

## PART 2: THATCHERISM

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### Racism and reaction

1978

IN HIS BOOK *Black and White*, which is a study of the negro in English society 1555 to 1945 – a book worth reading – James Walvin recounts how in the last decade of the sixteenth century, England was troubled by an expanding population and a shortage of food: ‘as hunger swept the land, England was faced by a problem which taxed the resources of government to the limits’.<sup>1</sup> He adds that immigrants were seen as adding to the problem, since ‘no group was so immediately visible as the blacks’ – which, it may surprise you to know, by then had been distributed already in their thousands in English cities as a result of the growing involvement of England in the slave trade. Queen Elizabeth I accordingly wrote to the Lord Mayors of the country’s major cities: ‘there are of late divers blackamores brought into the realm, of which kind of people there are alreadie here to manie, considering howe God hath blessed this land with a great increase of people’. She recommended that ‘those kind of people be sent forth of the land’. And indeed, in January 1601, she repeated her advice in the rather more official form of a Royal Proclamation allowing a Lubeck merchant to take ‘such Negroes and blackamores which are carried into this realm, to the great annoyance of her own liege people’.

Walvin doesn’t record whether this is the first British ‘moral panic’ about race. But the incident does give us a little bit of historical perspective on the theme of this lecture, which is about the English reaction to race in the postwar period. It also suggests something about the mechanism involved: that it isn’t quite of such recent origin as we might suppose. I mean, specifically, the mechanism by which problems which are internal to British society, not ones which are visited on it from the outside, come to be projected on to, or exported

into, an excessive preoccupation with the problem of 'race'. This decade is not the first time that the English official mind, when forced to contemplate a 'crisis', has turned the conversation in the direction of 'the blacks'.

This is, in a way, the first and perhaps the most important point that I want to make. Let me put it rather more generally. There is, it seems to me, an overwhelming tendency to abstract questions of race from what one might call their *internal* social and political basis and contexts in British society – that is to say, to deal with 'race' as if it has nothing intrinsically to do with the present 'condition of England'. It's viewed rather as an 'external' problem, which has been foisted to some extent on English society from the outside: it's been visited on us, as it were, from the skies. To hear problems of race discussed in England today, you would sometimes believe that relations between British people and the peoples of the Caribbean or the Indian sub-continent began with the wave of black immigrants in the late 1940s and 1950s. 'The English and race' is frequently debated as if it is a brief and indeed temporary interlude, which will shortly be brought to an end. These poor, benighted people, for reasons which the British sometimes find it hard to bring to mind, picked themselves up out of their villages and plantations and, quite uninvited, made this long, strange and apparently unpredictable journey to the doors of British industry – which, as you know, out of the goodness of their hearts, gave them jobs. Now the 'good times' are over, the kissing has to stop. The national patience is exhausted. The fund of goodwill has been used up. It's time the problem 'went back where it came from'. The British people, I am told, require to be assured that the problem of race will have a definite and conclusive end.

It seems to me that the tendency to pull race out from the internal dynamic of British society, and to repress its history, is not, as might be supposed, confined to the political 'right' of the spectrum. It is also, in my opinion, to be found on the liberal 'left'. For the 'right', immigration and race has become a problem of the control of an external flow, or, as the popular press is fond of saying, 'a tidal wave': cut off the flow and racism will subside. The liberal 'left', on the other hand, have long treated race and immigration as a problem in the exercise of 'good conscience': be kind to 'our friends from overseas' – then racism will disappear. Neither side can nowadays bring themselves to refer to Britain's imperial and colonial past, even as a

contributory factor to the present situation. The slate has been wiped clean. Racism is not endemic to the British social formation. It has nothing intrinsically to do with the dynamic of British politics, or with the economic crisis. It is not part of the English culture, which now has to be indeed protected against pollution – it does not belong to the ‘English ideology’. It’s an external virus somehow injected into the body politic and it’s a matter of *policy* whether we can deal with it or not – it’s not a matter of *politics*.

I hope to persuade you that this view cannot be true. It is not true of the historical past. And it is certainly not true of the decades since the 1950s, the ‘high tide’ of post-war black migration to Britain. We can’t account for the emergence of a specifically *indigenous* British racism in this way. This last phase, the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, is of course the main subject I want to come on to in a moment. But something first must be said about the historical aspects. Britain’s relations with the peoples of the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent do not, of course, belong to and begin in the 1940s. British attitudes to the ex-colonial subject peoples of a former time cannot be accurately charted from the appearance of a black proletariat in Birmingham or Bradford in the 1950s. These relations have been central features in the formation of Britain’s material prosperity and dominance, as they are now central themes in English culture and in popular and official ideologies. That story should not indeed require to be rehearsed. Britain’s rise to mercantile dominance, and the process of generating the surpluses of wealth which set economic development in motion, were founded on the slave trade and the plantation system in the Americas in the seventeenth century. India provided the basis for the foundation of Britain’s Asian empire in the eighteenth; the penetration by trade of Latin America and of the Far East was the centre-piece of Britain’s industrial and imperial hegemony in the nineteenth. In each of these phases, an economic and cultural chain – in short, to be brutal, the imperialist chain – has bound the fate of millions of workers and peasants in the colonial hinterlands to the destiny of rich and poor in the heartland of English society. The wealth – drawn off through conquest, colonisation and trade – has slightly enriched one English class after another. It has supported the foundation of one flourishing urban culture after another. It has led to one phase of economic development after another. It is, in a sense, geography and distance which has rendered this long historical connection

invisible. It's only in the very last phase of British imperialism that the labouring classes of the satellite countries and the labouring classes of the metropolis have had to confront one another directly 'on native ground' in large numbers. But that is not the same thing as saying that their fates have not long been indissolubly connected.

I want to make the proposition that the very definition in the 1970s of what it is to be English has been articulated around this. If the blood of the colonial workers has not mingled extensively with the English, then their labour-power has long entered the economic blood-stream of British society. It is in the sugar you stir; it is in the sinews of the famous British 'sweet tooth'; it is in the tea-leaves at the bottom of the next 'British' cuppa.

I want to turn on that point and argue that the development of an indigenous British racism in the post-war period *begins* with the profound historical forgetfulness – what I want to call the loss of historical memory, a kind of historical amnesia, a decisive mental repression – which has overtaken the British people about race and empire since the 1950s. Paradoxically, it seems to me, the native, home-grown variety of racism begins with this attempt to wipe out and efface every trace of the colonial and imperial past. Clearly, that is one effect of the traumatic adjustment to the very process of bringing Empire to an end. But, undoubtedly, it has left an enormous reservoir of guilt and a deep, historical, resentment. It's not possible to operate surgically so directly on popular memory without leaving scars and traces. And, undoubtedly, this reservoir of resentment and guilt, which does not find easy expression any longer in, for instance, the forms of popular imperialism in which it did at the end of the nineteenth century, but which is nevertheless there, has undoubtedly nourished and provides something of a reservoir for the indigenous racism of the 1950s and 1960s. Its lingering legacy may in fact account for something of racism's popular appeal in the last twenty years. Thus, that history has to be reckoned with, by one way or another. But it cannot alone explain the growth of a home-grown racism in Britain in the last twenty years.

To do this, we have to turn to the factors which are more internal to British society, factors which have made racism a growing and dynamic political force in Britain since the 1950s. And here perhaps I should say that it's not helpful to define racism as a 'natural' and permanent feature – either of all societies or indeed of a sort of universal 'human

nature'. It's not a permanent human or social deposit which is simply waiting there to be triggered off when the circumstances are right. It has no natural and universal law of development. It does not always assume the same shape. There have been many significantly different *racisms* – each historically specific and articulated in a different way with the societies in which they appear. Racism is always historically specific in this way, whatever common features it may appear to share with other similar social phenomena. Though it may draw on the cultural and ideological traces which are deposited in a society by previous historical phases, it always assumes specific forms which arise out of *present* – not past – conditions and organisation of society. It may matter less that Britain has, over four centuries, been involved in modes of economic exploitation and political dominance, on a world scale, which frequently operated through the mechanism of race. This only signals the potential – perhaps, the propensity – of the society to travel that route again. But the indigenous racism of the 1960s and 1970s is significantly different, in form and effect, from the racism of the 'high' colonial period. It is a racism 'at home', not abroad; it is the racism, not of a dominant but of a declining social formation. It is to the construction of this home grown variety that I want now to turn.

First, it's necessary to establish some kind of rough periodisation. But in doing this, I ask you to hold two different perspectives in mind at the same time. I think we must look, what I call *sequentially*, at the way in which racism has been constructed and developed through the three decades; at its development as a process; at its forms and its deepening impact from one stage to another. Here we are interested in what the turning points have been. But at the same time, I think it's important to look *laterally* at what are the other things with which this developing racism has been connected.

We start at the period of the late 1940s and 1950s, the period of initial settlement. Here, we find the build up of black workers in the labour-hungry centres of British production. It's a period when industry is, of course, swinging over from war-time to peace-time production. It leads in to the great productive 'boom' of the mid-1950s. The main outlines of the pattern of black settlement are established in this phase: the inner-city black concentrations, multiple-occupancy, the density of black labour in certain specific occupational sectors. In this period, accommodation and adjustment between blacks and whites is on the agenda. The black population, on the whole, maintain what I would

call a 'low profile'. They draw their curtains both against the cold and against the 'outsider'. They efface themselves as an intrusive presence. They are tiptoeing through the tulips. It's a period of muted optimism about the hope and dream of long-term black and white assimilation.

The real environment where this proposition is to be tested is, of course, in the jobs and localities where black and white workers meet and live. There are, indeed, even in this early phase, problems of adjustment between blacks and whites. What is not present are the strictly defined lines of informal segregation between blacks and whites which has come to be the prevailing social pattern in such areas. The whole period is one which Sivanandan has called the 'laissez-faire' period in British immigration politics. It's the period of the 'open door'. Remember that it's lubricated by the economic boom. The need in British industry to draw heavily on this new reserve army of labour weakens both any official resistance to the introduction of a black proletariat and the sense of competition for jobs between blacks and whites. The segmentation of blacks and Asian workers in particular occupational sectors helps in this shielding process. But above all, rising living standards in this period provide just that economic space, just that room for economic manoeuvre, especially in the urban areas, which gives people from different ethnic backgrounds a little room to settle and move in, to put it crudely. The modest 'optimism' about race in this period is closely dependent on a general climate of economic optimism and the one is an expression of the other.

The real history of that early phase remains to be written. But the first signs of an open and emergent racism of a specifically indigenous type appears, of course, in the race riots of Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958. These riots cannot be directly attributed to the early warning signs of a developing economic crisis, though those are undoubtedly on stage. Notting Hill is a classic scenario for the appearance of indigenous racism: it's one of those 'traditional urban zones' where, for the first time, the incipient 'colony' life of blacks begins for the first time to flourish and expand at the very heart of the British city.

In the race riots of 1958, there are three constituent elements. The first is the appearance, for the first time in real terms since the 1940s, of an active fascist political element: the Unionist movement and the dissident League of Empire Loyalists. They saw, quite correctly, that the uneven development of culture in an area like this, with its

incipient but growing urban problems, provided a more favourable terrain for the construction of a native racism than, for example, the more traditional structures of an older area of settlement, like Brixton. They introduced the syntax of racism into street-corner politics for the first time openly in the post-war period. But, in effect, they were at that stage more symptom than cause.

The second element, however, is more important. It is the structured antagonism between 'colony' blacks and sections of the indigenous white working class and petty-bourgeoisie of this decaying 'royal' suburb. It is against this fulcrum – which marks the interconnection between the politics of race and the politics of the inner city – that the wheel of British racism first begins to turn.

The third, and active element – that which attracted the publicity and the talk – was white teenagers. Here, looking laterally, it is worthwhile reminding you that Notting Hill race riots have two histories, not one. It has a history in the development and the emergence of British racism and also in the panics about youth and affluence and permissiveness in the 1950s. It is part of that double structure. If the presence of blacks within the area touched sources of public anxiety about competition over scarce resources and coming competition over jobs and so on, the spectacle of black and white youths, locked in confrontation around the tube station and the back streets of North Kensington, fed directly into a deep and troubled anxiety about the whole process of post-war social change – a process, incidentally, for which the term 'Youth' had by then become a vivid social metaphor. In its famous editorial 'Hooliganism is Hooliganism', *The Times* mapped the Notting Hill events directly, not into the problem of race or of urban poverty, but into the problem of hooliganism, teenage violence, lawlessness, anarchy, together with the football spectator – an ancient ring that term has – and the railway carriage breaker – an even more ancient formulation. 'All', *The Times* said, 'are manifestations of a strand of our social behaviour that an adult society can do without'. As the economic downturn begins and youth culture surges forward, Britain introduces, in 1962, the first Commonwealth Immigration Act, which imposes controls on the 'flow of black people into the society'.

The second turning point is 1964. For, by now, the economic boom has tapered off, and the classes which have to be addressed about the growing material problems – which in the 1950s you will remember were defined as never to appear again – are no longer composed

of runaway Teddy Boys or football hooligans, but adult white workers, and their families. The location of the new turning point in the emergence of post-war racism therefore takes place not in the decaying transitional zone of Notting Hill but in the very heartland of traditional and conservative Britain: Smethwick, the Midlands. Peter Griffiths's successful campaign which centred on black immigration in the 1964 election marks the first moment when racism is appropriated into the official policy and programme of a major political party and legitimated as the basis of an electoral appeal, specifically addressed to the popular white classes. Here is the beginning of racism as an element in the official politics of British populism – racism in a structured and 'legitimate' form. The defeat of a Labour minister on the issues proved the penetration of this ideology into the organised working class and to the labour institutions themselves. It revealed the degree to which, as a consequence, of everything that had happened to the labour movement in the 1950s and 1960s, sectors of the working class were by now clearly exposed and vulnerable to the construction of a popular racism. The Smethwick victory is a turning point in the history of British racism. It is followed by the 1965 White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth, which, as Robert Moore has recently observed, 'laid the ideological basis for subsequent policy in this area and as a result, the argument that the numbers of immigrants was the essence of the problem'.

Between 1964 and 1968, the date of our third 'turning point', it seems that the world itself, not just Smethwick, turned. It turned, of course, specifically about race. The dream of assimilation of black people to white culture is laid low and interned in the mid-1960s. The black population draws back into its defensive enclaves and, much affected in the 1960s by the rise of black struggles, especially in the United States, begins to develop a different, distinct and more actively engaged political ideology. But 1968 is also, of course, a cataclysmic year, not only in Britain but elsewhere: in the US, France, Italy, Germany, Japan and Czechoslovakia. It is the period of growing protests against the Vietnam War. It's the year of the student revolutions, of black power and black separatism, of the cultural underground; of 'hot' summers followed by 'hot' autumns. It inaugurates, in Britain and elsewhere, a period of profound social, cultural and political polarisation. It is when the great consensus of the 1950s and early 1960s comes apart, when the 'politics of the centre' dissolves and reveals the contradictions and social

antagonisms which are gathering beneath. It is, more specifically, a period in which the state and the dominant classes perceive, not simply what had tended to transfix them in the 1950s, that is to say the plague of 'permissiveness', the loss of traditional standards and landmarks, but something much worse than that – something close to an organised and active conspiracy against the social order itself. It is the year in which President Nixon wins an infamous victory by summoning up the 'silent majority' in the service of 'law and order'.

'Powellism' is formed in this moment, in this crucible. By 'Powellism' I mean something larger and more significant than the enunciation of a specifically defiant policy about race and the black population by a single person. I mean the formation of an 'official' racist policy at the heart of British political culture. Mr Powell's personal pronouncements on race in 1968 and 1969 have since become justly famous. It is not so frequently remarked that 'Powellism', though it undoubtedly derived its cutting edge from the resonance of its racial themes, was indeed directed more widely at the general crisis of the social order itself; at the conspiracy of radical and alien forces threatening the society, at what Mr Powell himself called the 'Enemy Within'. Nor can the articulation of this talk of 'conspiracy' and 'threats to the social order' be laid exclusively at his door. A range of politicians and public spokesmen in the press and the media in this period are mesmerised by the spectacle of a society which is careering into a social crisis.

### **A crisis of authority**

It is this whole crisis, not race alone, which is the subject and object of the law and order campaigns of the period and the increasingly vigorous appeal to 'tough measures'. But, undoubtedly, as far as what one might call the 'crisis' talk in British society is concerned, it is largely thematised through race. Race is the prism through which the British people are called upon to live through, then to understand, and then to deal with, the growing crisis. The 'Enemy' is 'within the gates'. 'He' is nameless: 'he' is protean: 'he' is everywhere. He may even, we're told at the one point, be inside the Foreign Office, cooking the immigration figures. But someone will name him. He is 'the Other', he is the stranger in the midst, he is the cuckoo in the nest, he is the excrement in the letterbox. 'He' is – the

blacks. This ideology, which is formed in response to a crisis, must of course, to become a real and historical political force, connect with the lived experiences of the 'silent majorities'. It must be given a concrete purchase on the lives of citizens, on their everyday going and comings, on their conditions of existence, if they are to feel that the 'threat to society' is palpable and real. When the 'silent' and beleaguered majorities – the great underclasses, the great, silent 'British public' – are made to 'speak' through the ventriloquism of its public articulators, it is not surprising that it 'speaks' with the unmistakable accent of a thoroughly home-grown racism. In this period 'Powellism' may be kept out of political power. But in this period it dominated and defined the ideological terrain. Both the Act of 1968 with its explicit use of racial categories, and the 1971 Act, which succeeded in bearing down on dependents and families of black and Asian workers, are tributes to its profound and long term success, that is to say, its popular, mobilising appeal.

It is on the back of that moment that the great backlash of the 1970s comes to be constructed. It moves on each of the fronts at once: political, industrial, economic, racial, ideological. As the true depths of the British economic recession begin to be revealed and as the state girds up its loins to confront directly what is called the hidden materialism of the working class, we witness the construction of what I have come to call a 'soft law and order' society. The law itself becomes, in this period, in part the engine of this social regression.

On the industrial front, it is indeed the law which is recruited directly into the confrontation with the working class. On the political front, it is the law which is mobilised against radicals and demonstrators and 'extremists'. It is in this period that the syntax was formed of extremists versus moderates, without which at one stage it seemed impossible for the media to comment on politics at all. The legal harassment of the black colony populations, the overt racist homilies against the whole black population by judges in courts, the imposition of tough policing and arrest on suspicion in the colony areas, the rising hysteria about black crime and the identification of black crime with 'mugging', must all be seen the context of what, in the early 1970s, is a decisive turn in the whole society into a form of popular authoritarianism. Here what we had defined earlier as a set of discrete panics about race can no longer be identified in that way. It is impossible to separate them out. The lulls between them

now are only temporary: the running warfare between unemployed black youth and the police; the swamping tactics of the Special Patrol Groups in the colony areas; the arrests of black political activists 'on suspicion'; the scare, fanned by sections of the press, against Ugandan and then Malawi Asians – the great, prophesied 'tidal wave' at last. Here are the 'scandalous' stories of Asian families 'living in luxury off the Council' – which is only the black counterpart of that general assault on the welfare state which has produced its white counterpart in stories of welfare scroungers drawing their dole on the Costa Brava. There are the beginnings of attacks on black centres and black book shops, the murder of Asian youths, the confrontations in Brockwell Park and other scenes of set warfare, the fining and focussing down of the problem of race into its concrete conditions in the inner-city. In these areas, the programmes of urban aid have failed to stem the tide of poverty and decay. The cycles of unemployment and the fears of recession are beginning to bite. Young blacks are increasingly unemployed – drifting, as every unemployed section of the working class historically has, into petty crime and pilfering. The colony areas are the incipient basis for an increasingly restless and alienated population. This is where the crisis bites. Practically, these areas have to be *policed* with increasing strictness. But, also, the crisis has to be explained. Ideologically it has to be dealt with, contained and managed. Blacks become the bearers, the signifiers, of the crisis of British society in the 1970s: racism is its 'final solution'. The class which is called upon to bear the brunt of a deepening economic crisis is divided and segmented – along racial lines. If racism had not existed as a plausible way in which the underclasses of society could have 'lived through' the crisis of the British social formation in the 1970s, it would surely have had to be invented then.

This is not a crisis of race. But race punctuates and periodises the crisis. Race is the lens through which people come to perceive that a crisis is developing. It is the framework through which the crisis is experienced. It is the means by which the crisis is to be resolved – 'send it away'. It is the means through which the movement, at the level of politics and the state, is 'pioneered' towards what we must now regard as a quite exceptional movement and form: a movement which comes to rely much less than it had in the previous two decades on the construction of consensus, and much more on the law and on coercion. Race is the sound in the working of the society, or a social

order, which is girding itself up to iron times, preparing to take tough measures for tough circumstances. It is, above all, the language of racism which has the effect of connecting the 'crisis of the state' *above* with the state of the streets, and little old ladies hustled off pavements in the depths down *below*. That is to say, it makes the 'crisis' real for ordinary people. It's like hanging, it 'wonderfully concentrates the popular mind'.

In his famous speech at Northfield during the 1970 election, Mr Powell had warned of what he called the 'invisible enemy within' – students 'destroying' universities and 'terrorising' cities, 'bringing down' governments; of the power of the form of the modern mob – the demonstration – making 'governments tremble'; the success of disorder, 'deliberately fomented for its own sake', the near-destruction of civil government in Northern Ireland; and the accumulation of what he called 'further combustible material' of 'another kind'. The problem, however, he asserted, has been 'miscalled race'. Race is being used, he suggested, to mystify and confuse the people. The real target is not race. It is the great liberal conspiracy, inside government and the media, which has held ordinary people up to ransom, making them fearful to speak the truth for the fear of being called 'racialist' and 'literally made to say that black is white'. It is race – but now as the pivot of this 'process of brainwashing by repetition of manifest absurdities'; it is race as a 'secret weapon', 'depriving them of their wits and convincing them that what they thought right was wrong'; in short, it's race as the conspiracy of silence against the silent and long-suffering majorities – the white majorities. This is the language of an authentic, regressive, national populism. It is articulated, of course, through the potent metaphors of race. Its echo, of course, lives on, expanded and amplified in the panic climate of 1978 – even if the terms are different, the rhetoric less compelling, and the accent more 'refined'. Populist racism is no longer the preserve and prerogative of a minority which is prophesying in the wilderness. It has become 'naturalised' – the normal currency of exchange at the heart of the political culture about this question, and it can be read, any day, on the front page of the *Daily Mail*.

I have said that the emergence of an ideology of indigenous racism has often assumed what I called the form of a 'moral panic'. I want now to say a word about what a moral panic is and how I think it operates. Moral panics have been defined as follows, in a quotation

from Stan Cohen's book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, which is a study of mods and rockers in the 1960s:

Societies appear every now and then to be subject to periods of moral panic. A condition, an episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylized and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors and bishops and politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved, or more often resorted to; the condition then disappears or submerges or deteriorates and becomes more visible. Sometimes the panic is passed over and forgotten, but at other times it has more serious and long-term repercussions and it might produce changes in legal and social policy or even in the way in which the societies conceive themselves.<sup>2</sup>

That definition, which is about youth and the way in which society has reacted to the problems of youth in the 1950s and 1960s, could, I think, with very little alteration, be extended to the emergence in Britain of an indigenous racism. The important features of the 'moral panic' as an ideological process are these: it represents a way of dealing with what are diffuse and often unorganised social fears and anxieties. It deals with those fears and anxieties, not by addressing the real problems and conditions which underlie them, but by projecting and displacing them on to the identified social group. That is to say, the moral panic crystallises popular fears and anxieties which have a real basis, and, by providing them with a simple, concrete, identifiable, simple, social object, seeks to resolve them. Around these stigmatised groups or events, a powerful and popular groundswell of opinion can often be mustered. It is a groundswell which calls, in popular accents, on the 'authorities' to take controlling action. 'Moral panics', therefore, frequently serve as ways of pioneering practices by the state which, in the end, increase effective social control, but with this difference: it is the movement towards a closing of a society which has the popular legitimacy, which has been able to win popular consent. That is to say, the moral panic is one of the forms in which a largely voiceless and essentially powerless section of the community can draw attention and give expression to their concrete problems and call for remedies

and solutions. Thus, the language of moral panics, whether they're about race or youth, provide a set of simple explanatory terms. They provide a popular vocabulary of discontent and are the way in which the people address themselves to their problems and address those problems to those in power. They consequently also provide vocabularies and motive and action through which the people themselves can be addressed. And in formal democracies, where policies, especially when they are tough and constraining, have to be given popular legitimacy and consent, 'moral panics' can also sometimes provide the basis by which a kind of authoritarianism can be *constructed*.

We have, undoubtedly, in the late 1960s and 1970s, seen both parts of this process in operation. We have seen a distinctive movement towards a movement of closure and of control in the state, and the complementary construction of popular authoritarian ideologies, of which racism is, in my view, only one. Both have operated, of course, in the condition of a deepening economic recession. Though they are not reducible to the economic level, they are quite specific ideological processes. They need to be understood as such. Indeed, whichever political party has been in power and in control of the management of the crisis, the ideological terrain has undoubtedly been defined and colonised through this shift into authoritarianism.

So we can find it in the general assault on the concept of welfare, the militant advocacy of the virtues of social competition and of what are now called 'social market values'. We find it in the assault on 'progressive' and 'comprehensive' trends in education, in the call for a 'return' to standards and to the traditional curriculum, and to discipline and authority in the classroom and, if necessary, to corporal punishment and the cane. We can find it in the aggressive defence of traditional moral standards and values and the traditional family, and the opposition to every tentative movement of liberalisation in the moral and sexual area and, above all, in the position of women. We find it in the 'moral backlash' itself, in the summons to worship at the traditional shrines and pieties.

Race is only one of the elements in this wider ideological crusade to 'clean up' Britain, to roll up the map of progressive liberalism and to turn the clock of history back to the times when the world was 'safe for ordinary Englishmen'. And parties in power, of whatever political complexion, which fondly imagine that they are in command of the forces and tendencies which are moving and shaping popular

consciousness, and do not remotely appear to understand the degree to which they are not riding, but *ridden*, well, they too are driven and directed by this wave. The historical stage, the political agenda, has been set, quite often, in the 1970s, in the ideological terrain specifically, and the political and economic forces have followed in the channels which they have opened up.

I want to insist that race is *one* element of this crisis which belongs to the British social formation as a whole, and that it has been a leading, indeed a key, element in the process. It is grounded in natural, obvious, visible, biological facts. It is a way of drawing distinctions and of making differences in practices which are perfectly 'natural', which are given, which are universal, which we are told all of us have a trace of. It has, for instance, become an acceptable explanation of some features of racism in the British police, in their interactions with the black population, that, after all, they are only a cross-section of the 'great British public'. That is to say, there is bound 'naturally' to be a due proportion of 'racists' among them. Race provides precisely the set of simplifications which makes it possible to deal with and explain troubling developments of that kind. After all, who now wants to begin to explore and unravel the complex tissue of political and economic forces which have created and sustained the poverty of inner-urban working-class districts? Who has time for that complicated exercise, especially if it requires us to trace and make connections between things which it is better to keep apart? Above all, if there is a simple, obvious and more natural explanation at hand? Of course they are 'poor' because the *blacks* are *here*. That is not a logical proposition, but ideologies do not function by logic – they have logic of their own. Race has provided, in periods of crisis and upheaval, precisely such a self-justifying circle of explanations.

I want to end by insisting on that. I want to insist that racism is not a set of false pleas which swim around in the head. They're not a set of mistaken perceptions. They have their basis in real material conditions of existence. They arise because of the concrete problems of different classes and groups in the society. Racism represents the attempt ideologically to construct those conditions, contradictions and problems in such a way that they can be dealt with and deflected in the same moment. That instead of confronting the conditions and problems which indeed do face white and black in the urban areas, in an economy in recession, they can be projected away through race.

Until the specificity of a British racism which has those real authentic material conditions at its roots, which does indeed address the real problems of the people, which is not a set of phoney conspiracies generated in the heads of the ruling class, which has a real life at the base of the society – until we can confront a racism which is specific in that sense, we haven't a hope, in my view, of turning the tide.

## Notes

1. James Walvin, *Black and White: Negro and English Society, 1555-1945*, Allen Lane 1973.
2. Stan Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Creation of Mods and Rockers*, MacGibbon and Kee 1972.