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“Cause for Concern”? Policing Black Migrants in Post-War Britain (1945-68)

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Immigrants & Minorities

Abstract: This article explores how Black migrants were routinely considered to be a 'cause for concern' in post-war Britain, identified as 'undesirables' and subjected to discriminatory policing practices. Despite the police's professed 'colour-blind' approach of 'non-differentiation' – often raising difficulties or contradictions when called on for their observations – characterisations of Black people as 'more predisposed towards criminality' led to their being disproportionately targeted by the police's discretionary powers. Utilising Home Office and Metropolitan Police Office records, this article demonstrates how the police's professed attempts at liaison with Black communities and recording of 'racial disturbances' were in reality efforts to monitor and 'prove' notions of Black criminality, which, in some cases, led to calls from the police for the mass deportation of so-called 'undesirables'.

“Cause for Concern?”: Policing Black Migrants in Post-War Britain (1945-68)

In July 1968, the BBC television series *Cause for Concern* broadcast an episode entitled ‘Equal Before the Law?’. Described in the *Radio Times* as addressing the central question of ‘Is the black man particularly vulnerable when he comes up against the law?’, it focussed on accusations of police racism and abuse of their powers.¹ Despite concerted police efforts to prevent it from being aired, protests and pickets – by those concerned about police attempts at censoring the BBC as well as by Black activists – ensured that the documentary and subsequent live panel discussion reached its audience with a significant impact.² Characterised as a ‘full-scale confrontation’ by Nicholas Deakin, Darcus Howe – prominent activist, commentator, and leading participant in the live studio discussion – himself described it as a ‘major watershed in the struggle in which the police and black community were locked’.³

This ‘struggle’ between the police and Black community in Britain has been well documented in the existing historiography.⁴ But, as Christopher Fevre has recently argued, this has often focused on the 1970s and 1980s: ‘this period cannot be understood in isolation. There is a longer history of black resistance to racially discriminatory policing that historians have yet to explore fully.’⁵ Certainly, it had begun well before 1968 as Black people have repeatedly been designated as a ‘cause for concern’ in modern Britain.⁶ As, indeed, have other racialised groups. Many writers have explored Britain’s long history of immigration – Colin Holmes noted that it is difficult to locate a period within British history where immigration did not take place – and the historical marginalisation and persecution of migrants and racialised people has been similarly repeatedly demonstrated, not least through other contributions in this current collection. For instance, studies have explored African people in the Tudor, Victorian or Edwardian periods, arrivals from Ireland or Eastern Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (stoking fears about immigration that led to the introduction of the 1905 Aliens Act), and racist riots in 1919.⁷ Illustrative of such, Jacqueline Jenkinson summarised:

During the seaport riots [in 1919], distinctions were frequently drawn between the rights of ‘British’ on the one hand and black, or more often ‘coloured’, sailors on the other. These distinctions were made by individuals across the social spectrum, including white rioters, members of the police forces in the riot ports, trades unionists, magistrates and lawyers during

¹ *Radio Times*, Issue 2332, 26 July 1968.

² ‘Black’ in this article is used to refer to people of African and Caribbean descent.

³ Deakin, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society*, p. 244; Darcus Howe, *From Bobby to Babylon: Blacks and the British Police* (London, 1988), p. 29 as cited in Bunce and Field, *Darcus Howe*, pp. 51-8.

⁴ See, for example: Solomos, *Black Youth, Racism and the State*; Cashmore and McLaughlin (eds), *Out of Order?; Hall et al., Policing the Crisis*; Keith, *Race, Riots and Policing*.

⁵ Fevre, “‘Race’ and Resistance to Policing Before the “Windrush Years””.

⁶ See, for example: Rowe, *The Racialisation of Disorder*; Long, *Perpetual Suspects*, pp. 21-41.

⁷ Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, p. 3. See, for example: Nubia, *Black Tudor Society*; Bressey, ‘The Black presence in Britain 1860-1920’; Ramdin, *Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History*; MacRaild, *The Irish Diaspora in Britain*, pp. 161-88; Hickman, ‘Reconstructing Deconstructing “Race”’; Cohen, ‘Race and Jews in Turn-of-the-Century Britain’; Bashford and Gilchrist, ‘The Colonial History of the 1905 Aliens Act’.

riot trials and also in the press. Britishness was ‘colour’ coded, and only grudgingly and infrequently were the rights of black British subjects recognized and considered.⁸

Such a distinction can similarly be seen in the reaction to the arrival of the *SS Empire Windrush* in 1948, which has long been cemented as a mythical ‘starting point’ for post-war immigration – based on selective history and omitting racialised people in Britain before *Windrush* or who arrived at different times through different means.⁹ Infamously, eleven Labour MPs immediately wrote to Prime Minister Clement Attlee, fearing the potential impact that Black migrants might have on ‘the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life’. They continued to suggest that the British Government should introduce some form of immigration controls to target such migrants; restrictions that they believed would be ‘almost universally approved by *our* people’.¹⁰ Such arguments reveal attitudes believing that the Black arrivals onboard the *Windrush* may technically have been subjects of the British Empire – or, following the 1948 British Nationality Act, citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies – but that, because they were Black, they were not and could never be *actually* British. Such portrayals demonstrate beliefs that Black people were deemed unable to assimilate into British society and would therefore cause great social tension. Attlee’s response to these letter-writing Labour MPs was to portray West Indian immigration as merely a temporary post-war phenomenon, not to be taken ‘too seriously’, and that the ‘majority’ of the *Windrush* arrivals ‘are honest workers, who can make a genuine contribution to our labour difficulties at the present time’. Nevertheless, he concluded that, ‘If our policy were to result in a great influx of undesirables, we might – however unwillingly – have to consider modifying it.’ Subsequently, as Dennis Dean summarised, ‘the term “undesirable” which was never defined precisely, came to be associated with influx of immigrants’.¹¹

While Attlee’s comments demonstrate official attitudes that immigration had not yet reached ‘problematic’ levels, increasing numbers of arrivals during the 1950s led to growing concerns and calls for increased immigration restrictions. Philip Cohen has demonstrated, using the example of Irish immigration, how ‘Visibility is socially constructed and can change over time’.¹² As many writers have noted, in response to more ‘visible’ migrants from the ‘New Commonwealth’ appearing in greater numbers within ‘metropolitan Britain’, the post-war period witnessed increased attempts at – to use the title of Kathleen Paul’s study – ‘whitewashing Britain’.¹³ A number of other migrant groups previously considered ‘undesirable’, such as Irish or Cypriots, to varying degrees ‘came to be considered “white”

⁸ Jenkinson, *Black 1919*, p. 5.

⁹ For critical discussion of this ‘Windrush-as-origins’ myth, see: Peplow, ‘The Rise of the “Windrush Narrative” in British Newspapers’.

¹⁰ Quoted in Carter, Harris and Joshi, ‘The Racialization of Black Immigration’, 335. Emphasis added.

¹¹ Dean, ‘Black Communities in Great Britain 1945–51’, 317. See also, for example: Schwarz, *White Man’s World*; Schofield, *The Making of Postcolonial Britain*; Joshi and Carter, ‘The Creation of a Racist Britain’.

¹² Cohen, ‘The Perversions of Inheritance’, p. 14.

¹³ The ‘New Commonwealth’ was a term applied to refer to recently decolonised countries, particularly in the Caribbean, Africa, and South Asia; Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*.

(and therefore acceptable).¹⁴ Debate in the literature has questioned the driving force behind increased calls for restrictions; earlier writers portrayed the post-war years as a period of *laissez-faire* immigration, where the liberal British State was reluctantly pushed by popular anxieties into the creation of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.¹⁵ Although some later additions to the historiography still hold that position, most notably Randall Hansen, this viewpoint was largely questioned with the subsequent release of government documents.¹⁶ For instance, Bob Carter *et al.* revealed how the state was instrumental in constructing Black migration as a ‘problem’, and that ‘racist policies and practices were an integral part of this construction’.¹⁷ Consequently, by extension, Black people themselves were considered to be a ‘problem’ group. For instance, in 1960, the Conservative Home Secretary Rab Butler circulated a memorandum to Cabinet depicting ‘a remarkable increase in the rate at which West Indian immigrants are coming here... The situation is clearly disquieting’. An earlier Home Office draft of this memorandum portrayed concerns over ‘The growing number of immigrants [who] tend to establish themselves in wholly coloured communities; this will make their assimilation to our ways of life more difficult, and the friction which is never very far beneath the surface will be more likely to come into the open.’¹⁸ Attitudes that Black migrants were unable to assimilate into British society also manifested themselves in fears regarding miscegenation. Offering some feedback on the Home Office’s draft memorandum, G.W. St. John Chadwick, Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the Commonwealth Relations Office, suggested that ‘we should make it clear that there was a large proportion of women amongst the Colonial immigrants, lest the impression be given that the projected increase in population would be mainly composed of half-castes!’.¹⁹

This article considers how, in the post-war period of heavily racialised immigration, the police were often at the centre of constructions that portrayed Black migrants as ‘undesirables’ – but that issues were raised by attempts to appear to be maintaining a liberal, ‘colour-blind’ approach. Geoff Pearson and Mike Rowe, utilising Keith Hawkins work on the uses of discretion, noted:

As public servants, operating out of sight of immediate supervision, frontline police officers have significant scope to exercise discretion... [street level being the point] ‘where the tensions, dilemmas, and sometimes contradictions embodied in the law are worked out in practice’.²⁰

¹⁴ Smith and Varnava, ‘Creating a “Suspect Community”’, 1158. See: Hiro, *Black British, White British*; Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, pp. 246-53.

¹⁵ For example, Foot, ‘Immigration and the British Labour Movement’; Rose, *Colour and Citizenship*; Freeman and Spencer, ‘Immigration Control’.

¹⁶ Hansen, *Citizenship and Immigration in Post-war Britain*.

¹⁷ Carter, Harris and Joshi, ‘The Racialization of Black Immigration’, 335. See also: Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*; Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black*.

¹⁸ The National Archives (TNA): HO 344/135, Draft Cabinet Memorandum by the Home Secretary, ‘Coloured Immigration from the Commonwealth’, November 1960.

¹⁹ TNA: HO 344/135, BSI/60 2/1/8, 3 November 1960. Lucy Bland particularly has published on this topic: ‘White Women and Men of Colour’; *Britain’s ‘Brown Babies’*.

²⁰ Keith Hawkins, ‘The Use of Legal Discretion: Perspectives from Law and Social Sciences’, in Hawkins (ed.), *The Uses of Discretion* (Oxford, 1992), p. 11 as cited in Pearson and Rowe, *Police Street Powers and Criminal*

Related to this, many studies have demonstrated the prevalence of racism and discrimination in histories of the UK police.²¹ While the declared ‘Peelian principles’ of British policing have been centred around notions of ‘policing by consent’, Georgina Sinclair and Chris A. Williams concluded that the UK police increasingly ‘in many ways followed the example of the colonial police... [which was] designed to maximise the ability of governments to control specific populations’.²² Police tactics, such as ‘over-policing’, have been characterised as something of a continuation of colonial policing practices. For example, John Rex highlighted the appointment of a former colonial officer as ‘Liaison Officer for Coloured People’ in Birmingham in the 1960s, demonstrating the perceived association between such roles.²³ Legacies of imperial notions of European superiority also fed into what Stuart Hall and others have described as ‘moral panics’ about Black criminality – most infamously demonstrated by the ‘mugging crisis’ of the 1970s, also illustrated by police describing Black crime rates as being a ‘problem’ in 1976 despite senior police figures having noted just four years earlier that ‘the West Indian crime rate is much the same as that of the indigenous population’.²⁴ As Paul Gilroy argued, a common-sense view existed that perceived ‘blacks as innately criminal, or at least more criminal than the white neighbours whose deprivation they share’ – and that ‘crime, in the form of both street disorder and robbery was gradually identified as an *expression of black culture*’.²⁵ Certainly, notions of culture became increasingly key to ‘new racist’ discourses in which ‘immigration was regarded as having brought to Britain a population that destroyed the cultural homogeneity of the nation’.²⁶

In the post-war years, the police monitored and controlled the Black presence in Britain in a variety of ways. This was partly through apparent attempts to avoid outbreaks of public disorder; for example, in response to the policing of a British National Party demonstration at Waterloo Station protesting the arrival of around 1,200 West Indian migrants in 1960, the police contacted the Commission for the West Indies requesting to be informed ‘of any future large scale arrival of coloured immigrants’.²⁷ By linking the presence of Black migrants with the potential for a rise in tensions and disorder, this increased the calls for more restrictive immigration controls – ostensibly in order to maintain ‘good race relations’.²⁸ However, as Peter Alexander concluded: ‘immigration control was expected to reduce racism. The reverse happened. And with increased racism came further controls’.²⁹

Justice, pp. 52-73. See also: Bowling, Reiner and Sheptycki, *Politics of the Police*, pp. 27-9, 127; Weber and Bowling, ‘Stop and Search in Global Context’, 353.

²¹ For example: Benyon, *Race and Policing*; Bowling and Phillips, *Racism, Crime and Justice*.

²² Sinclair and Williams, ‘“Colonial” and “British” Policing’, 222-3. For discussion of ‘policing by consent’, see: Bowling, Reiner and Sheptycki, *Politics of the Police*, pp. 77-8.

²³ Rex, ‘Life in the Ghetto’, p. 103. See also: Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 42-7.

²⁴ Solomos, *Black Youth, Racism and the State*, pp. 108-9; Bowling and Phillips, *Racism, Crime and Justice*, p. 78; Hall *et al.*, *Policing the Crisis*.

²⁵ Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black*, 140. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Miles and Brown, *Racism*, p. 61. See also: Barker, *The New Racism*.

²⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Chief Superintendent A2 Branch to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 2 September 1960.

²⁸ See, for example: Dean, ‘Black Communities in Great Britain 1945–51’, 319.

²⁹ Alexander, *Racism, Resistance and Revolution*, p. 34.

Previous studies have explored the state's use of and reliance on police reports when it came to formulating or justifying immigration policies – interpretations, as Clair Wills outlined, 'hardly likely to offer a value-free account [as] police had to do with immigrants insofar as they were trouble' – and this article's consideration of police records covering earlier years and other locations generally supports such analysis, further demonstrating how surveillance also pervaded many aspects of day-to-day policing activities.³⁰ This can be exemplified by Jeff Crawford, Secretary of the West Indian Standing Conference, preparing a "dossier" of cases' in 1968 where police had unlawfully fingerprinted Black people 'in circumstances where their finger-prints could not reasonably be expected to help the police in investigating any crime'.³¹ While Scotland Yard described such accusations as 'just general and vague allegations', they typify how, as Benjamin Bowling, Robert Reiner and James W.E. Sheptycki concluded, racialised people are more likely to be classified as 'police property' to be kept in check: 'low-status, powerless groups whom the dominant majority see as problematic or distasteful'.³²

Moreover, other writers – most notably James Whitfield – have explored liaison between police and 'representatives' of Black communities, correctly portraying such actions as being viewed by the police as conditional:

While it welcomed dialogue with those it deemed appropriate, [the Metropolitan Police] did so largely on its own terms; namely, so that it could be better informed of the potential threat to public order, criminal activity and the political conduct of those who were believed to hold extremist political views.³³

This study extends this argument, contending that further than being regarded as a 'self-defence mechanism by which it appeared to be actively working to address the concerns of the West Indian community, but failing to back up positive words with good deeds', liaison and other monitoring activities regarding Black people were regularly utilised for control purposes – an aspect touched on by Whitfield, but further explored here.³⁴ This article also utilises police records released since the publication of Whitfield's work, currently unstudied in the existing literature, to develop considerations of police records related to (what they described as) 'racial disturbances' – exploring why such incidents were deemed worthy of attention and how this complicated professed 'colour-blind' approaches of 'non-differentiation' in this period. In practice, police policies and actions routinely identified Black people as 'undesirable' or denoting a 'cause for concern' in Britain up to (and beyond) 1968, deemed requiring to be both monitored and controlled.

³⁰ Wills, *Lovers and Strangers*, p. 109. See also: Fevre, "Injustice on Their Backs and Justice on Their Minds".

³¹ Dennis Barker, 'Dossier on immigrants' claims against police', *The Guardian*, 29 August 1968; TNA: MEPO 2/9854, A/Chief Superintendent to Acting Assistant Commissioner 'A', 30 August 1968.

³² Bowling, Reiner and Sheptycki, *Politics of the Police*, pp. 174-9.

³³ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 80.

³⁴ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 60.

Police Categorisations

It is first important to consider terminology. In the period explored here, the term ‘coloured’ was often used as something of a ‘catch-all’ category, essentially to refer to anyone ‘non-white’. As Stephen Tuck concluded, communities with disparate histories ‘from the Caribbean, South Asia and Africa [were] lumped together [under] the word “coloured” to describe non-white peoples’.³⁵ However, the police did routinely differentiate between people encompassed within this term. For example, in 1963 Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Joseph Simpson informed Nadine Peppard, Secretary of the Immigrants’ Advisory Committee, that ‘The Indians and Pakistanis have brought up no particular problems whatsoever as far as the police are concerned although we are watching the situation carefully’.³⁶ Upon considering how to engage with local communities, Philip Margetson, Assistant Commissioner ‘A’ (Operations and Administration) – with responsibility for all uniformed police except traffic police – further aligned with stereotypical views when declaring that ‘Indians and Pakistanis... prefer to keep to themselves and probably do not wish for direct liaison with the police’.³⁷ On the other hand, police figures declared, compared with ‘the Indian type who are, on the whole, far less prone to acts of lawlessness and moral turpitude than the Negro type’, that ‘The ethical conduct of the average negro resident... is deplorably low’.³⁸ Such attitudes were particularly heightened with regards to people of West African descent, believed by police to be ‘generally insufficiently civilised to take their place in the community’.³⁹ Even a local officer for the National Assistance Board, responsible for public assistance, recommended that the Colonial Office should ‘gather in the degraded and idle West Africans... It is this minority which is giving the whole black community a bad name’.⁴⁰

Despite such sweeping declarations, the police at this time did not officially record race or ethnicity, and as migrants from the British colonies or Commonwealth were not required to register with the police – unlike foreign ‘aliens’ from elsewhere – the police ‘had no figures concerning them readily available and that any estimates we might give would be so vague as to be of little or no value’.⁴¹ This raised some recurring issues for the police when they were called on for their observations or comments. For instance, in 1957 the Liverpool City Police noted that ‘Statistics kept by the police do not, of course, indicate whether a criminal is coloured or not’; nevertheless, they continued to state that ‘it has been estimated that approximately 2% of adult persons proceeded against for indictable offences

³⁵ Tuck, ‘Malcolm X’s Visit to Oxford University’.

³⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to Nadine S. Peppard, 10 December 1963.

³⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Assistant Commissioner ‘A’ to Deputy Commander ‘A’ Division, 20 May 1953. For discussion of the relationship between the police and ‘Asian’ groups in Britain, see for example: Brah, ‘The “Asian” in Britain’; Cashmore, *The Logic of Racism*.

³⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, A/Chief Superintendent ‘G’ Division to Commander District 3, 27 March 1952; TNA: MEPO 2/9047, A/Chief Superintendent ‘H’ Division to Commander District 3, 26 March 1952.

³⁹ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Commander District 4, 10 August 1951.

⁴⁰ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, National Assistance Board Area Office, Stockwell, 16 July 1951.

⁴¹ TNA: MEPO 2/10011, Chief Superintendent to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 4 September 1959.

in this city during the period since 1953 have been coloured'.⁴² Despite these kinds of estimates of involvement in crime, two years later the Deputy Commissioner informed Director of the Institute of Race Relations, Philip Mason, that 'no attempt at segregation has ever been made. Even if we were able to define "coloured people" for this purpose, I am sure you will be the first to agree that any comparison would be undesirable.'⁴³ Similarly, a letter from the Home Office in the same year of 1959 expressed the belief that 'It is desirable to avoid giving the impression that statistics of this nature are collected on the basis of colour, and this can be done by relating them to the territories of origin instead.'⁴⁴ However, this practice led to police descriptions using 'national origin' euphemistically, such as with one Mr Miller – who police recorded had 'stated that he was born in London, E.14. He was of Jamaican appearance.'⁴⁵

Nonetheless, a supposedly official 'colour-blind' approach was seemingly repeatedly forwarded. For instance, a 1950 report from the Liverpool City Police declared that

...no accurate or official records are kept in connection with coloured people, as such, who are resident here and dependent on public funds, and my enquiries shew that this is as a direct result of a definite official policy of 'non-differentiation' between whites and blacks doubtless with the object of avoiding the 'colour-bar' question. This policy is being implemented with implicit obedience by all Government departments concerned.⁴⁶

In a clear example of policy transfer, the British state looked to experiences in the United States for guidance on whether to continue this approach.⁴⁷ For instance, when it came to drafting the 1965 Race Relations Act – the first legislation in Britain to address racial discrimination – W.N. Hyde of the Home Office consulted the Foreign Office's American Department, questioning if U.S. Government policy to 'collect statistics of the number of "coloured people" living in particular parts of the U.S.A.' had actually 'been suggested... of itself [being] discriminatory?'. Hyde noted that the Home Office were 'quite often asked if we can say how many "coloured people" are now living in Britain', but that they had 'no figures of the number of "coloured people" in the country (as distinct from the number of those who have come here from certain countries)' as Britain had long maintained that 'it would be wrong in principle for the Government to collect such statistics'.⁴⁸ Hyde's inquiry was passed to the British Embassy in Washington, D.C., who responded with the information that the U.S. Bureau of the Census, Department of Labor, Bureau of Vital Statistics and police records all recorded 'colour and race' – and

⁴² TNA: HO 344/122, Liverpool City Police, 27 February 1957.

⁴³ TNA: MEPO 2/10011, Deputy Commissioner to Philip Mason, 15 April 1959.

⁴⁴ TNA: MEPO 2/10011, T. Fitzgerald to Commissioner, 26 October 1959.

⁴⁵ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, A2/2602/65, 16 August 1965.

⁴⁶ TNA: HO 45/24471, 'Coloured Population in Liverpool', Liverpool City Police, 5 April 1950.

⁴⁷ Much political science work has focused on 'policy transfer', in which 'knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting (past or present) is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting': Dolowitz and Marsh, 'Learning from Abroad', 5.

⁴⁸ TNA: FO 371/174337, W.N. Hyde to P. Neville-Jones, 14 August 1964.

that ‘crime statistics are regularly published showing the numbers and rates as between Negroes and Whites’. Contrary to the suggestion that this approach might be seen as discriminatory, the British Embassy in Washington, D.C. reported that ‘Negro leaders welcomed this separation by colour as a means of highlighting the plight of the coloured population’ and that U.S. Governmental officials considered this ‘the only way which will give a full picture of the American nation’.⁴⁹

Despite receiving this response, Home Office notes from 1973 demonstrate how their policy remained that

No information on the colour or ethnic origin of offenders is recorded for the purpose of the Criminal Statistics. The general policy about record-keeping by ethnic origin is that such statistics should be compiled where there is an operational need, but not otherwise.⁵⁰

It had been concluded, at that point, that recording such information for criminal statistics did not constitute ‘an operational need’. Erik Bleich has argued that, when Britain gradually followed U.S. examples of recognising race more widely from 1976 onwards, it thereafter found itself at odds with the more ‘colour-blind’ approach favoured by countries such as France. While acknowledging certain advantages of collecting this information, Bleich concluded that ‘ethnic monitoring’ can ‘reinforce racial and ethnic group identities’, unlike the French approach ‘where most people believe that the state should ignore racial and ethnic identities rather than reinforce them’.⁵¹ However, despite stated policies of not officially recording differences between ‘races’, police and state actions suggest that differentiations were certainly made on a daily basis.⁵²

Police ‘Situation Reports’

In the years following World War II, a gradual increase in ‘New Commonwealth’ migration was attributed by some observers to the apparent British efforts taken during the war to appear welcoming. For instance, in 1950, the Liverpool City Police suggested that it had been

...the obvious desire at the time, dictated in no small measure by expediency, to shew a welcome to these people. The flow of these coloured workers into this Country has continued long after the war, no doubt as the result of the glowing representations of conditions in this Country sent back from here by the immigrants to their relatives and friends at home.⁵³

As numbers of Black migrants in Britain increased, so did the police’s monitoring of them – actions which fit with Bob Carter *et. al.*’s descriptions of attempts by the British State to build a case for legislative control through ‘gathering information... which it was hoped would confirm that Black

⁴⁹ TNA: FO 371/174337, H.F.B. Fane to W.N. Hyde, 14 September 1964. For the 1965 Race Relations Act, see for example: Peplow, ‘The “Linchpin for Success”?’.

⁵⁰ TNA: HO 376/136, Notes for Home Secretary’s oral answer to Parliamentary question, 14 June 1973.

⁵¹ Bleich, *Race Politics*, pp. 206-7. See also: Gilroy, *Ain’t No Black*, pp. 41-83.

⁵² See, for example: Holdaway, *The Racialisation of British Policing*.

⁵³ TNA: HO 45/24471, ‘Coloured Population in Liverpool’, Liverpool City Police, 5 April 1950.

immigration posed insoluble problems of social, economic and political assimilation'.⁵⁴ The police were relied on heavily for this attempted 'empirical demonstration' of the issues apparently caused by increased Black migration, and various surveys and situation reports were collected in the 1950s and 1960s that are extremely illuminating of police attitudes and actions – especially regarding conceptions of Black criminality.

On 21 January 1952, a memorandum was prepared by J. Waring Sainsbury, the Town Clerk of Kensington, which voiced concerns raised by various London Boroughs – particularly Lambeth and Stepney – about the impact of increased post-war immigration. Despite being couched in apparently liberal language, the memorandum nonetheless suggested that the remedy to these problems would be the introduction of immigration restrictions and the deportation of 'undesirables':

London, being the capital city of the mother country of a world-wide Commonwealth and Empire, has for centuries been accustomed to house a polyglot population. It is also inherent in the character of the British to accept willingly in their midst persons from overseas, irrespective of race, creed or colour... In pre-war days the presence of foreign or coloured communities in London presented no particular problem. Today, however, conditions are not normal... It would be unfortunate if the principle of "the open door" were to lead to the growth of racial prejudice and discrimination – from which this country has hitherto been free... Australia, Canada, East Africa and South Africa prohibit coloured immigrants from settling in their respective countries. While appreciating that such an embargo on the entry of British subjects into this country is neither feasible nor desirable, it is suggested that, while the present abnormal conditions persist, a limitation of immigrants might be considered.⁵⁵

This memorandum was sent to the Home Office, who in turn forwarded it to the Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Sir Harold Scott. Noting that Conservative Home Secretary Sir David Maxwell Fyfe was 'already aware' of 'some considerable feeling... about the conduct of the coloured Colonial people living in those districts', Fyfe reportedly had nevertheless not previously considered the problem to be 'of such a grave nature to justify measures so extreme as are suggested'.⁵⁶ To assess the situation and potential need for action, the Home Office therefore requested police observations, which were subsequently organised through reports submitted from police divisions throughout London.

In response, Commander of No. 3 District (North-East London) provided a summary of reports received from Chief Superintendents within his district. Despite acknowledging that 'There is no actual evidence that the proportion of bad ones is greater amongst blacks – the probability is that when they are bad they are more conspicuous by reason of their colour', the Commander nevertheless suggested that, as 'public resentment at the presence of many half-civilised blacks will tend to increase', immigration controls and repatriation powers were required 'since it is unreasonable that this country

⁵⁴ Carter, Harris and Joshi, 'The Racialization of Black Immigration', 337.

⁵⁵ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Memorandum for the Use of the Advisory Panel of the Metropolitan Boroughs' Standing Joint Committee, J. Waring Sainsbury, 21 January 1952.

⁵⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, R.L. Jones to Commissioner, 12 March 1952.

should become a Mecca for large numbers of native undesirables'.⁵⁷ Police Commanders of other districts – again, admitting that Black migrants had 'not been a very serious problem' in their areas – nonetheless similarly concluded that it would 'be better to take steps to control it now than to allow to develop into a serious national question'.⁵⁸ For instance, a suggestion of requiring 'Immigration Deposits of £50' was believed likely to 'eliminate the immigration into this Country of the "wastrel" element among coloured people'.⁵⁹ Therefore, the Police Assistant Commissioner subsequently responded to the Home Office's initial letter recommending that 'steps [be] taken to restrict the entry of unwanted persons, and to repatriate those who prove to be unsuitable to reside in this country'.⁶⁰ Recommendations in 1952 for powers to deport 'undesirables' came from police figures who, despite a lack of supporting evidence, nonetheless suggested that Black immigration had already become a serious problem:

The problem is one which has been allowed to run on for too long. Had some realistic approach been made to it some five years ago, probably we should not have had this trouble on our hands to-day. Any measures now must be largely confined to closing the gap. The undesirables are here and established and short of deporting large numbers there is little answer.⁶¹

As seen, such comments and conclusions were often based on extrapolations from what was readily admitted to be scarce or disputed information.⁶² For instance, a Chief Superintendent in Kensington noted how in 1951 'only one coloured man was charged... with living on immoral earning of a prostitute' – but that he believed this was not really an accurate reflection of the situation, as it was apparently 'generally agreed amongst senior officers of the Division, that this practice among coloured men is much wider spread in this area than is indicated by the one arrest'.⁶³ While police's comments were frequently qualified with statements that they were based purely on limited 'discreet enquiries' or 'casual police observation', this did not prevent such sweeping proclamations of Black criminality from being made: 'Whilst it is impossible to draw any definite conclusion, from such a limited picture, I feel, taking all the aspects into account, that the coloured population is already attracting police attention out of all proportion to their numbers.'⁶⁴ Such a statement, that Black people were receiving

⁵⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Commander District 3 to A.1, 1 April 1952.

⁵⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Commander District 1 to A.1, 28 March 1952.

⁵⁹ TNA: HO 45/24471, 'Coloured Population in Liverpool', Liverpool City Police, 5 April 1950.

⁶⁰ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Assistant Commissioner to Under Secretary of State, 18 April 1952.

⁶¹ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, A/Chief Superintendent 'H' Division to Commander District 3, 26 March 1952.

⁶² Bob Carter *et al.* have noted the uncertainty caused by contradicting estimates from the police, Ministers, and civil servants 'about the size of the Black population, with [different] figures... being bandied about': Carter, Harris and Joshi, 'The Racialization of Black Immigration', 338.

⁶³ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Chief Superintendent 'F' Division to Commander District 1, 27 March 1952. See: Gilroy, *Ain't No Black*, pp. 95-104; Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging*, pp. 111-49.

⁶⁴ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Inspector to Chief Inspector 'L' Division, 1 April 1952; TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Chief Superintendent 'E' Division to Commander District 3, 25 March 1952; TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Chief Superintendent 'F' Division to Commander District 1, 27 March 1952.

disproportionate police attention, certainly appears accurate – but seemingly based on racialised characterisations and police attitudes, rather than verifiable evidence.

Certainly, this high level of police monitoring and focus on Black migrants was infused with imperial notions of racial hierarchies and an assumed predisposition to criminality.⁶⁵ For instance, a Chief Superintendent in Marylebone declared:

The whole question of coloured people in the inner district of London is one that must always be in the minds of senior officers as very serious troubles could break out very quickly, and Police must deal with these people with a firm hand, not because of their colour but because their outlook upon law and order and social behaviour are not the same as those of a white man of similar class.⁶⁶

In other words, that the police should forcefully target Black people for their criminality; not simply because of their race, but on account of their inherent higher levels of criminality – due, apparently in such constructions, to their race. This aligns with the concept of a ‘suspect community’, first developed by Paddy Hillyard to describe the impact of the Prevention of Terrorism Acts on perceptions of the Irish community in 1970s/80s Britain – and subsequently utilised by other studies, such as the Cypriot community in inter-war London and Muslims in twenty-first century Britain.⁶⁷ In this case, such constructions led to over-policing and targeting of Black people and perpetuated ideas that Black migrants, despite being citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies, could never *actually* be British as they would fail to hold themselves to the standards of ‘indigenous’ (white) citizens. As one Chief Superintendent opined: ‘Although claiming British nationality, I suggest that any infringements of our way of life or hospitality should be met with the prompt return of the delinquent to the land from which he came.’⁶⁸ However, such arguments – of notions of Black criminality being used to fuel calls for powers to deport ‘undesirables’ – caused tensions when senior police figures repeatedly acknowledged that, for example as was stated in 1957, ‘The almost unanimous opinion is that coloured people are law abiding and that there is no reason to suppose that the influx of immigrants during the past few years has resulted in an increase in crime’.⁶⁹

A number of other investigations and requests throughout this period led to surveys of police opinion on Black migrants in their districts. These included a 1953 Home Office committee examination of the social and economic impact of recent immigration returning very similar reports from Chief Constables as those examined above, and a request in 1954 from Prime Minister Winston Churchill for

⁶⁵ See, for example: Carter, Harris and Joshi, ‘The Racialization of Black Immigration’, 341-2.

⁶⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Chief Superintendent ‘D’ Division to Commander District 2, 27 March 1952.

⁶⁷ Hillyard, *Suspect Community*; Smith and Varnava, ‘Creating a “Suspect Community”’; Breen-Smyth, ‘Theorising the “Suspect Community”’; Nickels, Thomas, Hickman and Silvestri, ‘Constructing “Suspect” Communities and Britishness’.

⁶⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9047, Chief Superintendent ‘E’ Division to Commander District 3, 25 March 1952.

⁶⁹ TNA: HO 344/122, ‘Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth countries’, March 1957.

a summary of the general feeling towards increased ‘New Commonwealth’ migration, which returned police reports containing, to use the words of James Hampshire, ‘a panoply of racist stereotypes’.⁷⁰ Similarly, after the 1958 racist riots in Notting Hill, the Director of the Institute of Race Relations, Philip Mason, asked the police for information on the involvement of Black migrants in a selection of offences, such as brothel keeping, living on immoral earnings and dangerous drugs. This focus, as Nadia Ellis highlighted, demonstrates that ‘Mason delimited the kinds of crimes he expected black migrants to be involved in – or at least, the kinds of crimes that mattered’.⁷¹ Moreover, in the lead up to the introduction of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act and its stricter immigration restrictions, a request from the Home Office Immigration Department was made for police information that would ‘assist [Ministers] in taking decisions on how the new measure is to operate’.⁷² Such surveys of police observations specifically targeted, in the description used by the Home Office’s Nationality Division, those districts and locations in which ‘believed sizeable coloured communities had grown up’.⁷³ The Home Office Immigration Department declared that the police were being asked to provide such information to inform operation of new immigration legislation because ‘it is from the police that we think we can most readily get a picture that will be both objective and reasonably comprehensive’.⁷⁴ Amongst others, Dean demonstrated how this reliance on police reports to make the case for increased restrictions led to the argument being ‘presented... as a law-and-order issue’.⁷⁵ However, senior police figures repeatedly specified that providing ‘strictly accurate figures... is an impossibility’; that, ‘As these people are nearly all British subjects and bear British names, and as no record is kept in Charge Books noting that the persons concerned are coloured or white, individual officers have had to rely on their memories to supply figures’.⁷⁶ Police memories that, influenced by racist constructions of Black criminality, were certainly neither ‘objective’ nor ‘reasonably comprehensive’. Liverpool City Police’s Criminal Investigation Department even complained that their job had been made harder because the local Immigration Office regarded official immigration figures to be confidential and would not provide them to the police.⁷⁷ Repeated police statements admitted a lack of information or the inability to provide accurate insights – such as the Birmingham Chief Constable’s frank declaration that ‘Little is known about the Africans’.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, these surveys of police districts and divisions are filled with

⁷⁰ Wills, *Lovers and Strangers*, pp. 107-22; TNA: MEPO 2/9563, A.A.O. Montague-Browne to R.J. Guppy, 5 October 1954; TNA: MEPO 2/9563, Ian Roy to Gilbert Carmichael, 6 October 1954; ‘Colour Bar War is Threatened in London’, *Empire News*, 3 October 1954; Hampshire, *Citizenship and Belonging*, p. 92.

⁷¹ Ellis, ‘Black Migrants, White Queers’, 902-3.

⁷² TNA: HO 325/183, Home Office Immigration Department to various Chief Constables, 19 March 1962.

⁷³ TNA: HO 344/122, ‘Immigration of coloured British subjects from other Commonwealth countries’, March 1957.

⁷⁴ TNA: HO 325/183, Home Office Immigration Department to various Chief Constables, 19 March 1962.

⁷⁵ Dean, ‘The Restriction of Commonwealth Immigration’, 181.

⁷⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9563, Acting Commander District 4 to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 7 October 1954; TNA: HO 344/122, John R. Inch to C.G.R.H. Jacques, 27 February 1957.

⁷⁷ TNA: HO 344/122, Liverpool City Police, 27 February 1957.

⁷⁸ TNA: HO 344/122, W.F. Thomas to J.M. Ross, 27 February 1957; Chief Constable, Birmingham City Police to J.M. Ross, 27 February 1957.

bald assertions alleging ‘an increase in illegitimate births of half caste children’ or that ‘The moral standard generally of the West Indians does not seem very high’ – but mostly based on, ‘other than general observations, no reliable information’.⁷⁹

Police Liaison

Therefore, other means were attempted for obtaining information about Britain’s growing Black population. One action that was mooted was the potential requirement of their registration with the police. In August 1965, the Labour Government released a White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth, which further restricted immigration under the framework introduced by the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act by reducing the number of annually-issued employment vouchers.⁸⁰ There had been constant discussion of further restricting immigration since 1962 and senior civil servant Sir Charles Cunningham, Permanent Under-Secretary of State of the Home Office, suggested in 1964 avoiding new legislation if possible – rather ‘that we must look pretty carefully at what we can achieve under the law as it stands’.⁸¹ Famously, upon the Labour Government’s publication of their White Paper, Richard Crossman recorded in his diary:

This has been one of the most difficult and unpleasant jobs the Government has had to do. We have become illiberal and lowered the quotas at a time when we have an acute shortage of labour... Nevertheless, I am convinced that if we hadn’t done all this we would have been faced with certain electoral defeat in the Midlands and the South-East. Politically, fear of immigration is the most powerful undertow today.⁸²

Labour’s 1965 White Paper also suggested that all people entering Britain – Commonwealth citizens as well as ‘aliens’ from elsewhere – should face the possibility of immigration officers requiring their registration with the police, which had been a requirement for ‘alien’ immigrants since the Aliens Registration Act of 1914. The significance of potentially including Commonwealth citizens within such conditions of entry was summarised by Oscar Gish: ‘The United Kingdom has always distinguished between Commonwealth and foreign (alien) immigration. After entry to the United Kingdom the Commonwealth citizen is subject to very little control.’⁸³ While this article contends that many actions demonstrate attempts at monitoring and controlling the Black presence in Britain, Leader of the House of Commons, Labour MP Herbert Bowden, similarly proclaimed in Parliament: ‘Aliens have to register with the police; Commonwealth immigrants do not.’⁸⁴ However, during Cabinet discussions in 1965, a draft section of the instructions on conditions of admission was drawn up by the Home Office, which

⁷⁹ TNA: HO 344/122, Norman Leigh to Chief Constable, 18 March 1957; Chief Constable, Birmingham City Police to J.M. Ross, 27 February 1957.

⁸⁰ Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*, pp. 173-5; Perry, *London is the Place for me*, p. 217.

⁸¹ TNA: HO 344/78, Sir Charles Cunningham to Mr. Gwynn, 12 June 1964.

⁸² Crossman, *Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, 2 August 1965, p. 132. For discussion of the impact of the 1964 Smethwick general election, see for example: Yemm, ‘Smethwick and the 1964 General Election’.

⁸³ Gish, ‘British Immigration, 1955-1968’, 19.

⁸⁴ HC Deb, 2 August 1965, c1063.

declared that ‘Ministers have decided that one purpose for which immigration officers should use the wider power of imposing conditions is to require commonwealth citizens to register with the police.’⁸⁵ Such a requirement was subsequently abandoned – due, amongst other considerations, to the perceived damaging impact this would have on British relations with the Commonwealth.⁸⁶

With requirements for the registration of Commonwealth citizens with the police deemed unfeasible, other methods were undertaken to increase police information about Black migrants in Britain. Despite at various points the police stating being unaware – or at least declaring so – of any ‘unhappy relations between the coloured population and the police’, they made various efforts ostensibly to improve relations with ‘immigrant groups’, such as establishing local community officers or organising talks from ‘outstanding coloured lecturers who are sufficiently broad-minded and experienced to appreciate both sides of the problem’.⁸⁷ The apparent need for liaison became particularly significant following racist riots in 1958; when thousands of people took to the streets of Nottingham and Notting Hill, in scenes described by the local press as ‘like a slaughterhouse’, Black residents organised their own self-protection as it appeared that the police could not – or would not – defend them against racist attacks.⁸⁸ For instance, Michael de Freitas – who, after 1964, became known as Black revolutionary Michael X – reportedly told a police officer ‘I don’t need you to fucking protect me’, and argued that Black residents ‘don’t want committees and representatives. What you need is to get a few pieces of iron and a bit of organisation so that tonight when they come in here we can defend ourselves.’⁸⁹ Similarly, the racist murder of Antiguan migrant Kelso Cochrane in Notting Hill on 17 May 1959 was blamed on those who had ‘too easily assumed’ that further racial conflict would be negated by the deterrent of ‘exemplary sentences’ for nine white youths involved in the racist riots of the previous summer.⁹⁰ It was believed that not enough was being done by the authorities to combat racist violence; that ‘little official action has followed... the government has a far greater responsibility than it has yet admitted’.⁹¹ The police initially declared that Cochrane’s murder had been due to robbery rather than a racist attack, a response that left-wing publication *Searchlight* later deemed ‘almost certainly a misguided attempt to ensure calm in the area’.⁹² Such attempts were rejected by the local Black community and deemed to be further evidence of police failings – particularly as it was claimed that the identity of Cochrane’s murderer was something of an ‘open secret’, but that the police feared the backlash to a white man being arrested for the murder of a Black man in Britain.⁹³ Notably, in 1959,

⁸⁵ TNA: HO 344/78, Draft instructions on Commonwealth Immigrants (Conditions of Admission), 18 August 1965.

⁸⁶ See: Miles and Phizacklea, *White Man’s Country*, p. 53.

⁸⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, D.E. Webb to Garnet H. Gordon, 26 October 1960.

⁸⁸ Pressly, ‘The “Forgotten” Race Riot’. See also: Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country*; Phillips and Phillips, *Windrush*, pp. 158-80.

⁸⁹ Willis, p.165; Malik, *Michael X.*, p. 76.

⁹⁰ Holmes, *John Bull’s Island*, p. 259.

⁹¹ ‘Knives in Notting Hill’, *New Statesman*, 23 May 1959.

⁹² Silver, ‘Who Killed My Brother?’.

⁹³ Olden, *Murder in Notting Hill*, pp. 70, 137.

the Commission in the United Kingdom for the West Indies, British Guiana and British Honduras recorded that it continuously received reports of a persistent feeling that the police were not impartial.⁹⁴

Responding to the violence, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Joseph Simpson described the Notting Hill area as traditionally disorderly, but that increased ‘Colonial immigrants had aggravated existing problems’ and that they considered the police to be their enemies. Nonetheless, he concluded that ‘the resources and flexibility of the Metropolitan Police were sufficient to maintain law and order unless there were to be widespread simultaneous outbreaks of racial strife in other parts of London’. Noting the importance of preventing widespread public disorder, Simpson concluded that ‘efforts were being made to establish some sort of liaison between the police and the agents of the Commissioner for the West Indian Federation which might lead to better understanding’.⁹⁵ Indeed, on the same day of 2 June 1959, Simpson met with Garnett Gordon, Commissioner of the West Indies Federation, to explore establishing a system of liaison. However, as Whitfield noted, Simpson’s record of this meeting demonstrates he was ‘less motivated by a desire to enhance the cause of racial and cultural harmony than by personal and corporate self-interest’ – in Simpson’s words:

West Indians constitute over half the coloured population of our troubled areas, and my aim was to establish a channel of liaison between this office and his office so that there would be no excuse for any allegations that Police had refused to co-operate with responsible representatives of the coloured people in the various districts.⁹⁶

For some police figures, liaison activities were likely genuine attempts to ‘start to try and understand coloured people and their problems’.⁹⁷ Nevertheless, attempts at liaison often appeared to be no more than efforts to push the police’s viewpoint, with police conclusions often drawn to confirm their pre-existing attitudes, rather than genuine attempts at understanding or improvement. This is again seen in Simpson’s account of establishing liaison with the West Indian Federation; when offers for talks and presentations were made to inform officers about ‘the West Indian’s way of life and his reaction on arriving here and attempting to settle in with the white population’, Simpson informed his Deputy Commissioner that ‘I do not propose to do more than to let them tell me, through the Liaison Officer, the sort of things they want to get over. I can then decide how best, if at all, to get them over.’⁹⁸ Similarly, despite the British Nationality Act 1948 supposedly allowing for the appointment to the police of any Commonwealth citizen, the recruitment of Black police officers was constantly deemed undesirable and

⁹⁴ Letter from the Commission in the United Kingdom for the West Indies, British Guiana and British Honduras to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, 1 September 1959, PRO CO 1028 50 as cited in Panayi, *The Impact of Immigration*, pp. 137-8.

⁹⁵ TNA: PRO CO 1031/2539, Home Office Meeting, 2 June 1959.

⁹⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to Deputy Commissioner, 3 June 1959; Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 65-6.

⁹⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Assistant Commissioner ‘A’ to Commissioner, 7 March 1964.

⁹⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to Deputy Commissioner, 3 June 1959.

potential Black recruits were regularly rejected due to beliefs they would not be ‘acceptable to the general public as a whole’.⁹⁹

Furthermore, activities falling under the blanket term of ‘liaison’ were also used as opportunities to increase police monitoring of certain groups and individuals. For instance, by the mid-1950s it was noted that various police forces were in contact with ‘fairly prominent figure[s] in the coloured population’ who could be relied upon to assist police with regards to ‘the undesirable members of [their] community’.¹⁰⁰ In 1959, one such liaison meeting was deemed by the police ‘an ideal opportunity [to explore] the complaints we are receiving of annoyance caused by the so called “Social Clubs” which are springing up’.¹⁰¹ Similarly, police descriptions of liaison meetings reveal deep frustrations and suspicion of those deemed to be questioning or criticising the police – a case in point being a police meeting with the West Indian Standing Conference (WISC) in 1967, involving WISC’s Public Relations Officer Joe Hunte. Hunte, a Caribbean-born community activist, had published *Nigger Hunting in England?* in 1966, which concluded that ‘sergeants and constables do leave stations with the express purpose of going “nigger hunting”’.¹⁰² This was a significant and clear account of the over-policing and targeting of the Black population, despite the police’s subsequent attempts to portray Hunte’s booklet as being ‘such a disastrous failure in that it failed to have the impact that was desired’.¹⁰³ Perhaps unsurprisingly, this publication marked ‘the notorious “nigger-hunting” Hunte’ in police attitudes as himself a target for monitoring.¹⁰⁴ Chief Superintendent Merricks, recounting police meetings with WISC – including a public event in which it was specifically recorded that Hunte had been in the crowd – concluded that ‘Hunte is a dangerous character, and is liable to twist anything we tell him.’¹⁰⁵

Some attempts at liaison with Black communities also led to the involvement of Special Branch.¹⁰⁶ For instance, an invitation from the West Indian Students’ Union in 1966 prompted Special Branch investigations into that organisation’s political activities.¹⁰⁷ When such checks came back as having found nothing, Police Liaison Officer J.R. Norman was put forward to speak at the engagement because, in the words of the Commissioner, the police ‘should be prepared to demonstrate that we have

⁹⁹ TNA: PRO CO 1031/2539, Home Office Meeting, 2 June 1959; TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Assistant Commissioner ‘D’ to Commissioner, 10 December 1963. See: Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 114-26; Sinclair and Williams, ““Colonial” and “British” Policing’, 224-6; Fevre, ““Race” and Resistance to Policing Before the “Windrush Years””.

¹⁰⁰ TNA: MEPO 2/9563, Chief Superintendent ‘C’ Division to Commander District 1, 7 October 1954.

¹⁰¹ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Note from Chief Superintendent W.C.F. Best, A.2(1) Department, 1 September 1959.

¹⁰² Hunte, *Nigger Hunting in England?*, p. 8. For discussion, see for example: McConville and Shepherd, *Watching Police, Watching Communities*, pp. 237-8.

¹⁰³ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, K. Lee to Commissioner’s Office, A.2(2) Branch, 25 October 1966.

¹⁰⁴ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Chief Superintendent Merricks to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 14 April 1967.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Chief Superintendent Merricks to A1, 22 March 1967. Such attitudes align with similar conclusions in Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 58-84.

¹⁰⁶ See: Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 71-4.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, E.M. Bowen to Roy Jenkins, 19 February 1966; TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Commissioner to K.A.L. Parker, 1 March 1966.

a liaison officer. If we refuse to do it the refusal itself can be used as ammunition against us.’¹⁰⁸ This approach led to police involvement in events they privately deemed ‘most frustrating and, indeed, embarrassing to senior officers’. For instance, police attendance at the National Youth Conference, organised by WISC and the Association of Jamaicans, was deemed to be ‘a wasted effort’. Although, during this event, one attendee publicly questioned the police presence and their ‘insidious actions’ of having attended meetings, ‘found out what we were doing and thinking about, and then were ready and waiting to arrest the West Indians when they do anything’ – leading the police representatives who attended this Conference to somewhat wryly conclude: ‘It would appear that in some quarters at least our efforts are not being wasted’.¹⁰⁹ Other figures similarly accused the police of using the banner of ‘liaison’ as a means of ‘infiltrating black organisations to find out what is going on, who is who, and to recruit black spies and informers’ – demonstrating the belief amongst Black people that the police used ‘liaison’ in this way, as well as the levels of distrust between the two.¹¹⁰

As well as the seeming benefits to the police of such monitoring, it was generally concluded that:

...these dialogues, although unpleasant and galling, are of considerable value, and while they must irritate the hard core who would like to say that police take no interest whatsoever in their problems, we shall win over some of the less committed’.¹¹¹

However, police liaison activities, and subsequent internal reports, also often exposed generalised and racialised attitudes – like a summary of one such meeting complaining it had ‘underlined once again the basic difficulties of dealing with West Indians. Namely that although many, if not most, of their grievances can be shown to be misconceived, they remain stubbornly if not cynically convinced that this Force practices discrimination.’¹¹² Whitfield noted that this particular meeting had included a proposal from WISC for increased liaison with the police, in which details would be exchanged of police liaison officers and ‘responsible members’ of WISC who could work with them. However, the police would not agree to such a proposal before checking with the government-funded National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants (NCCI). As Whitfield concluded, ‘This suggests that certain representative organisations were more highly regarded by the Met’s senior officers than others... but this poses the question: how representative were the NCCI ... and how would other bodies have viewed such preferential treatment?’¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Commissioner to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 25 February 1966.

¹⁰⁹ TNA: MEPO 2/11238, A7 Branch Paper, 1 July 1971.

¹¹⁰ Louis Chase, ‘West Indians and the Police’, *New Community*, 3:3 (1994), 208 as cited in Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 82.

¹¹¹ TNA: MEPO 2/11238, Commissioner to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 5 July 1971.

¹¹² TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Chief Superintendent Merricks to Assistant Commissioner ‘A’, 14 April 1967.

¹¹³ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 76.

During a meeting in 1963 between senior police figures and Henry Laurence Lindo, High Commissioner of Jamaica to the United Kingdom, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Joseph Simpson expressed surprise at suggestions that relations between Jamaican people and the police in Britain had deteriorated – ‘His impression, gleaned from the incidence of disturbances between coloured and white groups, was that the situation had improved considerably since 1960.’¹¹⁴ Simpson had previously cited statistics indicating that incidents of violence involving exclusively white people vastly outnumbered those involving solely racialised people, and that incidents involving both fell a long way behind – presumably welcome news to those increasingly concerned about racially-motivated violence following events of the late 1950s.¹¹⁵ However, as Whitfield pointed out, ‘[Simpson’s] observation – perhaps purposefully – somewhat missed the point. The issue concerning the Jamaican High Commissioner was that of relations between black people and the police, and not relations with white society at large.’¹¹⁶ Nonetheless, it was recognised that the previous formal system of liaison between the police and Office of the Commissioner of the West Indies Federation had functioned well. Indeed, Simpson had earlier expressed being ‘impressed by the common-sense outlook of the Commissioner’ and his Office, who Simpson reported had ‘acknowledged the sort of weaknesses and defects which we experience in coloured people’ by recognising ‘the reputation of the less reputable classes [of] undesirable blacks’.¹¹⁷ This system of liaison, deemed agreeable by the Police Commissioner, had ended with the dissolution of the West Indies Federation in 1962, and Simpson therefore subsequently ‘promised to consider certain action which may help to alleviate any misunderstandings which exist on either side’.¹¹⁸ Seemingly somewhat compelled into promises of increased liaison with the High Commission of Jamaica, Simpson privately admitted to the Home Office to being ‘a little nervous that other Countries will cash in on this and that we shall be inundated with similar requests’.¹¹⁹ This created a situation where no other representatives from the West Indies in London enjoyed the same formal contact with Senior Metropolitan Police figures as the High Commission of Jamaica, likely to cause discontent – particularly as the dissolution of the West Indies Federation had already been blamed on Jamaica’s decision to leave the union.¹²⁰

‘Racial Disturbances’

Further to liaison meetings and observation activities, the Metropolitan Police also compiled reports on what they described as ‘racial disturbances’ for monitoring purposes – somewhat belying claims of an

¹¹⁴ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to K.A.L. Parker, 20 June 1963; TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Lord Jellicoe to Home Secretary, 27 May 1963.

¹¹⁵ TNA: PRO CO 1031/2539, Home Office Meeting, 2 June 1959.

¹¹⁶ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 67.

¹¹⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to Deputy Commissioner, 3 June 1959.

¹¹⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to K.A.L. Parker, 20 June 1963; TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Lord Jellicoe to Home Secretary, 27 May 1963. Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, pp. 65-6

¹¹⁹ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, Sir Joseph Simpson to K.A.L. Parker, 20 June 1963.

¹²⁰ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 67.

official ‘colour-blind’ approach to their daily duties. As previously discussed, the police recorded such incidents as part of attempts by the British state to monitor ‘race relations’ and avoid substantial outbreaks of public disorder, particularly following events in Nottingham and Notting Hill in the late 1950s.¹²¹ While acknowledging that competition for housing and employment had played a role in such violence, government ministers advocated immigration controls and powers to deport ‘undesirable immigrants’ as they believed a numerical limit on racialised people arriving in Britain would improve ‘race relations’.¹²² Kennetta Hammond Perry concluded that, to prevent beliefs of ‘the tolerant British’ from being tarnished, perceived ‘un-British’ racial violence was popularly blamed on the deviant working class and increased immigration, leading to increased calls for harsher restrictions.¹²³ In Ira Katznelson’s words, successive post-war governments ‘were convinced that immigration controls and the appointment of a [governmental] advisory council [would] provide for harmonious race relations’.¹²⁴ However, the counter to this argument is that immigration restrictions actually increase racism rather than diminish it. As journalist Bernard Levin would later conclude, responding to Margaret Thatcher’s infamous 1978 interview declaring that ‘people are rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture’: ‘If you talk and behave as if the black man were some kind of virus that must be kept out of the body politic, then it is the shabbiest hypocrisy to preach racial harmony at the same time.’¹²⁵ However, in the 1950s and 1960s, ‘racial harmony’ was deemed to be best achieved through police monitoring of the situation and, increasingly, by restricting immigration. For instance, in 1963 the police contacted the High Commissioner of Jamaica’s Office to request ‘information of any large-scale arrival of coloureds – i.e. in special trains – which might give excuse for demonstrations by anti-racial organisations’.¹²⁶

A confidential memorandum, circulated on 2 March 1965 by the Commissioner’s Office, revised previous procedures for ‘reporting the more serious offences committed by coloured persons’ as well as for ‘reporting disturbances involving coloured persons’. This outlined that ‘information of all disturbances or incidents where there is some racial significance is to be sent forthwith by teleprinter to A.2(2) Branch and confirmed by a report in due course’.¹²⁷ Whitfield outlined how A2 Branch had ‘specific responsibility for establishing and developing liaison with representatives of the West Indian community’.¹²⁸ Illustrating issues of officially relying on apparently ‘colour-blind’ approaches, the memorandum concluded:

¹²¹ See also: Wills, *Lovers and Strangers*, pp. 158-73.

¹²² TNA: CAB/128/32, Cabinet Conclusions, 8 September, 11 September 1958.

¹²³ Perry, *London is the Place for me*, pp. 89-125.

¹²⁴ Katznelson, *Black Men, White Cities*, p. 146.

¹²⁵ *The Times*, 14 February 1978. For Thatcher, see for example: Layton-Henry, *Politics of Race*, pp. 150-1; Hall, *Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*.

¹²⁶ TNA: MEPO 2/9854, ‘A.C.A’ to Commissioner, 29 May 1963.

¹²⁷ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Confidential Memorandum 5/65, 2 March 1965.

¹²⁸ Whitfield, *Unhappy Dialogue*, p. 46.

All entries in Charge and Prisoners' Property Books, Crime Books and Occurrence Books, concerning coloured persons, are to include a reference to the nationality or country of origin of the person, if known. If this cannot be ascertained the fact that the person is of a certain coloured type will be recorded, e.g., Coloured (Negro type) or (Maltese type).¹²⁹

Many of the 'incidents' reported would more accurately be described as racist attacks. However, fitting with a general inclination from British authorities at the time, the police's tendency to attempt to downplay the racial nature of such reported incidents is often displayed.¹³⁰ For example, attacks or assaults on Black people are recorded by the police as simply being 'obviously the work of a group that had perhaps too much to drink on that particular evening', 'sheer hooliganism... not a racial incident [based purely on sentiments that] the situation had in the past two years shown a definite improvement', or – despite a Black man being stabbed in the arm and a robbery motive being unlikely as no attempt was made to steal anything – that 'There is a slight possibility that the incident may have had some racial significance but, in such a case, I would have expected the assailants to have shouted abuse which would have indicated the reason for their action.'¹³¹ Even a Black family's house being set on fire was described as an incident having 'no racial significance'; a Police Superintendent's conclusion that was subsequently questioned by their superior officer: 'I would have thought quite the reverse.'¹³² Recorded incidents were also explained by, or blamed on, the impact of sensationalised media portrayals. For instance, eight instances of wooden crosses being set alight outside the homes of racialised people were described as being 'of no racial or political significance', due to their apparently being unconnected other than 'current Press publicity to this type of offence'.¹³³ In a similar way, the police also referred to the publicity of sentences emerging from these 'racial incidents' as acting as 'a good deterrent to others thinking of indiscriminate assaults on coloured persons' – framing the situation around tackling the actions of a few 'undesirables', rather than addressing more widespread attitudes.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, these kinds of incidents were noted as having prompted increased surveillance of the area and alerting officers to the possibility of 'any incidents which might have serious repercussions'.¹³⁵ Despite this attempted positive portrayal of police as being well-positioned to protect victims from racist attacks, the impact of this was felt by the increased monitoring and over-policing of Black people – who, as demonstrated elsewhere, generally had little faith and trust in the police.

¹²⁹ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Confidential Memorandum 5/65, 2 March 1965.

¹³⁰ See, for example: Paul, *Whitewashing Britain*.

¹³¹ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Chief Superintendent 'D' Division to Commander District 1, 23 September 1965; TNA: MEPO 2/10747/2, Superintendent 'D' Division to A.2, 11 November 1965; TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Inspector 'M' Division to A.2, 27 June 1965.

¹³² TNA: MEPO 2/10747/2, Superintendent J.D. Culpin to A.2(2), 10 October 1965; TNA: MEPO 2/10747/2, Commander 'A' to Chief Superintendent 'T' Division, 13 October 1965. See: Bowling, *Violent Racism*.

¹³³ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Detective Inspector G. Burrows, 'H' Division to A2, 13 September 1965.

¹³⁴ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Superintendent D. Helm to Chief Superintendent 'B' Division, 16 September 1965.

¹³⁵ TNA: MEPO 2/10747/1, Acting Chief Superintendent 'D' Division to A.2(2), 16 August 1965.

Conclusion

Although outside the period considered by this article, an illuminative summary of police attitudes towards their relationship with Black people in post-war Britain can be seen by the Metropolitan Police Policy Committee's consideration in 1973 of a paper authored by Commander K.L. Newman, of the police's Community Relations Branch, entitled 'The Policing of Racially Sensitive Divisions'. The paper's stated aim was to, amongst other things, 'consider the causes and the implications of the potentially dangerous tension which has developed between police and West Indian youths in some racially sensitive divisions'. Outlining a series of 'causative factors' for tensions, it provides a revealing insight into how the police viewed Britain's Black population – and how this had influenced previous actions and approaches explored above. For instance, it was believed that children who had grown up in the West Indies faced 'the added difficulty of adjusting from a backward rural environment to a confusing and complex urban situation'. The paper combined other aspects of 'scientific' racism-inspired characterisations – that 'West Indians are by temperament excitable and violent' – with the impact of imperial legacies – that 'Many [Black youth] have a vague notion, exploited by the militants among them, that they are owed something because our ancestors "exploited" theirs' – to conclude that 'there is a pre-existing reservoir of grievances and a volatile mixture of attitudes and beliefs which needs only a spark to ignite group violence.' In this portrayal, a 'trivial... precipitating event' could quickly lead to 'a bottle throwing mob', through no apparent fault of the police. Moreover, this document notably stressed the importance of liaison and of 'an integrated community relations programme' as a highly praised police tactic. Not only to 'try to isolate the militants [and] keep the responsible people on our side', but also for gathering intelligence and targeting 'undesirables'. It was outlined that local police officers often had 'an understanding with club leaders' that, if a Black youth was wanted for questioning, they would avoid a disturbance at the club by presenting the youth to the police: a practice that 'If operational officers, particularly the CID, take advantage of this liaison they can effect [sic] their purpose more efficiently.' In other words, that 'the liaison community relations personnel have with the black community can be used to collect, evaluate and disseminate information essential to operational decision making in immigrant areas'.¹³⁶ Considering the clear impression presented of what police deemed the benefits of liaison to be, it is perhaps unsurprising that A.J. Langdon of the Home Office noted that certain aspects of Newman's paper 'would need adjustment if this were not an internal document'.¹³⁷

While police reports and other papers were not intended for use as a basis for criminal statistics in this period – as the police supposedly maintained a 'colour-blind' approach of 'non-differentiation' – such internal documents certainly demonstrate, and likely influenced, police attitudes and strategies

¹³⁶ TNA: HO 376/136, 'The Policing of Racially Sensitive Divisions', Commander K.L. Newman, Community Relations Branch, 24 July 1973.

¹³⁷ TNA: HO 376/136, A.J. Langdon to Mr Fries, 15 October 1973

with regards to Black people in Britain. Although senior police figures repeatedly acknowledged that the available evidence did not support views that the Black crime rate was proportionately higher than that of the rest of the population, those officers most likely to be in day-to-day contact with Black people – and armed with discretionary powers to target those who they deemed required police attention – appeared more likely to believe that Black people were inclined towards criminality. When, for instance in the police territorial district of Holborn, ‘casual and frequent observation [of] a small colony of coloured people failed to disclose any ground upon which [police] could act’, this was not taken as a reason to question fixed ideas of Black criminality or to fundamentally alter the police’s approach.¹³⁸ This article has demonstrated how, in post-war Britain, such attitudes and constructions of Black migrants as a ‘suspect community’ manifested in increased monitoring and ‘over-policing’ as the police undertook a range of activities and actions in attempts to monitor the Black population – partly due to attempts to avoid repetition of large-scale racial disorders, but also seemingly in attempts to ‘prove’ preconceived notions of Black criminality. As illustrated by above discussions, despite the British State’s professed ‘colour-blind’ approach of ‘non-differentiation’, Black people had long been identified as a ‘cause for concern’ – characterised as ‘undesirables’ and subjected to discriminatory monitoring and policing practices.

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¹³⁸ TNA: MEPO 2/9563, Chief Superintendent ‘E’ Division to Commander District 3, 6 October 1954.

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