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### SHIRIN HIRSCH – IN THE SHADOW OF ENOCH POWELL

Due to its recent 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Enoch Powell's infamous 1968 anti-immigration 'Rivers of Blood' speech has received plenty of renewed attention – a contentious BBC Radio 4 documentary, a proposed blue plaque in Powell's old parliamentary constituency of Wolverhampton, and subsequent charges from some that Britain is 'obsessed by Powell rather than fighting today's battles over racism'. However, Shirin Hirsch's *In the Shadow of Enoch Powell* successfully connects the past with the present by illustrating Powell's lingering influence on discussions about race and immigration in modern Britain.

Hirsch's focus makes this a different book than other works on Powell, in that it places the industrial town of Wolverhampton, its people, and their response to Powell's speech at the forefront. It aims to give a voice to local people of colour, too often rendered silent by contemporary media reports and subsequent discussions. This local focus forwards one of the book's central arguments: that Powell's Wolverhampton constituency witnessed his shift from the paternalistic racism of the global British Empire towards a local focus that characterised non-white immigrants as a threat. This saw a repositioning of his ideology based around efforts to maintain national stability through reconceptualising Wolverhampton – and England – as a historically harmonious and white dominion.

The book's focus on Wolverhampton allows Hirsch to refute such constructions and to consider both the impact on and the response of local people of colour following Powell's speech. This is achieved through a range of illuminating and often powerful sources, such as the media and interviews – both archival and conducted by the author. Local patterns of resistance emerged in response to Powell's speech, and these are placed by Hirsch within longer struggles for recognition in arenas such as the labour movement and multiracial education. Disputes in this period demonstrate how the term 'immigrant' was used as code for 'non-white', as Powell furthered discursive constructions of ideas of immigration as really being ideas of race. However, if 'Rivers of Blood' fostered new forms of racism in Britain, the response demonstrated that new forms of resistance were also emerging. Movements that would require time and organisation to grow more effective, but that nonetheless developed from daily responses to the racism that was fuelled by Powell's speech.

The book is split into various thematic chapters: locating Powell and his 1968 speech within postcolonial Britain; the history and racial dynamics of Wolverhampton; the local response and patterns of resistance to 'Rivers of Blood'; and the contested legacy of Powell and his speech. This structure is effective, allowing for a strong focus and argument to be maintained throughout. For example, the chapter on Powell's legacy begins with a quotation from Powell himself, taken from his 1977 biography of Joseph Chamberlain: 'All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at some happy juncture, end in failure.' It is demonstrated how many have attempted to rehabilitate Powell and the 'failures' of his political career by downplaying or ignoring his racism, while others have endeavoured to portray his legacy as one of sacrifice: that his interjections on race and immigration in the public discourse came at the cost of his own political career. Hirsch concludes that Powell remains a figure evoked by all sides: utilised both to criticise apparent limitations placed on conversations about immigration and to restrict access to a nuanced history of anti-racist struggle and resistance.

This book may be considered quite short; however, it by no means neglects the key points. While some aspects are raised that might have been further discussed, the book does a good job of addressing these without detracting from its central focus and concise argument. For example, when outlining the post-speech strikes that have traditionally been portrayed as demonstrating working-class solidarity with Powell – recent scholarship has questioned the actual depths of working-class support – Hirsch deftly brings this back to Wolverhampton through examination of local trade union activity and instances of workers' support (or otherwise) for Powell. It would be interesting to examine potential further links through other aspects, such as possible connections with the Black supplementary school movement or legacy for the often-fragmented Black Power movement in Britain; but these, of course, are not this work's central focus.

When I mentioned in passing to somebody that I was reading a book on Powell, their response was: 'Do we really need to keep talking about Enoch Powell?' This important book clearly and effectively demonstrates the significance and legacy of Powell and his 'Rivers of Blood' – the new forms of both racism and opposition that it prompted – in order to understand and combat the contemporary racism in Britain.

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