black people in the existence of institutional racism in Britain. Barker has illustrated the willingness of British politicians to act on the 'genuine fears' of the white population. The 'argument from genuine fears', Barker says, involves first establishing the existence of 'real people' with 'genuine fears' (about, for instance, the rate of immigration or Black criminality) and then from this sliding to an intimation that the object of these fears must therefore be actual.[67] This flows from Enoch Powell's logic that 'the people of England will not endure it. If so, it is idle to argue whether they ought or ought not to.'[68] What Barker does not investigate, however, is the inverse of this operation: the process by which the 'genuine fears' of Black actors are dismissed, scorned and met with inaction. This can be observed most readily as regards policing. The police themselves admitted that, in the six months prior to the unrest in Handsworth, Black people had been stopped and searched at a level disproportionate to their percentage in the total population of the area.[69] However, 'such police activities do not discriminate and are an essential part of our preventive and detective tactics.'[70] Hurd, too, felt 'slightly tired of the approach that it is all because of racism on the part of the police'.[71] Even Handsworth's well-documented unemployment problems were disputable since, as the *Spectator* argued, 'no doubt some of those registered as unemployed do more work than they admit to the Welfare State'.[72] These ideas were part of a wider belief that, in the words of *The Times*, Blacks attempt to 'win arguments by pulling skin on whites ("I'm black, so I'm right")'.[73] Even the apparently sympathetic voice of Julius Silverman felt that accusations of racial discrimination in Britain were at least partially fictive, since 'the *feeling* of being discriminated against is an important part of the social and psychological background of Handsworth.'[74] The idea that Black fears regarding British racism were baseless is undermined by those investigations which combed narrations of Black experiences with rigorous statistical evidence (such as the report of the Black and Asian Review Panel commissioned by West Midlands County Council and published as *A Different Reality*). Yet these were dismissed as 'suspect and dangerous' by the local press.[75] The Black community, then, is presented as beset by 'paranoid ideation': mistakenly, unshakably and dangerously convinced of the malevolence of British society. As one Redditch resident observed to the makers of 'Handsworth Songs': 'we have no chance. When we's right; we's wrong. When we's wrong; we's double wrong.'[76]

The 'paranoia' arrogated to the Black community by popular discourse, it must be allowed, is not always presented as the 'fault' of the Black community itself. Rather, outside agitators are often at work. The suggestion was widely and frequently made that the participants were merely 'copying' events in South Africa.[77] Alternative sources of agitation were the Revolutionary Communist Party and other groups on the far Left. [78] As Hurd commented, 'we must be aware of the tactic employed by a number of hard Left local authorities of claiming to

be champions of the black community and using that community to their own objectives.'[79] Within the media, *The Times'* Woodrow Wyatt expressed concern that 'black youths are being misled by those in the community relations business to hate the police and to hate whites'.[80] The *Daily Mail* described how residents were 'brainwashed to hate the police.'[81] Yet, however expressed, the message is simple: Blacks do not know their own minds. This makes them dangerous: they represent an inert body of water ready to be whipped into tempest by the winds of outside agitation.

As alluded to above, one of the most distinctive characteristics of the racial thought present in the discourse relating to Handsworth's unrest was its bipartite nature: apparent differences between Asian and Black experiences were frequently investigated as a source of explanation. Much of the commentary on the events was underpinned by simplistic representations these two communities, drawn from their respective archetypes. Some analyses even sought to essentialise the 'properties' of the two groups, and to naturalise the conflict supposedly occurring between them. To be sure, Black and Asian experiences in Handsworth were by no means identical, but this *fixation* upon difference nevertheless requires explanation.

Suggestions of direct hostility for purely 'racial' reasons were rare. The *Sun* printed a story offering to explain to its readers 'why the Blacks hate the Asians.'[82] However, arguments favouring this simplistic dynamic are obviously difficult to support. If the unrest's Black participants had mobilised with an 'anti-Asian' motive in mind, it is difficult to explain why the local Sikh temple was left untouched; why Asian shopkeepers enjoyed freedom of movement during the events; and why local Asian residents were not directly attacked.[83] Instead, it was usual within national newspapers to comprehend 'race' as the physical veneer behind which class operated. Few media outlets did much to question the *Daily Mail*'s simple assertion that 'the Asians [are] the traders, the West Indians their customers.'[84] Explanations denying any 'racial tension', but presenting the disturbance as an uprising of the (Black) dispossessed against the prosperous (Asians), were common.[85] The *Guardian* believed that 'what happened appears to have been a spontaneous orgy of looting and arson and, as many of the little local shops were Asian owned, it was Asians who bore the brunt of the theft and the fire.'[86]

Speaking at the Social Democratic Party party conference, Shirley Williams spoke of 'the terrified Asian shopkeepers of Handsworth.'[87] Indeed, this stereotype quickly became a central image in many explanations of the riot; the 'victim' of its counterpart, the 'Black youth'. Newspaper and television media frequently sought interviews with Asian shopkeepers, rather than any other element of the population.[88] During Douglas Hurd's visit to Handsworth, the Home Secretary's public relations advisor arranged for the minister to speak only with a local Asian shopkeeper.[89] This stereotype created an attitude towards the Asian community amongst some of the British elite of racialised paternalism. The *Economist* spoke of the need to 'protect the Asians… by punishing grimly those blacks (and whites) who attack them…'[90] Lord Hailsham praised the Asian community as 'industrious and respectable.'[91] *The Times* saw Asians as 'quieter and gentler' than their Black neighbours.[92] Unlike the Black family unit, Asians did not produce social deviancy within their households for 'they have, for example, a passionate belief in the closely knit, mutually dependant family.'[93] During this period, even Islam itself could be seen as having a positive effect upon the assimilation of British Asians.[94] Such analyses of the British Asian community recall Roland Barthes' famous 'sign' of the Black soldier saluting the French flag. Like Barthes' image, the sign of 'The Asian Shopkeeper' shows 'the acceptable face' of migrant behaviour: both actors have transcended their otherness by accepting the values of the host society. The Black soldier moves straight to a respect for and sense of duty to the nation; the Asian shopkeeper expresses his non-threatening nature via the conduit of ideological support for the British values of 'hard work' and economic self-dependence. Yet, the 'shopkeeper' image

contains a 'tragic' element. The 'white man's burden', that mission to 'demonstrate to "lesser breeds without the law" the advantage to be gained from becoming loyal, dependent subjects'[95] has proven too much for the 'sick man of Europe' to shoulder. An unseen malevolent presence – the 'Black youth' – has disrupted the order of British society to such an extent that the nation can no longer confer the 'advantage' of 'protection' upon its subjects. By packing together stereotyped images of both the Asian and Black communities, and reflecting fears regarding the apparent wider 'failing' of law and order within Britain, this image came to reflect succinctly popular imaginings of Handsworth's 'racial' component.

V. CONCLUSION

As outlined at its beginning, this essay is intended to take up the challenge of presenting a particular permutation of racism as it existed 'on the ground'. The author hopes that this has been achieved via a stress upon the multivalent nature of the racial ideology developed in association to the Handsworth violence. Rarely did elite actors regard the community as indivisible whole. The most salient and unbridgeable 'division' was that separating the Black and Asian communities. Little commonality existed in the way these groups were represented: indeed, popular theories of causation frequently stressed the role of inter-community *difference* -- and, moreover, hostility. Black residents in particular were further subdivided via the categories of age and gender, with the elderly Black population frequently situated as their community's 'acceptable face.' In this scheme, Hall's resonant assessment that 'race is the modality in which class is 'lived'' appears almost too simplistic.[96] Facets of identity were considered by elite discourse to experience rich layers of interplay. Some of these facets were regarded as essentially coterminous with 'race' (so the Asian community is gendered as female and presented as largely self-employed, even if not 'middle class' in the normative sense). Others were not so regarded – for elderly Black residents, their advancing age seems to 'cut across' or even negate their Blackness by rendering them socially passive.

It is not difficult to see how this stress upon layers of difference relates back to the concept of 'new racism.' The above argument has both genuflected towards Barker's work whilst problematising his findings. Much of the elite racism precipitated by the events of Handsworth was in fact expressed via reference to culture. However, these cultural manifestations were frequently regarded as a superstructure generated by essential flaws in Black psychology. It is when considering rhetoric such as this that one must question the paradigm of 'new racism'. These presentations of a 'flawed' Black psychology - marked by ambivalent and inexplicable emotionality, intense and dangerous paranoia and easy susceptibility to rhetoric – returned the trope of 'inferiority/superiority' to racist discourse, and dispensed with the purely cultural explanation for the 'problem' within the Black community. Such notions of Black psychological inferiority were a founding notion of the 'classical racism' which 'new racism' is supposed to have departed from.[97] If any 'departure' has in fact occurred, then this is observable only at a rather high level of abstraction. A thicker and more focused description of relevant discourse has unearthed a disordered array of ideological tropes both old and new. As Hall has argued:

> No doubt there are certain general features to racism. But even more significant are the ways in which those general features are modified and transformed by the historical specificity of the contexts and environments in which they become active.[98]

Some twenty-five years after Barker discovered 'new racism', a scholar of classical antiquity began to unearth the 'proto-racism' lurking in his own period of interest.[99] The racism of the ancient world is not that of, say, Nazi Germany. The racism of Nazi Germany is not that that of 1980s Britain. One should not expect these very different societies to produce

very similar racisms. Yet the tangled web of continuities and departures within the history of racist thought equally resist simple cleavages into the epochs of 'proto-racism', 'racism' and 'new racism'. It is perhaps better to see the ideology of 'racism' as a super-ideological corpus of tactics, tropes and images which can be reconstituted to great levels of specificity within precise social contexts. It is the intention of this essay both to evidence the utility of case studies into these contexts, and thereby to encourage the continued production of such work.

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[1] I would like to thank Dr. Elizabeth Buettner and Prof. Peter Biller for their tutelage and guidance, as well as this journal's anonymous peer reviewer.

[2] Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman and Angela Bodino eds., *Racism: A Global Reader*, (New York : M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2003), p. 5.

[3] Paul Gilroy, 'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation, (London : Routledge, 1987), pp. 131-2.

[4] Martin Barker, The New Racism: Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe, (London : Junction Books, 1981), p. 31.

[5] See especially Paul Gordon and Francesca Klug, *New Right New Racism*, (London : Searchlight, 1987); Gilroy, '*There Ain't No Black…'*, pp.43-72; Mark Duffield, *New Racism… New Realism* (Oxford : Refugees Studies Centre, 1982).

[6] Mark Mitchell and Dave Russell, 'Race, the New Right and State Policy in Britain' in Kenneth Lunn and Tony Kushner eds, *The Politics of Marginality: Race, the Radical Right and Minorities in Twentieth Century Britain* (London : F. Cass, 1990).

[7] Phil Cohen, 'New Ethnicities, Old Racisms' in Phil Cohen ed., *New Ethnicites, Old Racisms*, (London : Zed Books, 1999), p. 9.

[8] *The Times*, September 11 1985 ; *The Guardian*, September 11, 1985.

[9] Ibid.

[10] *The Times*, September 12, 1985.

[11] Julius Silverman, The Handsworth/Lozells Riots [of] 9,10,11 September: Report of an Inquiry by Mr. Julius Silverman, (Birmingham : Birmingham City Council, 1986), p. 73.

[12] Such claims are hard to evidence quantitatively, but one might reflect anecdotally that books such as John Benyon ed., *Scarman and After: Essays Reflecting on Lord Scarman's Report, The Riots, and their Aftermath*, (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1984) found no analogue after Handsworth.

[13] Birmingham City Council, *Handsworth/Soho/Lozells Inner Area Report 1985-6*, (Birmingham : Birmingham City Council, 1986) p. 136 placed the 'Asian' population at 19.4% of the total – roughly 10,900 people.

[14] Throughout this essay, 'Black' will be used to refer to members of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora; 'Asian' to refer to the British community comprising of immigrants from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and their descendents. (This latter should be taken as shorthand for 'British Asian', rather than as an indication that only first-generation migrants are being considered). Most primary material retains the word 'Asian', but frequently prefers the terms 'Afro-Caribbean' and 'West Indian' over 'Black'. This essay follows the argument of Tariq Modood, ''Black', Racial Equality and Asian Identity', *New Community* 14, 1 (Spring 1988), pp. 402-3 that such appellations homogenise the experiences of ethnic minorities in Britain in a way that is unhelpful.

[15] *Guardian*, September 11, 1985.

[16] *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1985. Hurd's mention of "the death" refers to two shopkeepers killed by a fire lighted during the violence. These deaths were later ruled to be accidental (*The Times*, July 26, 1986).

[17] *The Times*, October 18 1985.

[18] The term "initial definers" is used extensively in Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, (London : Macmillan, 1978), p. 58. A discussion of "initial definers" and their role in framing media presentations of Handsworth will follow in the main text.

[19] For the police report, see Geoffrey Dear, *Handsworth/Lozells: September 1985: Report of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police*, (Birmingham : West Midlands Police, 1985). The clearest association of drug dealers with the violence in this document can be found on p. 53.

[20] *Guardian*, September 11, 1985; *Birmingham Post*, September 11, 1985; *Daily Telegraph*, September 11, 1985; *Times*, September 11, 1985; *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985.

[21] *Financial Times*, September 10, 1985; *Daily Telegraph*, September 11, 1985; *The Times*, September 11, 1985; *Guardian*, September 11, 1985; *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985; *The Spectator*, September 13, 1985.

[22] *The Times*, October 19, 1985.

[23] *The Times*, October 12, 1985. Emphasis added.

[24] *Observer*, September 15, 1985.

[25] *Daily Mail*, September 12, 1985.
[26] Dear, Report of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, p. 9.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Jeffrey Rooker (*The Times*, September 15, 1985) estimated that only 0.5% of residents were involved in the violence. Estimates on the number of arrests made during the disturbance range from between 300 and 370 (*Sun*, October 25th, 1985; *Guardian*, October 26th, 1985; *The Times*, November 20th, 1985).
[29] Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 259.
[30] *'ITN News'*, September 11, 1985.
[31] *The Times*, September 19, 1985.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid.
[34] *Guardian*, April 28, 1987.
[35] Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: the Creation of Mods and Rockers*, (London : Routledge, 2002 [1972]), pp. 44-5.
[36] Ibid, p. 45.
[37] *Daily Telegraph*, September 11 1985.
[38] *The Times*, September 21st 1985.
[39] *Daily Telegraph*, September 11 1985.
[40] Hall et al., *Policing the* Crisis, p. 58. Emphasis in original.
[41] Ibid, p. 64.
[42] *Daily Telegraph*, September 11 1985 Emphasis added.
[43] For Grant's comments, see *Weekly Worker*, April 13, 2000. For *The Sun* on Grant see the relevant quotations in BBC News, 'Bernie Grant: A Controversial Figure', http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/706403.stm, accessed 1st March 2010. For Kinnock's criticisms of Grant, see *Daily Telegraph*, October 10, 1985.
[44] It should be noted that Channel 4's *'ITN News'*, September 11, 1985 was somewhat more analytical in this regard.
[45] For a comment upon the general treatment of Black and Asian women within the mainstream media, see Pratibha Parmar, 'Gender, Race and Power: The Challenge to Youth Work Practice' in Phil Cohen and Harwant Bains eds., *Multi-racist Britain*, (Basingstoke : Macmillan Education, 1998), p. 199.
[46] *Guardian*, January 12, 1987.
[47] 'Handsworth Songs'.
[48] An influential denial of institutional racism within British society which pre-dates Handsworth can be found in Leslie Scarman, *The Brixton Disorder 10-12 April 1981: Report of an Inquiry*, (London : H.M.S.O., 1981).p. 11.
[49] Ibid, pp. 8; 9.
[50] Silverman, The Handsworth/Lozells Riots, p. 22.
[51] *Guardian*, September 12, 1985.
[52] *Daily Telegraph*, November 8, 1985.
[53] *Daily Telegraph*, November 12, 1985.
[54] *Sun*, September 14, 1985; *The Times*, September 15, 1985.
[55] Wolverhampton Express & Star, September 14, 1981.
[56] Silverman, The Handsworth/Lozells Riots, p. 87.
[57] *Guardian*, October 21, 1985.
[58] *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1985. Emphasis added.
[59] *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1985
[60] *The Times*, September 11, 1985.
[61] Geoffrey Dear, quoted in *Guardian*, September 11, 1985.
[62] Conservative M.P. Jack Butcher, quoted in *Guardian*, September 11, 1985.
[63] *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985.
[64] *The Times*, September 11, 1985.
[65] *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985.
[66] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (London : Penguin, 2001 [1961]), p. 242.
[67] Barker, *The New Racism*, p. 15.
[68] Enoch Powell.net, 'Speech to London Rotary Club, Eastbourne, September 1986', http://www.enochpowell.net/fr-83.html, accessed 1st March 2010.
[69] Dear, Report of the Chief Constable of West Midlands Police, p. 54.
[70] Ibid.
[71] *The Times*, March 1, 1986.

[72] *Spectator*, September 13, 1985. For material on unemployment in Handsworth, see Birmingham City Council, *Inner Area Report 1985-6*, pp. 59, 138, 141, 144. West Midlands County Council, *Handsworth/Soho/Lozells Inner Area Report* 1987, (Birmingham : West Midlands County Council), pp. 7-8, 10.
[73] *The Times*, September 19, 1985.
[74] Silverman, *The Handsworth/Lozells Riots*, p. 48. Emphasis added.
[75] For the quoted comment, see *Birmingham Post*, February 21, 1986. For the report itself, see *The Review Panel, A Different Reality: An Account of Black People's Experiences and their Grievances Before and After the Handsworth Rebellion of September 1985: Report of the Review Panel*, (Birmingham : West Midlands County Council).
[76] 'Handsworth Songs'.
[77] *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985; *Daily Mail*, September 12, 1985; *Economist*, September 14, 1985. A 'progressive' version of this argument, couched in terms of 'assertiveness', is presented by *New Statesman*, September 13, 1985.
[78] *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1985.
[79] *Daily Telegraph*, October 19, 1985.
[80] *The Times*, October 12, 1985.
[81] *Daily Mail*, October 8, 1985.
[82] *Sun*, September 12, 1985.
[83] *The Times*, September 12, 1985; *Indian World*, September 18, 1985; Horowitz, *Deadly Ethnic Riot*, p. 492.
[84] *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985.
[85] *The Times*, September 11, 1985; *Daily Mail*, September 11, 1985; *Sun*, September 11, 1985; *Economist*, September 14, 1985; *Observer*, September 15, 1985; *Daily Telegraph*, September 12, 1985.
[86] *Guardian*, September 12, 1985.
[87] *The Times*, September 11, 1985.
[88] *Guardian*, September 10, 1985; *'ITN News'*, September 11, 1985;
[89] *Guardian*, September 11, 1985.
[90] *The Times*, September 14, 1985.
[91] *Daily Mail*, December 12, 1985.
[92] *The Times*, October 12, 1985.
[93] Roy Hattersley, *Guardian*, April 9, 1988.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Phil Cohen, 'The Perversions of Inheritance' in Cohen and Bains eds., *Multi-racist Britain*, p. 18.
[96] Hall, Policing the Crisis, p. 394.
[97] Cohen, 'The Perversions of Inheritence', p. 68.
[98] Stuart Hall, 'Gramsci's Relevance to the Study of Race and Ethnicity' in David Morley & Huan-Ksing Chen eds., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London : Routledge, 1996).
[99] Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, (Princeton, New Jersey ; Oxford : Princeton University Press, 2004).