The Politics of Care: Black Community Activism in England and the United States, 1975-1985

Dissertation
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Abstract

In the 1970s and 1980s, African Americans and Black Britons placed community activism at the center of their work. Understanding their communities as imperiled or neglected, they directed their efforts towards exposing and dismantling institutional racism in State agencies. This project considers Black activism around educational inequalities, police harassment, and health care to demonstrate various expressions of Black community activism. Because of the focus on local and national communities, activists participated in an expression of a politics of care, which placed the survival of Black families, children and communities, writ large, as the center of a socio-political platform. Connected to expressions of familial responsibilities, care, and love, activists saw their work on behalf of other Black people as central to the maintenance of Black communities locally, nationally, and sometimes globally.
Dedication

To Laverly “Lee” Worth Fowler. I miss you.
Acknowledgements

Much like the activism presented below, I know that this dissertation could never have been written without an entire community of people. Obviously I can not name, or remember, them all but I would like to try. First, I would like to thank my mother, Ida Lyons, for providing the kind of invaluable support I needed. Whether she was a listening ear, a copy center, or even just someone to check and make sure that my flights were leaving and arriving on time, she has always been in the trenches with me, figuratively speaking. My family, those here and those that have passed, have also been wonderful founts of knowledge and encouragement throughout the process, but my aunts, Brenda Fowler and Dorothy Fowler DeBose, and cousin, Loleatha Edmond, have always reminded me to keep heading towards my goal. And lastly, even though they are far too young to read or even recognize this accomplishment, my nieces and nephews are wonderful reminders that I did not do this work solely for myself.

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Introduction

In *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black*, African American feminist theorist bell hooks argues for the possibility of using love as a revolutionary foundation of political activism. “In reconceptualizing and reformulating strategies for future feminist movement, we need to concentrate on the politicization of love, not just in the context of talking about victimization in intimate relationships, but in a critical discussion where love can be understood as a powerful force that challenges and resists domination.” hooks make this assertion as a critique of the ways in which (White middle-class) feminists eschewed a discussion of positive intimate relationships as a driving force for political mobilization. Believing that activists’ personal relationships were vital, this project considers how responsibilities to family and community have undergirded the social activism of African Americans and Black Britons. Love and care helped to create political platforms for Black social activism.¹

The history of the 1970s-1980s has yet to receive extensive historical attention. Deemed too recent to “count” as history, much of this period’s important social trends have been taken up by journalists, political scientists and social critics, especially in the United States and England. However, when the period has been considered by historians it has been to discuss it’s relationship to the 1960s and early 1970s. Usually the later 1970s and 1980s are considered as a diminution of the social revolution of the previous

period, alongside growing rates of unemployment and recessions in each country, with moves toward decreased social spending domestically.

While this may be a fairly accurate assessment, it would be erroneous to presume apathy from communities affected by the socio-economic and political milieu, and it would be just as wrong to ignore their responses. For instance, cuts in unemployment aid and welfare benefits were hotly contested as early as the 1960s in the United States, while restrictive national health services and proposals for forced repatriation of migrants were popular organizing agendas among Afro-Caribbeans and Asians in Britain. However, what might have been a significant distinction, was that there was not a larger unifying social protest movement, and for possibly this reason, local (city-wide or neighborhood) affairs have often been hidden from scholarly gaze. This project is an examination of activism around issues of health inequalities, police harassment, and educational disparities, wherein families, communities and care shaped social activism.

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Many scholars pinpoint the docking of the MV Empire Windrush on July 22, 1948, and its 492 West Indian migrants as the beginnings of significant populations of Afro-Caribbeans in England. Most of these passengers were young, semi-skilled male workers from Jamaica looking for better economic opportunities, although women were aboard the Windrush in small numbers. One can also locate the importance of the Windrush as the beginning of a crisis in British identity. Colonialism allowed for the creation of the fallacy of a White Britain as it sought to contain racialized others in the colonies. But with decolonization those boundaries between metropole and colony, East
and West, Black and White were not longer clearly defined. The movement of former colonial subjects out of the colonies in large numbers, into the former seat of imperial power, disrupted the national consciousness of what it meant to be English. Thus, the complex relationship between Black British people and the State must always be viewed under the spectre of colonial relationships, immigration policies, and the various histories of citizenship given and denied to colonial subjects therein.²

The connection between race and citizenship has also been a dominant theme in the long history of people of African descent in the United States, however many scholars point to the end of World War II, and the experiences of Black soldiers, as a significant shift in African American activism for citizenship rights. After fighting for their country in Europe, Black veterans recounted being consistently treated worse than Nazi prisoners and facing racist (often violent) attacks from Whites at home. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s focused particular attention on the deep inequalities between Black and White America. In contrast, by the early 1970s, Black Power advocates began to articulate a complex understanding of Black American citizenship. In his revisionist consideration of the Black Power movement, Jeffrey Ogbar suggests that, “Black Power employed—even co-opted—the activism typified in civil rights struggles and operated on basic assumptions of rights and privileges. In essence, it demanded inclusion while advocating autonomy and self-determination. It asserted black access to

full citizenship while conspicuously cultivating pride in much that was not American.”

In this way, African American, a term that became popular in the post-Civil Rights/Black Power period, owes much to the dissonance of Black people in America; familiar and foreign at the same time.

Black Americans and Britons focused on sustaining their own communities often as a result of their marginalization from mainstream (read: White) society. In September 1984, Frankie Jacobs Gillette, national president of the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, Inc (NBPW), gave testimony to the U.S. Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Organizations regarding American NGO involvement in the United Nations Decade for Women. The domestic programs were indicative of the group’s ideas about their role in local and national African American communities. By late 1976, the national leadership boasted of its local clubs’ initiatives, including: day-care programs throughout the country; disaster relief projects in Mississippi; the Sojourner Truth Manor, a retirement home for elderly African Americans in Oakland, California; a recreational center in Tidewater, Virginia; provision of books and educational materials to poor families in Baltimore; a business internship program for Black youth in Pittsburgh; and a “Perpetual Shoe Program” in West Palm Beach, Florida to provide shoes to poor children, supported by local businesses. Across the country NBPW chapters developed social programs that sought to address the

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economic and social deprivation of Black people in the U.S. understanding that the real threats to the continuation of African American communities must be addressed.\(^4\)

In England, the Black Parents Movement (BPM), made up of autonomous local/regional groups, worked alternately to protect children in police encounters, provide legal and emotional support to children on trial, and organized supplementary classes for local Black children. Members of one group, based in the North London neighborhood of Finsbury Park, also started the George Padmore Supplementary School for Black pupils and England’s oldest Black bookstore, New Beacon Books. In 1971, New Beacon helped publish a pamphlet on Black underachievement in English schools, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal in English Schools*. This activity, was, like the NBWPH, based on a belief in the responsibilities they owed to their communities. The BPM also helps to illustrate how ties to larger communities could begin with caring for children, reinforcing the relationship between families and communities in a social activist politics.

This Black community work was a form of activism that represents their engagement with, what I am calling, a *politics of care*. Because Black people identified Black communities as “at risk” in various ways, they became involved in social activism to publicize these problems and advocate for change. As much of their work focused on acutely disadvantaged groups such as youth and women, many activists approached their work through familial networks; either through the intimate bonds of parenting or

\(^4\) National Association of Negro Professional Women’s Clubs, “Proposal for a Grant to Undertake a Pre-feasibility Reconnaissance Study of Problems relating to African Women Entrepreneurs leading to an Operational Program Grant, (OPG).” Box 1, Folder 6, Daisy George Papers, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library.
through fictive bonds of kinship within the larger Black community. A politics of care is based on Black feminist critiques of social movements and state repression in Black life, which allows this work to argue for a political engagement that centers complex experiences of racism to see these social activists as members of communities that they affirmed and sought to change simultaneously. This insistence on community, especially relationships between Black women and men, shaped my idea of the politics of care. At the point where Black people became politicized and began to engage in political activism, caring for other Black people was paramount.

This project considers communities in, at least, two forms. First, there is the concretely identifiable communities within neighborhoods. Many Black areas in England and the United States emerged out of instances of racism, specifically restrictions placed on where Black people were allowed to rent or own homes. Black neighborhoods fomented the creation of Black community identities based in the very basic reality that Black people often lived close to one another and experienced similar forms of racism. At the same time, there has been a tendency for Black Britons and African Americans to consider all Black people, nationally and internationally, as related in some way. Usually this form of identification is based on experiences of racism or African ancestry. Most importantly though, these understanding have led some Black activists have participated in work meant to affect Black people whom they would never meet. Thus, the operation of community in this instance is based on the imagined ways in which Black activists have chosen to relate to other Black people. In both of these instances, however,
community is in some ways connected to ideas of family or at least the intimate connections that can exist between marginalized and vulnerable people.

The historiographies of African America and Black Britain are uneven. The former is, by comparison, much more extensive and varied, while the latter is, in many ways, still in its adolescence. However, there are numerous points at which the bodies of literature speak to one another. In terms of general themes, the World War II period is an important historical moment to consider migration. The impact of war, economic opportunities or lack thereof, and military service all facilitated the movement of various groups of people around the world. Many Caribbeans, South Asians and African Americans settled in England, while Southern African Americans moved north and west to access wartime jobs and escape southern violent racism and Jim Crow repression. In London, England and Oakland, California, the predominant locales for this project, poor housing and unemployment were important features of the historiographies of these areas by the 1950s onward. Radical Black social movements were also important. The infamous Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), originated in Oakland in 1966. In 1968 a London chapter of the BPP was organized and quickly became integrated into Black British politics there.

By the mid-1970s, Black women’s engagement with a feminist politics, connected to, but distinct from, male-dominate Black social movements and white-dominated women’s groups created a unique understanding of race, sex, and class oppression. A predominate theme in Black women’s histories in both countries has been to articulate Black women’s lives in the margins of, or somewhere in between, other groups,
specifically White women and Black men. In 1892 African American educator and intellectual Anna Julia Cooper enunciated the position of Black women in American society. “The colored woman of to-day occupies… a unique position in this country… She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.”\textsuperscript{5} Almost a full century later, Black British feminist, Heidi Safia Mirza said very much the same thing about Black women in Britain who, in her estimation, “inhabit a third space…which, because it overlaps the margins of the race, gender and class discourse and occupies the empty spaces in between, exists in a vacuum of erasure and contradiction.” Mirza continues to elucidate what has been, and continues to be, the crux of the “problem” of Black women in the West, namely that they fill a space “maintained by the polarization of the world into blacks on one side and women on the other.”\textsuperscript{6} It is this space, or the lack thereof, which has defined the complexity of Black women’s lives and activism in the United States and England and this marginalization has been generally replicated in scholarly attention.

Even though Black men and women are the subject of this project, the frameworks relies on Black women’s feminist theory to illuminate community work for two reasons. First, Black feminists have understood Black women as members of various groups “blacks” and “women” being the two most obvious. Because of this, they have tended to see Black women’s activism as related to the larger community, often situating Black women’s liberation as related to Black men, White women, etc. The relationship

\textsuperscript{5} Anna Julia Cooper, \textit{A Voice From the South}. New York: NYU Press, 1988, 134.

between Black women, Black men, and Black youth allows one to consider a more full cross-section of the Black community. Secondly, Black women’s history has often been an “add-on,” coming after scholars have told the stories of “Black people” (read: Black men). Thus, as the historiography of this period is in its adolescence, a Black feminist framework can tell these stories as more fully recreated.

This work contributes, most directly, to a burgeoning Black feminist studies created relatively recently. Kimberly Springer’s *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968-1980* is a detailed discussion of the emergence and scope of Black feminist organizations in the post-Civil Rights and Black Power period. Springer asserts that Black feminist organizations “enacted interstitial politics focused on articulating their race, gender, and class identities as interconnected.”

Throughout the work, the author illustrates that in a distinctly Black feminist context, Black women critiqued the masculinist tendencies in African American protest and the lack of race or class analysis in white, middle-class feminism. This is especially important as Springer treats sensitively and effectively Black women’s disavowal of White feminists’ separation from men even as they foregrounded gender disparities within the Black community.

Like Springer, Julia Sudbury’s “*Other Kinds of Dreams*: Black Women’s Organisations and the Politics of Transformation, is a recovery work of Black British women’s activism, located somewhere in the margins of Black/immigrant and women’s protest movements. In this work, the first full-length scholarly discussion of Black

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8 Ibid, 29.
women in England, Sudbury discusses the theoretical foundations of Black women’s groups. The author’s straightforward account provides two important interventions in the study of global Black women’s history. First, Sudbury spends considerable time illustrating the similarities and differences between African American and Black British women. She does this at least partially because one of her stated goals is to illustrate how Black British women were creating a theory of women’s activism as they lived it. This explains why they produced comparably little theory at the time, especially important for this study. Sudbury uses African American feminist theory to illuminate its similarities and dissimilarities between African American and Black British contexts. For instance, the author takes particular issue with Patricia Hill Collins’ “standpoint theory” arguing that it essentializes what it means to be Black and presumes the importance of African ancestry, which in the British context hardly makes sense, considering that in the 1970s and 1980s “black” became a political term which unified Caribbean, Asian and African migrants from former colonial countries.

“The Politics of Care: Black Community Activism in England and the United States” is about the connection between socio-political activism and intimate spaces. Because they believed that Black communities were in peril, Black activists connected everyday experiences of racism with the national and global domination of Black people. Changing immigration policies and citizenship categories were connected to frequent and violent clashes with local police forces as reinforcing the idea that Black people were not


welcome to settle in England. And African Americans understood educational disparities as a sign that full citizenship in America was still differentiated along racial and class lines. Focusing on Black women’s bodies, family relationships and Black neighborhoods, one can see the ways in which racial, gender and class domination are enacted in people’s everyday lives. As the national culture denigrated, and in some cases sought to eradicate, Black communities Black activists responded with an oppositional political structure. They found solace in their relationships with other community members, male and female, and they attempted to counter these oppressive forces.

Chapter Outline

The first chapter, “Black Community Activism and the Politics of Care,” is a theoretical examination of the uses of care in Black activism. Many Black women have excoriated Western, middle class, White feminism as “anti-male.” Such a critique is based in the simple truth that Black women have united with Black men to fight White supremacy, colonialism and class domination and thus see the separation of the sexes as undesirable, if not impossible. Black women have also fought against a White feminism that they deem to be apolitical, or at least unconcerned with the everyday battles against which people of color and the poor contend. From this disaffection, Black feminists in both countries developed a social critique of gender relations, while still separating themselves from the racial and class underpinnings of mainstream articulations of feminism. This chapter deconstructs articulations of Black community activism to illustrate the ways in which definitions of community, care and love lay at the center of these debates about political involvement and social responsibilities. After this
introduction to the framework, the chapters are presented in pairs, covering similar, but not identical, subject matters in the United States and England. This structure allows for the reader to more fully engaged the comparative framework. The sections consider education activism, anti-police harassment, and reproductive injustice.

The first pair of chapters consider Black community activism around educational inequalities. In each case, Black activist understood that the educational opportunities available for Black children were central to the ability to access rights in predominately White countries. In “A Very Tender Problem”: Education and the Making of ‘Multicultural England,” repeated documentation of Black underachievement in English schools had become, by the 1970s, a problem of great importance for Black parents. Locating critiques of the English educational system in curricula and racist behavior by teachers and pupils, community activists worked to identify and publicize these problems while also providing alternative educational opportunities for their children. Because all of the actors involved believed that education played a role in citizenship and national identity, migrants thought affecting change in the schools was a way to give their British-born or raised children the citizenship rights they had been denied.

“‘Screaming Loud Against the System’: Race, Integration and the Problems of Color-Blind Education” considers educational inequality throughout the Oakland Unified School District. Very often discussions of African Americans and education focus on Brown v. Board of Education, even though the post-Brown period has made clear that African Americans still faced serious obstacles in educational achievement. Studies of desegregation has often focused either on the South or those sites, like Boston or Detroit,
where desegregation played out on the nightly news, Oakland, California, however, never fully committed to integration or busing, because the city’s makeup did not make this a pressing matter. Thus, this chapter considers educational inequality in the lead up to *Regents of University of California v. Allan Bakke*, and the end of affirmative action programs, which highlighted what had been systemic and oft-overlooked disparities in educational spending and school resources for poor communities of color.

The next section continues many of the themes developed in the previous to delineate the often-confrontational relationship between Black communities and the police. The politics of care is based on the premise that Black activists organized around vulnerable members of their communities, of which there is none more at risk than young adults encountering systems of authority, wherein both sides distrust one another. These violent and often deadly encounters with the police are in many ways local and individualized affairs, at the same time as they call up memories of widespread injustices.

In the English context, the Notting Hill riot of 1976 and the Brixton riot of 1981 framed the rise of Black parents organizations throughout England. Many parents groups identified violent policing and unfounded arrests and prosecutions as a threat to the safety of Black youth. They also connected their contentious relationship with police forces to restrictive immigration polices and changes in their legal citizenship status. Often educational activists feared that young adults would leave school without qualifications or job prospects and the aimlessness of their existences would make them vulnerable to police harassment. “On the Front Line: Race, Citizenship, and the Battle Over English
“Streets” considers what some activists understood as the criminalization of Black youth as related to anti-immigrant legislation and general English xenophobia.

In Oakland, the history of strained police-community relations entered the national, and international, consciousness with the BPP. Clashes between members of the radical organization and Oakland police were frequent and connected to a history of Southern migrant marginalization in the East Bay Area. African Americans were unable to see the police as peace keepers or concerned with law and order, while police seemed to focus considerable attention on supposed “Black criminality.” This mutual distrust colored virtually every encounter between an Oakland police officer and Black resident. Thus, Black oversight of police behavior, within the ranks and from outside, was deemed necessary to dismantling the fraught relationship between the Oakland Police Department and Oakland’s Black communities.

The two previous sections share many themes in common; mixed-sex organizations and focus on protecting children, for instance. Because of this there are some similarities between the protest tactics in which people engaged. The last section on reproductive just is a departure from these patterns. While women made their connections with the larger Black community a priority, they did not avoid issues that only or primarily affected their sex and Black women’s organizations developed out of this reality. Activism around health inequalities, examines Black women’s articulations of ideas about family, reproduction and motherhood. In both the United States and England, abortion and birth control access, specifically Depo-Provera, allowed Black women’s activists to offer analyses of the intersections of poverty, racism and health in shaping
Black women’s reproductive choices. The relationship between Depo-Provera, Black women’s access to health care, and the ability to control their own reproductive choices, is a concrete example of the ways in which race, class and gender domination affected Black communities. Across national boundaries and with divergent histories, African American and Black British women engaged in similar fights, which even more poignantly than the previous two cases, illustrates the confluence of intimate realities and political mobilization. By fighting for reproductive justice, equal educational opportunities, and against police brutality, Black community activists desired to give Black people the right to control and protect themselves body, mind and spirit. Thus the abstract nature of political engagement was tied to the day-to-day survival of entire communities of people.
Black Community Activism and the Politics of Care

The moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. The moment we choose to love we begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. That action is the testimony of love as the practice of freedom.

-bell hooks

Byllye Avery was born in 1937 in Waynesville, Georgia. She met her husband Wesley in 1955 at Talladega College and they married in 1960. Around the same time, the pair moved to Gainesville, Florida for work, Byllye was getting a master’s in special education, and Wesley was studying educational research. In November 1970 Wesley had a massive heart attack and died, he was thirty-three years old. Byllye remembers that in the years before his death her husband seemed like a healthy man, even though he was able to escape service in the Vietnam war because of his high blood pressure. Wesley’s death, then, was a shock to his wife and their two young children. Byllye remembered her husband’d death as a “truly... radicalizing experience.”

In her 2007 memoir, Doreen Lawrence tells of her emigration from Jamaica to England when she was nine years old. Born in 1952, she left Jamaica to be reunited with her mother who migrated some years before and whom she barely remembered. She shares, briefly, her experiences growing up in London in the 1960s, her marriage to another Jamaican-born migrant, and the early years of their family. In this respect, Doreen’s life can be placed alongside a number of autobiographies which have emerged

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in the last twenty years about Black people in Britain, including Chris Mullard’s *On Being Black in Britain* and Mike Phillips’ *London Crossings*. But the sometimes idyllic picture of her life in London that Doreen creates ends on April 22, 1993, when her eldest son, seventeen-year-old Stephen, was stabbed to death while waiting for a bus to return home in time for his curfew. “I was a different person,” Doreen wrote.\(^{13}\)

In the aftermath of these two events, separated by a thousand miles or more and roughly two decades are important threads of similarity. After her husband’s death, Byllye “realized it doesn’t really matter how much formal education you have. If you don’t know how to take care of yourself, you’re still basically in a state of ignorance.” Avery says she looked around at her life, her loved ones, and wondered about their health, she wondered how people could be given the tools to take improvement of their health into their own hands. Later she helped found the Birth Place, a feminist alternative birthing facility, focused on creating support systems throughout the pregnancy and optimizing women’s physical and emotional comfort throughout the birthing process. Later, as a member of the National Women’s Health Network, Avery undertook the research and initiatives that eventually led to the foundation of the National Black Women’s Health Project.

Doreen and her husband Neville were deeply shaken by the loss of their son. At first they were dismayed, and later angry, at the inadequate investigation the London Metropolitan police conducted into Stephen’s murder. Even though likely suspects were immediately identified, the police spent precious time interrogating Stephen’s friends and

insinuating that he was a thief, rather than an “innocent” victim. Doreen, initially too shocked by the murder, retreated into herself, while her husband Neville worked tirelessly to encourage the public to give any information on Stephen’s murder to the police or the family, later leaving the country from the stress of two failed investigations and threats on his life. In the eighteen year struggle to discover who murdered their son and hold the police accountable for their mistakes, Doreen became a vocal opponent of racist attacks in Britain, she and Neville began a scholarship program to help young Black Britons interested in studying architecture (which would have been their son’s course of study at university). Doreen was later made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) for her efforts and both parents were present at the 2011-2012 trial, and conviction of two of Stephen’s suspected killers.

Out of these personal tragedies Avery and Lawrence created new lives for themselves; lives they likely might not have lived otherwise. They learned community organizing tactics, participated in the political processes of their respective countries and on an individual, local and national level they were agents of change. But this study is interested in the ways in which they used those individual tragedies as something more, something relevant to the larger communities in which they lived, communities that supported them in their own loss and healing, communities that had too often been neglected or repressed.

The idea of the politics of care emerged from examples like Avery and the Lawrences. The African American and Black British people in this study found ways to transcended their individual experiences of loss, frustration, and disaffection to see the
ways in which racism and social marginalization affected their communities. Their activism was based in a desire to highlight and address problems, through a critical reading of their own (recent) histories as well as visionary ideas about the future. This work also involved conscious (re)-imaginings of what community meant and whom it could include. This work was part of the love and care that they expressed in their personal familial relationships.

Outside of one’s own local neighborhood, the idea of community must be imagined, thus the idea of “a Black community” becomes less of a truth and moreso a form of fiction. Race, or more accurately, racial discrimination, has been a unifying factor for people of African descent globally. However, there is extreme heterogeneity in ideas about race and appropriate responses to experiences of racism. It is not even entirely true that people of African descent will necessarily see Black people outside of one’s ethnic group or nation as related to them in any concrete way. It might also be true that White people, in different time periods and geographic locations, often believe in the connections between people of African descent more concretely than their Black counterparts. Ultimately Black people have chosen to connect with other people of African descent across lines of class, national borders and language for a variety of reasons. The question then, is why.

In the introduction to *Black British Feminism: A Reader*, Heidi Safia Mirza asserts that “to be black (not white), female and ‘over here’, in Scotland England or

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14 This is based, in some sense, on Benedict Anderson’s idea of the nation as “an imagined political community... imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 6.
Wales, is to disrupt all the safe closed categories of what it means to be British: that is to be white and British.” However, Mirza also asserts that one’s location in a majority white society (in this case Britain) “is about a state of ‘becoming’ (racialized); a process of consciousness, when colour becomes the defining factor about who you are. Located through your “otherness” a ‘conscious coalition’ emerges: a self-consciously constructed space where identity is not inscribed by a natural identification but a political kinship.”

Even though there are important differences between African Americans and Black Britons, Mirza’s discussion of the importance of race transcends in this period of study. The process of racial identification as the primary means of creating communities, however, has often excluded the experiences of certain groups, like gay people of color, (im)migrants, or poor women for instance, usually to tell the stories of those with relative forms of privilege and power (men, heterosexuals, etc). And in some cases, it has only been when confronted with White racism do people come to see themselves as Black, and locate their race as the primary form of identity.

In her memoir of her battle with cancer, author, poet and activist, Audre Lorde asserted that she was “defined as other in every group I’m part of... Yet without community there is certainly no liberation, no future, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between me and my oppression.”

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16 For instance, in her biography of Zora Neale Hurston Valerie Boyd writes that growing up in the all-Black town of Eatonville, Florida gave her a sense of freedom from experiences of racism and role models but also allowed for her not to consider race as the only, or even primary, mode of self-identification. Valerie Boyd, *Wrapped In Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 25 & 93-94.

labeling could be (as a lesbian, Black, and female), yet she saw these labels as useful in the pursuit of her own liberation. In much the same way, Black feminist, lesbian collective, the Combahee River Collective, made clear that their specific identities made them part of all of the groups working in some small way toward dismantling a variety of oppressions. Their attempts at solidarity with White women (to end patriarchal oppression of women), Black men (to end racial discrimination) and heterosexual Black women were part of a larger process to achieve their own liberation.

The major source of difficulty in our political work is that we are not just trying to fight oppression on one front or even two, but instead to address a whole range of oppression. We do not have racial, sexual, heterosexual, or class privilege to rely upon, nor do we have even the minimal access to resources and power that groups who possess anyone of these types of privilege have.\(^\text{18}\)

In this way, choosing to work within (even a limited) frame of identity to create communities based on a shared identities might be useful to achieve a specific goal, even though the process might also marginalize other parts of one’s identity.

But, if one accepts that racial identity, particularly in terms of social activism, is a conscious choice rather than a natural state, one can see the ways in which making those communities in and of themselves created new possibilities. For instance, activists in the 1960s-1980s understood their own domestic movements toward liberation as related to African decolonization and other struggles for Black liberation, making conscious decisions to achieve a wider form of African Diasporic freedom. This agenda understood histories of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, New World slavery, and European colonization of the African continent as part of one larger movement toward Black subjugation. If

Black communities are fiction, various Black people have suggested, in their own way, that they should be fiction of the highest form. They should imagine a drastically new future, even if there was disagreement as to what that future might look like.

The same visionary aspect can be inferred in the building of Black women’s communities. At the conclusion of her choreopoem/play, for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf, Ntozake Shange paints a vivid picture of the emotional and spiritual healing toward which the women in her work have arrived or are heading.

Lady in red: i waz missin somethin
Lady in purple: somethin so important
Lady in orange: somethin promised
Lady in blue: a layin on of hands
Lady in green: fingers near my forehead
Lady in yellow: strong
Lady in green: cool
Lady in orange: movin
Lady in purple: makin me whole
Lady in orange: sense
Lady in green: pure
Lady in blue: all the gods comin to me layin me open to myself
Lady in red: i waz missin somethin
Lady in green: somethin promised
Lady in orange: somethin free
Lady in purple: a layin on of hands
Lady in blue: i know bout/layin on bodies/layin outta man bringin him alla my fleshy self & some of my pleasure being taken full eager wet like i get sometimes i waz missin somethin
Lady in purple: a layin on of hands
Lady in blue: not a man
Lady in yellow: layin on
Lady in purple: not my mama/holdin me tight/sayin i’m always gonna be her girl not a layin on of bosom & womb a layin on of hands/the holiness of myself released
Lady in red: ...i found god in myself & I loved her/ i loved her fiercely
Lady in brown: & this is for colored girls who have considered suicide/but are movin to the ends of their own rainbows

Shange’s poem illustrates the capacity for women to create a wholeness within themselves that popular understandings suggest others will do. As bell hooks asserts in her feminist interrogation of love, women have been schooled to believe that we find ourselves in relation with other, females learn early to search for love in a world beyond our own hearts. We learn in childhood that the roots of love lie outside our capabilities, that to know love we must be loved by others. For as females in patriarchal culture, we cannot determine our self-worth. Our value, our worth, and whether or not we can be loved are always determined by someone else. Deprived of the means to generate self-love, we look to others to render us lovable; we long for love and we search.

Shange’s stage direction; “All of the ladies repeat to themselves softly the lines ‘i found god in myself & i loved her fiercely.’ It soon becomes a song of joy...The ladies sing first to each other, then gradually to the audience,” indicates the importance of finding a community whose experiences and ideas support one’s wholeness as an individual and member of the collective.

The importance of Black women’s communities can not be overstated. At the end of her poem, “So you think I’m a mule?” Nigerian-Scottish, British-born poet and novelist, Jackie Kay paints the Black women who accept and succor her as a safe haven from White racism and judgement.

Aint nobody debating my blackness./You see that fine African nose of mine,/my lips, my hair. You see lady/I’m not mixed up about it./So take your questions, your interest,/ your patronage. Run along./Just leave me./I’m going to my Black sisters/ to women who nourish each other/ on belonging/There’s a lot of us/Black women struggling to define/ just who

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19 Ntozake Shange, for colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf (New York: Collier Books, 1989), 63-64.

20 bell hooks, Communion: The Female Search for Love (New York: W. Morrow, 2002), xv
we are/ where we belong/ and if we know no home/ we know one thing;/ we are Black/ we’re at home with that.\textsuperscript{21}

Kay’s portrayal understands Black women’s relationships as a place of safety, sometimes emotional and at other times physical, from racism. While the larger Black community can provide this in certain ways, the identification between Black women, even amongst their many differences, Shange and Kay both suggest, is unique.

In an in-depth editorial, published in radical Black British magazine \textit{Race Today}, members of the Brixton Black Women’s Group, published an article about the plight of Black nurses in Britain. Throughout the article the authors attempt to sever the relationship between “care” and the nursing profession. As one nurse says about the numbers of Black women working as night nurses:

\begin{quote}
Most of the night staff are black... because they have children and it’s more convenient for them to be at home in the days to see after the children. If you work days you’re not there to send them off to school, you’re not there to receive them when they come back, and you have to get somebody to look after them. With nights, you can actually put them off to bed before going to work.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Centering the importance of their roles as mothers they also locate their children, and families in general, as the rightful recipients of their care-work, rather than their patients. At least some nurses reached that position as a result of the abuse they suffered while caring for White patients. As another unnamed author said in her short story, “Black Nurse in White Hospital,” after being called a “Black whore” or “Black bitch” by their patients, Black nurses often felt little sympathy for the people who abused them. As she said, “We meet these people when they can no longer hide their true feelings. When these

\begin{footnotes}
\item[21] Jackie Kay, “So you think I’m a mule?” in Mirza, ed. \textit{Black British Feminism}, PAGE NUMBER
\end{footnotes}
people insult us they do so from the heart.”23 The insistence that nursing was, for these women, just a job, unbuckles the relationship between what is presumed to be “care-work” as the proper domain of women.

This project is based on the idea that Black activism was an expression of the care Black people felt towards their local, national, and sometimes global communities. While specific events created and directed the activism in this study, social activism very quickly mushroomed into discussions of the systemic, institutional underpinnings of these events. By fighting to dismantle these processes, the activism recounted here became something much larger than the original event.

While concerned with both men and women, too often discussions of social activists marginalizes the contributions of women. This work pays particular attention to Black women’s expressions of a politics of care, choosing to center them, whenever possible. In the introduction to The Black Women’s Health Book: Speaking for Ourselves, Evelyn C. White asserts,

> Without a sound body and mind, it is impossible for Black women to attain personal goals or to provide the leadership our community needs as we approach the twenty-first century. For generations, we have taken care of everything and everyone but ourselves. Now is the time for us to put our well-being at the top of the program.24

Speaking here specifically of the American context, White illustrates how crucial Black women’s activism can be. Women are sometimes denied the possibility of caring for themselves; and when they do, they can be understood as selfish or their actions divisive.

The presumption that women will be the primary carers for their families, especially the

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23 “Black Nurse in White Hospital” Black Parents Movements, 3/1/4/1, George Padmore Institute, London.

elderly and youth, has extended to ideas about women’s activism. Thus, it can be
dangerous to center caring in Black women’s activism, but when working to protect and
take care of themselves, women’s activists situated Black women’s health as vital to all
facets of Black liberation, because of the many functions they performed in their own
families and at the local community level.25

Care, however, is not the only emotional component to the framework for this
project; there was also love. bell hooks posits that while care is a component of love, care
is not love itself. She defines love as “a combination of care, commitment, knowledge,
responsibility, respect, and trust.” Using love as framework for understanding historical
processes can be fraught. First, love is inherently subjective. Each individual expresses it
differently and certain modes of expression might be common in certain cultures, but
uncommon in others. Secondly, there seems to be little evidence that there is a clear and
universal definition of love for any historical period.26

At the same time there are pitfalls in asserting that women’s activism it has been
motivated by love. Much like caring, women are presumed to love naturally, especially in
regards to children. Popular associations of love focus either on the family or on romantic
relationships. Like caring, love is seen as something personal, enacted within the space of
one’s home. Another important reason to avoid using the word love in this work is
personal. Again, hooks reminds us that “A woman who talks of love is suspect... Taught
to believe that the mind, not the heart, is the seat of learning, many of us believe that to

25 Rosemary McKechnie and Tamara Khon, “Introduction Why Do We Care Who Cares?” in Extending the
Boundaries of Care: Medical Ethics and Caring Practices (Oxford & New Yorkk: Berg, 1999), 3
26 hooks, Communion, 88.
speak of love... means we will be perceived as irrational.”

Thus, to write a historical account of Black community activism, concerned with families, women, love and care puts this work at risk of not being taken seriously. However, I include love as a component of the politics of care because for the men and women in this study it was integral to their work. Because many of these activists entered their community work on the behalf of a family member, often children, their activism was an expression of the love they felt for these individuals already.

In Bernard Coard’s recollection of the impetus for his pamphlet on the plight of Black children in Educationally Sub-Normal schools, various encounters with Black people who were suspicious of the English educational system encouraged his work. While one can argue that it was care that urged Coard to write _How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal_, it was an expression of parental love, which motivated his supporters. Their children were the ones being let down by the English educational system and they viewed supporting Coard as an extension of their responsibilities, to provide safety for their children.

In much the same way, when the National Association of Colored Women’s Clubs called their members to participate in community literacy program, it was based on love.

Recognizing the fact that the entire future of Black America rests in the hands of our youth, the NACWN is adamant in its belief that the youth of this nation, especially black youth, possess an unlimited wealth of untapped resources - human resources that if properly awakened, guided and developed, can lead to thousands of new doctors, computer

27 hooks, _All About Love: New Visions_ (New York: W. Morrow, 2000), xxv & xxvii
technicians, all kinds of highly competent engineers and hundreds of other vital vocations—leading to productive lives and self-sufficiency. Using hooks’ definition of love as care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility and respect, one can understand that these women understood the devastating rate of illiteracy, adult and youth, as a community, rather than individual problem. Working toward improving the educational experiences of Black children impacted their individual futures and African Americans as a whole.

Another problem with using love as a framework is that it might lead to an assumption that women are the only actors. Society has too often seen love, or the practice of loving, “as women’s work, degraded and devalued labor.” There are many problems with such a construction for this study and beyond. Much of the work being recounted here happened in mixed-sex organizations or coalitions, in English parents’ groups or in the Oakland, California chapter of the NAACP. It is important not to divest love as a motivator for Black men involved in social activism. As fathers, sons, brothers, lovers, friends, or completely unrelated members of the larger Black community, men can and do act out of love, whether or not society is willing to name it as such. And just as women are not “natural” caregivers, women do not love naturally, in intimate relationships or otherwise. Rather, using love as a framework helps to better explain this articulation of community activism. hooks suggests that the choice to love is also a choice “to live in community, and that means that we do not have to change by

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29 hooks, *Communion,*
ourselves.” Loving reinforces the importance of the community aspect of this work and explain certain choices and tactics in social activism.30

Part of the reason why care and love feature throughout this work is that it is concerned, at least incidentally, with the mobilization of parents or extended familial networks. Even when they did not always identify as such, protecting family members (especially children) emerges as a recurring theme in both countries. The focus on protecting children, especially in schools and in encounters with police, blurred lines between personal and communal responsibilities.

Looking at encounters with police officers in London, England and Oakland, California the importance of protecting children, whether one’s own or not, is clear. Individual arrests by the London Metropolitan police and the decades-long strained relationship between the Oakland police and Black youth were pieces of a larger puzzle. In both cities, work to highlight the consistent harassment of Black youth by police was ultimately important to every young Black person on the cities’ streets. Thus, some activists operated from a perspective that police harassment was inevitable and stopping it was in everyone’s best interests.

Families are also important because Black people saw them as in danger or popularly maligned. In the U.S. the Moynihan report has historically been an important referent in understandings of African American families. Moynihan’s depiction of absentee fathers and Black matriarchs has, since its publication in 1965, been the frame through which African Americans refuted racist and unsympathetic understandings about

30 hooks, Outlaw Culture, 248.
their families. However, this has often led to idealized, but no less incorrect, understandings of Black family patterns; in other words that Black mothers, for instance, are revered for being self-less and devoted to their families, even if those labels might be harmful as well.\textsuperscript{31}

Black British families, intimately connected to the history of migration and British imperialism, have also understood their families as imperiled. Connecting immigration restrictions to British support for global population efforts, migrants and their descendants have seen the process of home-building and family creation in the Mother Country as political acts. On the other hand, in terms of governmental or academic research, “Black families have been judged dysfunctional and pathological, despite the fact that little empirical evidence supports this assumption.” This was most evident in the aftermath of the 1981 Brixton riots where “dysfunctional” and “disintegrating” Caribbean family structures were blamed for youth behavior. And in both countries the normalization of White family models “against which Black family experiences [were] measured... contributed to the development on a broader scale of a close association, made implicitly or explicitly, of Black family identity as negative.”\textsuperscript{32}

Communities can also be understood as fictionalized family. In England “black” came to include people of Asian and African origin or descent. In the 1970s and 1980s, Black Britain was created “through... a self-consciously constructed space where identity is not inscribed by a natural identification but a political kinship.” Those who used


\textsuperscript{32} Bertha M. N. Ochieng and Carl L. A. Hylton, eds. \textit{Black Families in Britain as the Site of Struggle} (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2010), 1 & 8.
“black” as a political marker consciously move beyond “race” and national boundaries to construct “a political identity shaped by the shared experience of radicalization and its consequences.” Of course every Asian activist did not identify as Black, and there were significant language and cultural distinctions within groups, but the choice to become “Black” was part of the process of creating a community from which to organize.\textsuperscript{33}

The United States has a different history with Blackness as a communal marker. Most generally “Black” has been synonymous with the descendants of enslaved Africans and African Americans throughout the country’s history. Situating enslavement as the sole genesis of African America, has created little room for understanding the heterogeneity within this community, for instance immigrants from the Caribbean and most recently Africa or even the important cultural markers as dictated by one’s region. But for this study it is significant to understand the ways in which African Americans blurred lines of class and educational achievement. Thus, for those who were educated and financially able, living in Oakland’s poorest neighborhoods was not mandatory, nor did they have to send their children to the city’s most neglected school; and many might not have. However, advocating on the behalf of residents in West and East Oakland, home to the city’s poorest residents of color, was meant to positively affect the future possibilities for all Black Oaklanders. Thus, solidarity, in this case based on racial identification, was not inevitable, but a conscious decision in deference to a larger goal.

Even though the actors here were men and women it would be impractical to ignore the importance of mothers. Speaking specifically of the African American

\textsuperscript{33} Mirza, “Introduction,” 4.
example, Patricia Hill Collins asserts that women-centered families have been expressions of African beliefs regarding communal child-care and child-rearing. While there has been extensive discussion of “other-mothering,” fictive kin and extended family networks as features of African American society, they also hold particular sway in discussions of social activism. Just as women are not inherently caring or loving, giving birth was not viewed by either African Americans or Britons of African descent as necessary to assume a mothering role. Rather, one could mother or parent without an identified familial relationship to the child in question. In the creation of the Manchester Black Parents’ Group, for instance, members consciously chose to allow non-parents to join, demonstrating that these individuals were just as invested in the fate of Black youth as biological families. Work around reproductive justice and Black women’s health sought to preserve a woman’s right to have children alongside her right not to. But, what is interesting in this context is to think of women who chose not, or were unable, to have children, advocating for the protection of Black motherhood and the health of Black children. The importance of family could be affirmed in ways distinct from the nuclear model by conscious decision to create and expand one’s family unit.

One impetus to expand family models were similar experiences of social, racial or economic inequalities. In attempting to make sense of her son Stephen’s murder, Doreen Lawrence says that his only “crime is that he was walking down the road, looking for a bus that would take him home.” She remembers that before Stephen’s death she was not a political person, nor did she spend much time thinking about racism. But in the aftermath of losing her eldest son she had this to say:

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Our [Black people] crime is living in a country were the justice system supports racist murderers against innocent people. In my opinion what happened was the way of the judicial system making a clear statement, saying to the black community that their lives are worth nothing and the justice system will support anyone, any white person who wishes to commit a crime, or even murder, against a black person. You will be protected. You will be supported by the british system. To the black community: your lives are nothing. You do not have any rights to the law in this country. That is only here to protect the white man and his family.34

The investigation into the investigation of Stephen’s death impacted recent British history. In 1999, the inquiry into the Metropolitan police’s investigation of Stephen’s death led judge Sir William Macpherson, to declare in his inquiry into the police investigation of Stephen’s death that the police were institutionally racist. And based on Macpherson’s recommendation the English high court overturned the country’s double jeopardy law, allowing for the possibility that Stephen’s murderers, previously tried but never convicted, might be brought to justice.

The Lawrence family’s fight demonstrates another critical aspect of the politics of care: engaging political change. Community activism is often analogous to local activism. But for the politics of care it is vital to understand that activists moved from one single event to larger processes of racial discrimination and marginalization. Thus Stephen’s death and the Lawrence family’s pain was connected to police inaction and English xenophobia. The Lawrences work after Stephen’s death did not diminish the significance of their loss, but it did bring together a web of seemingly separate parts of Black British life (anti-immigrant legislation and police harassment, for instance).

But political change, as an outcome, was not a guarantee. Some people identified policy changes at the outset while others did not. For instance, when Byllye Avery began the early work of the Black Women’s Health Project, as a program within the National Women’s Health Network, educating Black women about their bodies and health occupied their primary initiatives. Avery understood that racism had a profound impact on Black women’s mental and physical health and much of their efforts supported the creation of local self-help groups. Only later did the NBWHP begin to work on issues of health care policy. While local Scrap-Sus groups throughout England located the repeal of Section IV of the 1824 Vagrancy Act, used by police to harass Black youth in public areas. Thus, affecting legislative change was their primary, if not their only, goal.

Because the people in this study were motivated by a desire to care for their communities, understood as pseudo-familial networks, and used their activism as an expression of love, such bonds contributed to the process of creating new visions of the future. It is not surprising that the issues of inadequate or abusive policing, educational inequalities and health disparities were all buttressed by institutional forms of racism. By confronting, what bell hooks terms, the “culture of domination” they sought to create different environments in which their young people would live. For instance, in her vociferous opposition of the repeal of affirmative action programs in the University of California system, NAACP Western regional director, Virna M. Canson, spoke not of her own future, but of those unknown Black children.

Oh what comfort racists take, and what a hostile environment is spawned with the Madison Avenue phrase Doctor [Wilson] Riles [UC Regent] repeats so often: ‘A Black Child Does Not Have To Sit Beside A White Child To Learn.’ Learn what, Dr. Riles???... We are expected to believe
that somewhere down the road everthing [sic] will be alright. We suspect not far down the road the University will again be all white.\textsuperscript{35} A highly educated and successful woman, Canson’s stance was focused on ensuring the necessities for children to achieve such possibilities in their own futures. Her position involved looking ahead at possible outcomes and imagining what ending affirmative action might mean for (local) Black youth. Her work is, in some ways, about the past, present and future at once.

At the same time, these activist also modeled new forms of identity. In the controversial 1978 documentary on Black Britons, Blacks Britannica, social activist Courtney Hay asserts: “I learned my politics in my mother’s kitchen”\textsuperscript{36} Hay’s simple declaration demonstrates that adults did not only become political actors to protect or seek justice for their injured youth, they also taught them how to do so for themselves. In this way, the expression of a politics of care could be a form of child-rearing, giving Black youth new images of Black resistance and self-respect to rival racist stereotypes encountered in school or through the criminalizing affect of police harassment, for instance. The activism discussed in this project, then, demonstrates that radical ideas about family, community, and social responsibility often served as blueprints for social change.

\textsuperscript{35} Virna M. Canson, “Copy for Other Voices” letter, 1-2. Virna M. Canson Collection, Museum of African American Life and History, Oakland, California.

\textsuperscript{36} Courtney Hay, Blacks Britannica (1978)
“A Very Tender Problem”37: Education and the Making of “Multi-cultural” England

We must never sit idly by while they make ignoramuses of our children, but must see to it that by hook or crook our children get the best education they are capable of!38

In her memoir, Jamaican migrant Doreen Lawrence discusses briefly her time in school. Lawrence left Jamaica in 1962, when she was nine (very nearly ten). Her mother left Jamaica for England some years before “with the idea of staying only five years then returning home” but settled, married, had other children and eventually sent for her eldest daughter. Doreen traveled with a family friend and his daughter, strangers, and at Heathrow airport “was handed over to another set of strange people. My mother was one of them.” 39 Lawrence describes her childhood self as color blind, but only saw White people for the first time when she arrived in England. She does not remember any serious instances of racism in school, but does recount one confusing encounter with a classmate:

when our class visited the Horniman Museum in Forest Hill. We were shown a video clip of some pastoral tribe in Africa - I think perhaps Kenya - whose custom was to pierce a cow’s vein and drink its blood. As we watched this, another child asked me if I did that too. I was astonished, since I probably knew as much about cows as she did. I can’t remember


39 Doreen Lawrence with Margaret Busby, And Still I Rise: Seeking Justice for Stephen (London: Faber and Faber 2006), 21
what I said to her, but that was the only insensitive comment that I ever heard in primary school.40
While Lawrence remembers her educational experience as one of relative ignorance “of how some people might feel about me,” this was not so for all Black pupils of her generation and after. Other Black children, migrant and British-born, experienced English schools where they were coded as problems.41 Some children felt that their time in school as an “assault on our sense of identity, which we were rarely prepared for, [that] made us vulnerable and isolated.”42 This is especially true of the children who entered school in the late 1960s and after.

In 1948, the British Nationality Act created the category of Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKC), the national citizenship status of the UK, the British Commonwealth and any remaining colonies effective January 1, 1949. This designation allowed all CUKCs the right to reside and work in England, travel and settle within the Empire without restriction, without any distinction between the citizenship status of subjects born in England, Jamaica or Pakistan, for instance. However Black migrants to the UK entered the public consciousness incorrectly labeled as “immigrants.” It is easy to assume that the use of “immigrant” is appropriate as Commonwealth migrants did move from one country to another, however situated in the wake of British colonialism, most of the West Indians, Asians, and later Africans who settled in England did not cross any

40 Ibid, 24.

41 This project uses Black to mean Asian and Afro-Caribbean, a term meant to convey the similarities in experience each group experienced in the United Kingdom. While most of my work focuses on the experiences between West Indians, much of this history affected Asian populations and growing African groups in the UK at the time.

conventional national boundaries. Rather, they effectively moved from one part of the Empire, and later Commonwealth, to another.\textsuperscript{43} Comparatively, to understand the movement of Latin Americans to the United States whereby Mexicans and Nicaraguans are conflated with Puerto Ricans would ignore the preferential migratory status that Puerto Ricans hold and erase their legal positioning as U.S. citizens because of the island’s status as an American territory. The imperial relationship between the United Kingdom and its global holdings therefore complicates constructions of foreignness inherent in labeling this movement as immigration.

This distinction was also significant culturally. Many of the first waves of migrants understood their move to England as a “return” to the Mother Country, or metropole. Leaving former colonial holdings such as Jamaica and Barbados, many migrants did not expect a significant culture shock because they lived in societies modeled on England itself. As one migrant woman asserted: “There was patriotism and a feeling that you would belong. It really was the mother country and being away from home wouldn’t be that terrible because you would belong.”\textsuperscript{44} This understanding of England speaks to the colonial relationships that had just recently dominated the lives of the British West Indies. However this relationship was one in which England and

\textsuperscript{43} After the dissolution of the British Empire, the New Commonwealth emerged, which bridged former Commonwealth states with former colonies still within the British sphere of influence. African, Asian and Caribbean states which were members during the period of this study: Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Botswana, Cameroon, Dominica, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guyana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Saint Lucia, Samoa, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. [Not a complete list] However, not all of these countries sent migrants to the United Kingdom nor did they all have the same relationship with the metropole. For instance, South Africa had an elevated status in the Commonwealth for various reasons, including economic, but in the 1960s its relationship with United Kingdom began to fray because of its apartheid government.

\textsuperscript{44} Elyse Dodgson, \textit{Motherland: West Indian Women to Britain in the 1950s} (Scotland: Heinemann Educational Books, Ltd, 1984), 7.
Englishness was elevated above colonial cultures, affecting the decision to migrate. As Black British activists Beverly Bryan, Stella Dadzie and Suzanne Scafe suggest in *The Heart of the Race: Black Women’s Lives in Britain* “The power of the myth of a better life caused us to leave even when we had the skills, jobs or social status for a good life back home.”45

While some migrants did not plan to say, many did and their transition from temporary sojourners to settlers fomented a crisis in English society and culture. As migrants settled, sent home for the children they left behind and gave birth to children in the Mother Country the questions emerged in newspapers and political dialogue: how would they change English society? And how would the English respond? The arena of Black activism around education reform was a consequence of this migration, as well as a response to their most unwelcome greeting.

While far from uniform, by the mid-1960s, some schools were quite unhappy with the increasing numbers of Black children in their midst. Programs to lessen the concentration of Black students in classrooms was meant, alternately, to assimilate these children or lessen their impact on White children. Black activists responded to this with dismay initially, anger and then organization, ultimately hoping to secure for their children the best education possible. More than anything, Black educational activism aimed at giving their youth the full gamut of their social citizenship rights, while also changing the nature and function of the English educational system to better reflect the increasingly diverse population. Fomenting the development of a “multi-cultural”

England, educational activism exposed the presumption of whiteness in English culture, and its support through state educational practices.

* A Cause for Concern *

The 498 West Indian migrants who stepped off of the *MV Empire Windrush* in 1948 were workers. Most were adults (or at least at the age of majority), who emigrated to the Mother Country for employment. Most were men, alone but not unconnected. Some travelled with friends, brothers or cousins looking to earn good money, while helping to rebuild England after the devastation of World War II. Some planned to work for only a short while and return home, others planned to stay, at least as long as they could make a good living. But above all, they were workers. The importance of work in shaping the earliest Commonwealth migration cannot be overstated. Few children migrated to British cities in this early period, rather they stayed home with mothers, aunts or grandparents while one or both of their parents worked in Europe, sending money home whenever they could; “the immigrants predominantly male and single, had not come to settle. The message that was generally percolating through to the children of the mother country was that it was their labour that was wanted, not their presence.” For this reason, families (parents and children) were a rare sight, at least into the early 1950s.46

The British government took very little notice of children, making it difficult to ascertain exactly how many migrant children lived in the United Kingdom before the 1980s. While there were Black children present in Britain before World War II and even more by the 1950s, there was little effort to document their numbers or educational needs.

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Ambalavaner Sivanandan, Sri Lankan migrant and activist, asserts that Black children were largely overlooked because their numbers were so few that they had yet to “cause a problem.” However, when these children did emerge as a problem they did not do so in a vacuum, by the late 1950s all Black migrants were construed as nuisances. In the aftermath of riots in the central London neighborhoods of Nottingham and Notting Hill in the summer of 1958, White Britons viewed all migrants who attempted to settle in England as problematic. Sivanandan argues that the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which stemmed the unfettered movement Commonwealth citizens previously enjoyed was based on the belief that “fewer blacks would make for better race relations.” These new immigration restrictions were aimed immediately at stemming settlement.\(^{47}\)

Just two years after this first Commonwealth Immigrants Act, the “problem” of Black students in British schools emerged as a concern. In October 1963, White parents in Southall, West London “(which had a high proportion of Indians) demanded separate classes for their children because ‘coloured’ children were holding back [White children’s] progress.” The Commonwealth Immigrants’ Advisory Council, reported a fear that large numbers of migrant children who were not fluent English speakers or writers would slow down the pace of the classroom, thereby retarding the progress of White children. They feared that this might cause White parents to pull their children from the schools. The response from the Department of Education and Science (DES) was to sanction policies of “dispersal.”\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\) Ibid, 4 & 12.

\(^{48}\) Ibid, 14.
In June 1965, the DES published “Circular 7/65” entitled “The Education of Immigrants.” In the section, “Spreading the Children,” the DES responded primarily to the parents in Southall, angered over the rising numbers of Asian children in their schools. The report posited that a school made up of more than one-third migrant children (especially non-English-speakers) would create “serious strains,”

It is therefore desirable that the catchment [district] areas of schools should, wherever possible, be arranged to avoid undue concentrations of immigrant children. Where this proves impracticable simply because the school serves an area which is occupied largely by immigrants, every effort should be made to disperse the immigrant children round a greater number of schools and to meet such problems of transport as may arise.49 Dispersal policies were never officially mandated and each local education authority (LEA) was free to ignore them; in fact, some of the LEAs with the largest migrant populations did just that, including those in inner London (ILEA) and Birmingham. American sociologist Lewis M. Killian posits that dispersal programs were never implemented in more than a dozen LEAs, however their design and implementation demonstrates how some schools framed increasing numbers of Black students.

Each LEA was allowed to design their own dispersal program, which led to considerable inconsistency in the methods used to identify students and dictate rationale for dispersal. Thus, Southall’s dispersal program initially required that no school should have more than thirty per cent Black students (later increased to forty and then fifty per cent), redrew some of their catchment areas and bused their Asian pupils, while the programs in Leicester and Bristol, facing widespread overcrowding in their district, bused

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Asian and some White pupils “not because they are immigrants but because they live where they live.”

Undergirding the impetus for dispersal policies, however, was a construction of Black people as perpetual “immigrants.” From their beginnings in Southall, dispersal programs generally cast Black children as the nature of the problem and implemented their policies on them rather than viewing the entire student body as important. This is why, with very few exceptions, only children of color were moved. In fact, in Southall, while White families registered their children at their nearest school, the local LEA “expected, but did not require, Asian and West Indian children to go to a central registration office at the town hall. If the quota for these children in neighborhood schools was filled, they would then be bused to a dispersal school.” White students, immigrant or native, were always accepted in their neighborhood schools, “for they would be essential in preventing even further racial imbalance,” except in very rare occasions. The DES “officially defined an ‘immigrant child’ as one who was born abroad or whose parents had lived in the United Kingdom for not more than ten years,” while one educator remarked that any child is an immigrant “if he constitutes an educational problem.” But the term “immigrant” was almost always used to refer to those from the New Commonwealth (i.e. former colonies). The term was based on race, rather than legal status, as many of the Asians and Afro-Caribbeans who moved to England were


51 Ibid, 189.
technically Commonwealth citizens like White Englishmen, while the Eastern and Southern Europeans, many non-English speakers, were immigrants in the classic sense.\textsuperscript{52}

It is important then, to understand, how British educators and the larger society understood the nature of the problem migrant children posed. Because dispersal emerged from White parents’ anger at large numbers of Asian students in local schools, the most common excuse given for dispersal were that non-English-speakers needed specialized language instruction and that all Black children needed to be immersed in British culture to better assimilate into society. Language instruction programs were inconsistently implemented throughout the country and there were no standardized procedures. The Bradford LEA transferred its large population of non-English-speakers to Immigrant Education Centers, however “even after the children satisfied the English course requirements, they could not be reassigned to their neighborhood school until there was space for them.” While in Huddersfield, Northern England, students were assigned to reception centers where they learned English and “were transferred to a regular school when found ready.”\textsuperscript{53}

These inconsistencies demonstrate that “culture” lay at the heart of the issue. Most Asian students were transferred because of language difficulties, however not all. One Indian father testified to the Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration in its 1972-1973 session that when his family moved to Southall he did not speak English and his wife spoke very little. “We felt that we might be teaching [our daughter] incorrect English. So when she was two she went into the playschool and by the time she was five

\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in Ibid, 187.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 189.
she spoke excellent English.” His daughter was still, however, registered at a dispersal, rather than neighborhood, school.\textsuperscript{54} West Indian children were also likely to have been native English-speakers, whether or not they were migrants, and yet they were dispersed as well.\textsuperscript{55} Asian and West Indian children were sent to dispersal schools because the “immigration” (read: race) problem was perceived as a threat to English culture. Thus, large numbers of Black children in certain schools were a threat to the imposition of British cultural lore and customs in the classroom. The general desire to “disperse” Black students sought to limit their cultural impact on the larger White society. This, more so than any other discussion, would remain a part of the debate about Black children in English schools.

Black community reaction to dispersal was uneven. Killian asserts that Asians in the borough of Ealing (which includes Southall) were initially supportive of the policy, for fear that a predominantly Asian school would be neglected by the DES. But eventually their support turned to outrage at the inconvenience of busing in particular. In the report to the Race Relations Board report on the Ealing dispersal system, the assessor identified a number of problems with dispersal including the inability of mothers to get to their children’s schools if there was a problem; the potential physical danger to Black children posed by their White classmates while the former waited at bus stops; and Black

\textsuperscript{54} Quoted in Ibid, 193.

\textsuperscript{55} There is some historical and academic disagreement as to whether West Indians had language difficulties. While some West Indians might have spoken French or Spanish in their home countries (and thus clearly would have been in need of English language instruction), migrants from English-speaking countries were difficult to locate in the records. It would not be until the 1980s that discussions of English language acquisition would recognize the prevalence of Creolized English as impeding, or at least affecting, the language patterns and educational achievement of children of West Indian descent. Few schools implemented language programs for these students, however.
pupils found it difficult to make friends or participate in extracurricular activities when they attended schools outside of their local communities. The latter line of reasoning did have some support officially. If schools were supposed to be some reflection of the surrounding community (in this case in terms of racial populations), by dispersing students to educational catchments in other neighborhoods stripped Black students and families of the opportunity to become apart of their neighborhoods.

Black migrants did not settle in cities and neighborhoods arbitrarily. Because many entered the United Kingdom for work, they tended to settle near their employment opportunities; often near other migrants from their countries of origin and largely in inner city areas. At the same time Black migrants were denied housing in certain areas and tended to congregate in neighborhoods out of necessity. Thus, the Notting Hill neighborhood in central London was through the 1950s a mostly West Indian area; many Pakistanis settled in places like Bradford and throughout Northern England; Southall, London had a large Indian population and many Asians settled in Leicester after being expelled from Uganda in the early 1970s. Spreading Black children across educational catchments to keep their numbers down ignored the fact that these neighborhoods had changed significantly in recent history. Rather than forcing the children to conform to outdated ideas about how English schools should look, there was the possibility to adapt to the new populations, which the London Outer Borough of Brent’s teacher’s association and Community Relations Council were willing to do:

Primary and secondary schools are essentially neighbourhood schools, an integral part of their locality, and it would seem that any attempt to bring

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about social integration by redistributing children my well tend to break down the neighborhood character of the schools, and create problems and tension in other schools in the area. Dispersal would make closer parent-school relationships almost impossible. The community in which children live, and which forms their background cannot be ignored or isolated from their school life.  

By depriving Black families of the possibility of participating in all areas of neighborhood life, including where to send their children to school, dispersal participated in the continued marginalization of Britain’s Black communities.

Although, in many ways dispersal programs were also aimed towards assimilation. In 1964, the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council delineated the function of the nation’s schools:

A national system of education must aim at producing citizens who can take their place to exercise rights and perform duties the same as those of other citizens. If their parents were brought up in another culture and another tradition, children should be encouraged to respect it, but a national system cannot be expected to perpetuate the different values of immigrant groups.  

In 1967, administrators from the Spring Grove school in rural Kent, southeast England, made an important contribution to the assimilationist program. Even though the school previously hosted the children of Polish, Yugoslavian, Ukranian and Latvian immigrants in the early 1950s, it was only upon the enrollment of Indian, Pakistani and West Indian children that it experienced a “particular educational problem.” While sympathetic to the needs of their students and willing to adapt, school administrators seemed to understand Black migrants as perpetually foreign, exotic creatures. Most of their report

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57 Quoted in Ibid, 191.


Spring Grove: The Education of Immigrant Children concerns Asian students, and in the initial description of their arrival the authors describe them thusly:

When the Indian and Pakistani children in their shulwars (pyjama-type trousers), tunics and flowing scarves of colourful silk cross the threshold into our grey school building, they seem to bring an Arabian Nights atmosphere of colour and mystery. They bring, too, experience of a culture so different from our own that their lessons within the classroom must be the least bewildering of their encounters with our way of life....To us, our hard-working industrial towns of solid, trustworthy stone represent security and prosperity, but they can only appear as something from a nightmare to children who, in all probability, have had no educational or emotional preparation for their flight to a new home.\textsuperscript{60}

Such a construction presumed out of hand that Asian students entered England without any previous educational experience and precluded the possibility that they might have been British-born.

The report relies on an equally stereotypical construction of its West Indian pupils, framing them as loud and boisterous “extroverted, noisy, and full of expression.”\textsuperscript{61} While a likely possibility for many of their students, the report does not allow for the possibility of any other kinds of West Indian children, seeing the above traits as true “[i]ndividually and collectively.” The true danger of such a framework lay in this ultimate pronouncement on West Indian children’s achievement: “They appear to find it difficult to take life seriously, and, unfortunately, their often unsettled home backgrounds and lack of parental interest are a serious obstacle to an improvement of their standards within school.”\textsuperscript{61} In this way, if West Indian children failed, they did so because of their own inherent traits or because their parents were unwilling to support them educationally.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 13.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 92.
There was no space in this report for failure on the part of the English teachers, school administrators, or governmental policy.

_A system in flux_

In 1951, at the age of twenty-seven, educator, novelist and activist, Beryl Gilroy emigrated from British Guiana (now Guyana) to attend the University of London. Trained as a teacher at home, she moved abroad to further her career, but upon receiving her credentials in 1953 as an infants (primary) school teacher she faced difficulty obtaining a job because of her race. In her 1976 memoir about her early years teaching in England, _Black Teacher_, Gilroy provides a unique snapshot of the interplay between race and culture in the English educational system. Of her time at one particular school in North London Gilroy says there her “life was clouded by an obsessive interest in my ‘blackness’. It seemed that no one could forget it, and no one really wanted _me_ to forget it. I was becoming heartily sick of it. It was difficult, at times, not to become the traditional black with the traditional chip on the shoulder.” This declaration of her frustration helps to map out the larger terrain of Black parental frustration at the way children would later be treated in English schools.62

In the post-World War II period, the English educational system went through many dramatic shifts. Before the war, education was compulsory only between the ages of five and ten (in some locations eleven) and children only receive more than the basic primary education at their family’s expense.63 This placed education out of the reach of a

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63 Because these policies affected Scotland, Wales, and Ireland disproportionately, this study will focus on England solely.
large portion of British society. The Education Act of 1944 (also known as the Butler Act) made school compulsory through the age of fifteen (sixteen beginning in 1973), enforced the separation between primary and secondary education at age eleven, and implemented a “tripartite” educational system. At the age of eleven, students sat for an aptitude exam (called the Eleven-plus), which determined their placement in secondary schools: either grammar, secondary modern, or secondary technical schools. Grammar schools were elite institutions, which eventually prepared students to take their General Certificate of Education (GCE) exams at either the Ordinary (O-) or Advanced (A-) levels and enter university. Secondary modern schools provided a range of practical subjects such as arithmetic, mechanical skills, and domestic skills and students prepared for the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) exam; not prestigious at all. Secondary technical schools were rarely built throughout the country and most students attended either secondary grammar or modern schools. Some comprehensive schools, which did not require entrance examinations to enroll and taught a broad range of subjects, were also created in this period.

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64 In 1988, the Department of Education and Science combined the examinations and formed the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) where students take examination at the Foundation and Higher levels. A student must receive passing grades in five subjects during their GCSE exams before they will be allowed to take A-levels, which continue to be college entrance examinations.


According to the pamphlet Ten Good Schools: A Secondary School Enquiry comprehensive schools the curricula is generally humanities, mathematics, science, creative arts, physical and spiritual development “should be the elements common to all curricula” and “there is general agreement... That within this framework there should be opportunities in the latter part of the course for options which will match career interests, preferences and the emerging abilities of the individual, provided that a degree of specialization that would prevents choice of advanced course or career is avoided.” Inspectorate of Schools, Ten Good Schools: A Secondary School Enquiry: A Discussion Paper (Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1977), 23.
The educational possibilities for the majority of British residents immediately after World War II expanded, but not without complication or contestation. By the early 1960s, there was increasing anger that students enrolled in secondary modern schools were being abandoned intellectually, “there was a great deal of gender inequality... with far more places for boys than girls” and that children in the poorest areas of the country received much less financial support from the government and thus “were still being taught in overcrowded and inadequate school buildings.” To address this the Labour government campaigned in 1964 and 1965 on a school reform platform to get rid of the Eleven-plus examination and convert schools to the comprehensive model. In July 1965 the party published “Circular 10/65: The Organization of Secondary Education.” In the publication they asserted that comprehensive schools “provide an effective and educationally sound secondary organisation.” While they stop short of mandating the conversation to comprehensive schools, throughout the 1970s most schools became either comprehensives or public/independent schools with entrance examinations and tuition fees.

Specifically for the purposes of this study, the conflict between Black communities and the government generally centered on three things: the language abilities of Black children, curricula, and qualifications for school-leavers. Because of

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66 Ibid.


68 Technically British students do not graduate from secondary school so school-leavers is the terms used. In my work school-leavers is used mostly for former students who did not take any examinations ad did not plan to attend university.
the nature of these complaints parents generally believed that their children were most vulnerable in primary school and as school-leavers, but parents believed that what their children learned and how they were taught affected their overall performance throughout.

*From Dispersal to Marginalization*

In September 1966 Grenadian-born Bernard Coard moved to England to study economics at the University of Essex. While writing his dissertation, Coard worked with “educationally subnormal” (ESN) students and says “I was outraged by what I was witnessing... in the nine ESN schools to which I was exposed” but he did not know if they were representative. One day his cousin gave him a report from the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA) that she received from a friend working in the school system. This friend “had clearly decided that enough was enough, and was seeking to get someone, anyone to take this report [on ESN schools] with all the tables of statistics and expose and explain its scandalous contents to the public at large.”^69 Coard took the report but was still unsure what to do with it. Sometime later, he attended a party that resolved his efforts.

At this party there where [sic] West Indians from all the islands. They have been living in Britain for many years, had children in the school system, and had been ‘hearing rumours’, as they put it to me, of what was happening in the schools, most especially in the ESN ones. More than one came up to me and said, something like ‘We hear you are a teacher [there were precious few black teachers in those days] in the ESN schools. We are hearing all kinds of things. What’s really happening there.’^70 After explaining the breadth of the situation as he understood it, he “was asked by several of those present to prepare and present a paper on the situation to a


[^70]: Ibid.
conference which was to be held a few weeks later. Samuel Selvon, Andrew Salkey, and other West Indian literary greats were also due to be presenting papers, I was told. By sheer ‘accident’- or divine will- I had found a vehicle to get the message into the black community.”71

The same 1944 Education Act that created the tripartite educational system also made provision for students that had previously been defined as “mentally handicapped.” The Act mandated that local education authorities (LEAs) “have regard... to the need for securing that provision is made for pupils who suffer from any disability of mind or body by providing; either in special schools or otherwise, special educational treatment.” The same year “educationally sub-normal” (ESN) became the catch-all phrase by which LEAs could identify students with some form of mild to severe learning disability, with the most severe being transferred to special ESN institutions.72

After the chance meeting with West Indian parents at the party in the spring of 1970, Coard wrote a research paper to present at the conference, wondering all the while if “a few dozen parent-activists from the community [would] be enough.” He quickly found that, yes, that would be more than enough. After presenting his paper, a “lively question and answer and then general discussion followed. At the end of it all I was virtually ordered by all present to turn that paper into a book. I was given, in practice, a deadline of three months to write the book, as everyone was anxious to have the scandal

71 Ibid.

exposed in the shortest possible time.” Over the summer of 1970 Coard wrote *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Subnormal in the British School System: The Scandal of the Black Child in Schools in Britain*.

Coard addressed the book “explicitly to black parents. Not to teachers, not to the education and political authorities, not to the public at large; exclusively to black parents.” In the text he argues that ESN schools were used as dumping grounds for Black children, immigrant and British-born. The author argues that a combination of low teacher expectations for Black pupils; racist practices by LEAs; the dearth of Black parental involvement in and knowledge of British educational policies; and the lack of Black parents’ groups to organize on their children’s behalf made Black students vulnerable. Marked as disruptive and/or low ability students they were shunted off to remedial classes and eventually left school with few qualifications and low job prospects.

However, it is virtually impossible to understand the impact of ESN schools or the larger picture of Black children’s experiences in the English educational system because individual schools and the DES rarely recorded basic statistics on pupils by race. This is partially a reflection of governmental policy, which did not, until the 1981 census, collect any information based on race. And what little was collected, focused on discrimination in housing and employment as the primary focus of the Race Relations acts of 1965 and 1968. In fact, when the Race Relations Act was revised in 1975, education was not one of the specific areas of discrimination that the Board addressed. After the 1968 revisions, however the Race Relations Act created the investigative Select Committee on Race

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73 Coard, “Why I Wrote the ‘ESN book’.”
Relations and Immigration, which did consider issues of education. In their 1973 report on education, the Committee discovered that in the Greater London (inner and outer) boroughs, “25 per cent of all children in ESN schools were immigrants, compared with a national average of 7 percent. By far the majority were of West Indian origin” and conclude that “The number of West Indian children in ESN schools is wholly disproportionate both to the numbers of other immigrant children in ESN schools and to the West Indian population.” With these figures, it is not entirely clear why the Race Relations Board did not more formally consider issues of education as a potential site of discrimination in 1975.

Partially because of this lapse in statistical data, coupled with the Race Relations Board’s silence, it has remained unclear how many Black children were enrolled in English schools, generally, and ESN schools, specifically. The only study of the issue Immigrant Pupils in England - the LEA Response, published in 1971, asserts that “roughly 3.3 per cent of the total school population in the U.K. is ‘immigrant’ (approximately 246,000 pupils).” West Indians represented the largest group (42.5 per cent) followed by Indians and Pakistanis (28 per cent combined). Unfortunately, the DES included British-born children of migrant parents in their definition of

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“immigrant.” Thus, again, it is virtually impossible to elucidate how, and to what degree, British-born children were affected by dispersal policies and ESN classifications.\textsuperscript{75}

One among many: Bernard Coard and the politics of care

Everything about the construction of Coard’s work illustrates the community’s engagement with a politics care (working towards the betterment of the larger community from bonds of affection and commitment based on ideas of race). \textit{How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal} was small enough to be carried in a purse or back pocket and read while on the bus or train. The book was designed to be read by a working population who “didn’t have time to read 210 pages.”\textsuperscript{76} By constructing his audience as West Indian parents, Coard situated their activism as the intended result of his work. The scandal was not just that Black children were being sent to ESN schools, but also that their parents seemed to have little clue as to why, or how the circumstances could be changed.

When the work was finished, he presented it “to the leaders of various West Indian organizations,” for their approval. Mainstream publishers, unfortunately, rejected the work claiming that West Indian parents were “a highly restricted target market... A tiny fraction of the British population, and one, moreover, which hardly ever bought books.” As Jessica Huntley, activist/co-owner of independent Black bookshop, Bogle

\textsuperscript{75} Statistics quoted in Margaret Rogers, “The Education of Children of Immigrants in Britain” \textit{Journal of Negro Education} 14:3 (Summer, 1972), 255 & Killian “School Busing in Britain” 187.

There are a number of problems with these statistics. The survey does include students from Africa (black and Asian), however their numbers are combined with immigrants from Italy, Portugal and Spain, it includes England and Wales (but not Scotland or Northern Ireland), and does not include all of the schools in either country. So there is very little precision in these statistics and they are always cited with some trepidation.

\textsuperscript{76} Coard, “Why I Wrote the ‘ESN book.’”
L'Overture, remembers, to these large publishers “We didn’t exist.” Coard took the book back to the West Indian organizations who supported its production to reconsider their options. Together they decided to raise the money amongst themselves to pay for publication and to print the book with a small Black press, New Beacon books (run by activist/journalist John La Rose), with support from Bogle L'Overture (owned by Jessica and Eric Huntley). The book was then distributed through these bookstores and at community meetings.77

In fact How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal’s impact lay in its far reaching ability to affect nearly everyone in the West Indian, and larger Black, community. West Indian parents encouraged and supported Coard’s work, but one did not need to be a parent to fear the insidious nature of ESN tracking. Older siblings could become active on their siblings’ behalf and non-parents sometimes worked for future children or themselves, for instance. Bernard Coard, himself, became interested in ESN schools as a consequence of his work as a teacher, but it was his involvement in a larger West Indian community that persuaded him of the necessity for the report. The fact that he was not yet a parent himself did not matter.

Getting a Handle of the Issue at Hand

Over time Bernard Coard’s book spread out from the the Black community, to which it was addressed and slowly entered the public consciousness. The book went into its second printing in 1974, still published by small Black presses. Local and national governments initially investigated the claims, possibly because they were as unsure of the

situation as many Black parents. The investigations initiated in the 1970s provides a wealth of information about some of the experiences of Black children in the English school system and teachers’ attitudes about their “immigrant” pupils. Parental and community fears about the education system were often marginalized in these official reports but Black parents worked simultaneously to affect change, which will be covered in the next section.

In 1973 Parliament’s Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration published a detailed description of the educational experiences of Black children. This committee had, in their first meeting, seriously considered the educational problems facing Black children. Created by the revised Race Relations Act of 1968, the Committee chose to consider “The Problems of Coloured School-Leavers” during its first session, 1968-1969. The Committee chose this topic because they understood educational achievements and failures as “a test case in race relations.”

If we fail to give the coloured school-leavers of the future full, fair and equal opportunities on entering adult life we are unlikely to succeed in any other sector of race relations... If we employ immigrants or their offspring in jobs below their qualifications or competence we are misusing our manpower resources; we are also wasting the resources of our schools in producing skills which are not fully used.78

In this way the Select Committee took a long-term view of their mandate. By positing that inadequate educational opportunities severely limited every other area of Black British life, including employment and housing, they centered education in the remaking of England’s race relations.

The Select Committee’s 400-page report in 1973 about education generally, also makes some interesting considerations about the function of education in a diverse society and offered recommendations for how to improve the experiences of Black children in schools. They consider in their discussions and recommendations dispersal; ESN schools (briefly); LEA and parental roles in English-language education; and the need for training teachers working in racially diverse areas, among other things. Their three main recommendations were that the government should set up a fund for LEAs to apply for “resources to meet the special educational needs of immigrant children and adults,” LEAs to report their efforts in this regard to the DES, and that the Department of Education and Science set up an advisory unit on “immigrant education.”

While extensive, the Select Committee’s report feels incomplete. The authors readily admit that they have only just begun to grasp the problems Black children faced in English schools. Much of this lay in the difficulty in understanding the local situation, considering national and local variations within the United Kingdom, a wide range of curricula, and the different needs of each age group. Thus their recommendation that schools initiate programs to address these issues at the local level and report their work to the government was clearly made with the hope that this report would be supplemented with more information later.

Responding at least in part to the Select Committee’s call for action one North London community compiled a detailed report on schools in their borough. In April 1977, teachers and local West Indian parents met at the Redbridge Teachers Centre in North

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79 Select Committee on Race Relations and Immigration, *Education*, 55.
London to discuss West Indian underachievement in schools. After the meeting, the Black People’s Progressive Party and Redbridge Community Relations Council began to study the issue because “there was in fact, remarkably little concrete statistical evidence available on the performance of West Indian children, either at the national or the local levels [and]... there appeared to be a fierce reluctance within Redbridge educational circles to admit that underachievement occurred within the Borough boundaries.”

In their final report, *Cause for Concern: West Indian Pupils in Redbridge*, the committee considered numerous reasons for possible underachievement including low intelligence among West Indians generally, (single) parenting, poverty, migration, and teacher expectations, ultimately offering a list of recommendations for local schools.

The Redbridge Committee is interesting for a variety of reasons. First, they were acutely aware of class in their statistical findings. Underachievement was not solely racial, as “White Indigenous” (as opposed to White immigrant) children performed below the national average on the “Junior Four” English-language examinations at schools in the borough’s poorest sections, Asian students scored well below White students, and West Indians below Asians. “Bearing in mind the fact that the Asian groups would include some very poor-English speakers,” they assert that “the scores of the West Indian pupils give real cause for concern.” Thus, if there were problems, which there were, West Indians were not the only ones in peril.

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81 Ibid.
In their attempt to understand why West Indian students performed so poorly on standardized tests, the Redbridge report’s most useful discussion was about the affect of curricula on Black children’s performance. They dismissed out of hand biological discussions of intellectual inferiority among people of African descent. Rather, they examined the claim (most often made by Black activists) “that a West Indian child grows up in a hostile society which portrays black people in a negative fashion. The child may internalize these attitudes and develop a poor self-identity which can lead to lack of confidence and a reduction in motivation.”82 This had been an important part of Coard’s earlier critique of ESN classifications. Black parents were particularly wary of the things their children were (and were not) being taught. However, the Redbridge study makes an interesting distinction between the performance of West Indian and Asian students, the latter whom they construct as emanating “from home backgrounds with distinct religious and cultural traditions which can provide positive alternative identity to counter the negative image”, while the former lived in families “with a unique Caribbean culture [with] strong British influences which means that homelife cannot provide the distinct and alternative identity apparently necessary to combat the emotional pressures of a racist society.”83 In effect they argue that, while all Black students encounter negative images and expectations in schools, because West Indian societies were so heavily influenced by Britain, Caribbean cultures could not provide models of achievement to counter this denigration. The Redbridge study unexpectedly offered a surprising, but brief, condemnation of the impact of imperialism on colonized cultures.

82 Ibid, 7.
83 Ibid, 8.
Because the Redbridge study identified curriculum as an important contributor to West Indian students’ underachievement their most interesting recommendations were aimed to that arena. First, they argued that “Much of British school curriculum still contains negative reference to black people or ignores them altogether.” This was a widespread critique throughout the Black community. Many West Indian parents believed that students were taught to marginalize the experiences of Black people, in England and globally, which did not give Black pupils models of success. In their core courses and at every stage of the educational experience, Black students were taught to believe that Black people had never done anything worth note, were barbarians, and, more importantly, were as peripheral to British history and society as to be completely invisible. The Redbridge group then recommended the implementation of Black studies courses either in schools or through local Black organizations.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Select Committee report and Redbridge study also discuss an important destabilizing element of potential coalitions between Asian and Afro-Caribbean educational activists. Basically, these two groups of children (which were not internally homogenous either) needed different things from educational reform. Dispersal, for instance, was focused primarily on non-English-speakers and the rationale for these programs was language acquisition. However, the policy of sending disproportionate numbers of West Indian children to ESN schools was based on negative ideas about Black intelligence. Too often discussions about how to identify and address the problems of Black children pit the needs of Asian pupils (English language acquisition) against the...
“failures” of West Indian students. By creating this dichotomy, hostile teachers and
school administrators, and sometimes politicians, sought to absolve English schools from
any complicity in educational achievement disparities along racial and ethnic lines.
Coalitions were possible and most governmental reports did make recommendations for
specific groups but in implementation specificity was often abandoned for blanket fixes.
Possibly as a result of the lack of complex discussions of Black pupils’ needs, the
language requirements of West Indian children (whose parents might have spoken some
form of Creolized English) were overlooked and the problems that Asian school-leavers
faced, namely high unemployment like their West Indian counterparts, were invisible in
official reports.

In their response to the Race Relations’s Board’s hearings on education,
Parliament largely agreed with the Select Committee. However there are two areas in the
Secretary of State for Education and Science’s discussion paper where one can see that
the “problem” of Black children in English schools meant different things to different
sections of the society. First, the Select Committee was conscious of the lack of statistical
evidence, and opined repeatedly how this made it difficult for them to fully understand
the depth of educational inequalities. However, in Educational Disadvantage and the
Educational Needs of Immigrants, the Secretary of State did not support initiating
statistical surveys to correct this lacuna. Accepting that disadvantaged children needed to
be identified, the report still suggested that “it is not, however, necessary for this purpose
that individuals should be identified by means of national statistics.”85 In his discussion

85 Secretary of State for Education and Science, Educational Disadvantage and the Educational Needs of
of the legal objection to dispersal programs, Kilian argues that British policies were based on the idea of “color blindness” and the Race Relations Board’s objection to busing hinged on the inclusion of English-speaking Black children, making race the operating factor, not language acquisition. Thus, the Secretary of State’s objection to national statistics was legal, but clearly flawed, which perpetuated continued ignorance about the breadth of Asian and Afro-Caribbean experiences.  

Next, the Secretary of State ends his general remarks with a problematic framing of the issue, which persisted at least through the 1980s:

> The Government attach importance to the advancement of harmony between the races in this country’s multi-cultural and multi-racial society and believe that such harmony must be based on mutual understanding and respect. For the education service this implies that all pupils and students should be enabled to acquire a greater knowledge and appreciation of the cultural traditions of the countries of emigration as well as of this country, and to develop rational attitudes to race and colour.  

While seemingly benign, the idea of a nascent multi-cultural or multi-racial England proved problematic. First, it privileged an idea that each culture and each person contributed to society equally, even though the foundation of English culture was the presumed default to which other cultures could contribute, but not change. As the next section’s discussion of curricula will make clear, the idea of a multi-cultural England attempted to ignore the very real history of British imperialism. For instance, the equivalent of a high school history course glossed over the negative impact of imperialism on colonized nations and thus the need for post-World War II migration. And, as one parent would argue, interest in the various cultures now resident in the

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Mother Country did not guarantee that such knowledge would, or even could, be conveyed without privileging British cultural norms and racism. Which is not to say that various Black activists did not espouse the benefits of a “multi-cultural” education, but it is entirely possible that their visions for a multi-cultural England were significantly different.

*Curricula and the Creation of a Multi-Cultural Citizenship*

The Redbridge study understood clearly that changing the content of educational materials was about more than just erasing problematic statements from the reading material. Including books and subject areas that reflected the cultures of the people in the classroom were concrete steps toward actually acknowledging the diversity of British society. At the most basic level, Black communities were fighting for an inclusion that gave serious consideration to their presence, histories, and ideas especially when they deviated from the White English norm.

In 1967, the Commonwealth Advisory Council said that assimilation of Commonwealth migrants would be the only goal of the English educational system, precluding any possibility for a “multicultural” framework. Assimilation was the general model of educational initiatives in the 1960s and most of the 1970s. The Spring Grove school followed this lead for both children and families, and the most extensive curricula changes centered on English-language instruction. In 1973, the Schools Council published their preliminary report on multiracial education in English schools. The very first sentence asserted that teachers believed “that one of the aims of education is to prepare children for life in the society in which they live” which, in the context of the rest
of the report, in all respects meant assimilation. In the same report, one headmaster asserted that, at least for his school, there was no other way:

I do not consider it the responsibility of an English State School to cater for the development of cultures and customs of a foreign nature. I believe our duty is to prepare children for citizenship in a free, Christian, democratic society according to British standards and customs and that any sectarian needs should be met by denominational foundation supported by the people of that particular sect.

What Black parents later fought against was a perceived erasure of their cultures as a condition of their social citizenship. In other words, Black parents believed that the idea of a multi-cultural England and a multi-cultural educational system would have to re-imagine the definitions of “English” and “English culture” or else it was really just cultural colonialism in disguise.

In March 1979, responding to parents’ demands, shocking test scores at the national level, and the Select Committee on Race Relations recommendations, the Department of Education and Science (DES) created the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children from Ethnic Minority Groups. In the interim report *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, alternately known as the Rampton Report, presented in June 1981, the Committee echoed the Redbridge report’s displeasure at the nature of representations of Black people in English curricula. The committee reported that they were “very concerned at the number of books still being used which give a negative

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89 Ibid, 13.
picture of ethnic minorities and their cultures." Representative of outdated material still available, the report quoted an interesting passage from Hal Fisher’s *History of Europe*:

To the conquest of nature through knowledge the contributions made by Asiatics have been negligible and by Africans (Egyptians excluded) non-existent. The printing press and the telescope, the steam engine, the internal combustion engine and the aeroplane, the telegraph and the telephone, wireless broadcasting and the cinematograph, the gramophone and television, together with all the leading discoveries in physiology, the circulation of the blood, the laws of respiration and the like, are the result of researches carried out by white men of European stock.

This passage quoted from the 1945 edition was still in wide use almost forty years later. Possibly as one of very few references to people of African descent, students were in fact presented with the denigration of people who looked most like them. As one student put it: “You would be getting deep into a story and suddenly it would hit you—a reference to Black people as savages or something. It was so offensive. And so wounding. Sometimes you would sit in a class and wait, all tensed up, for the next derogatory remark to come tripping off the teacher’s tongue.” Bernard Coard described the effect of these experiences thusly:

As the weeks and months progress, the Black child discovers that all the great men of history were white - at least, those are the only ones he has been told about. His reading-books show him white children and white adults exclusively. He discovers that white horses, white rocks and white unicorns are beautiful and good; but the word “Black” is reserved for describing the pirates, the thieves, the ugly, the witches.

Focusing on the curriculum in English schools made race relations not simply about how individuals interacted with one another. Rather, they sought to highlight how racist ideas

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91 Ibid.


93 Coard, *How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal*, 29.
about Asian and Afro-Caribbean people were at the foundation of British culture, transmitted to successive generations. The institutionalization of this racism, they argued, would have to be dismantled at its roots if a multi-cultural society, where people of different ethnicities and races were equals, could ever come to fruition.

In the informational pamphlet announcing their formation in 1979 in the North London borough of Haringey (the location of New Beacon Books since 1966), the Haringey Black Pressure Group on Education argued that students in English schools were taught to dehumanize and marginalize Black people. The group consisted of Black parents, teachers, pupils and concerned community members who believed that their school perpetrated “a System based on Racist Principles.” Specifically they targeted history courses: “They [Black students] are taught European Historyonly [sic], ignoring the fact that we have a Great History as well. Most School Books show Black People as Inferior, Exotic Creatures; if they show them at all.” While superficially simple, this discussion of historical education was actually much more complex.94

If students were taught a “Great History” centered in the European experience it meant that all students missed the opportunity to learn about the ancient African kingdoms and Asian empires that preceded many European civilizations. But most importantly, if students encountered a global history centered within a British frame of reference, wherein people of color were either exotic curios or savages, the histories of Asian and African-descended people began with European contact. This historical revisionism erased the foundations for the economic and political realities that

contributed to Asian and Afro-Caribbean migration to England after the second World War. While all students missed out on the richness of this global history, for Asian and African students, understood as perpetual “immigrants,” they lost the ability to relate to and understand their ancestral histories. At the same time, they were made to feel as if they had no place in the creation of history, the creation of British society and, most importantly, no place in the Mother Country. Thus, there were important social and psychological implications for altering the curricula in the schools; just as there were important implications for its maintenance.

The Rampton report begins with the assertion that schools contribute to the preparation for “life in a society which is both multiracial and culturally diverse” as an acknowledgment of the relationship between English identity and citizenship and the social function of education. This was, in a sense, the foundation of Coard’s critique. He argued that by designating large populations of West Indian children as “educationally subnormal” educators suggested that Black students were ill-equipped to excel in English society. In fact, he says outright that ESN schools prepared children “for survival, not for excelling, or even participating actively in the society as does the average person.” And if Black activists were correct in their critiques of English curricula, by marginalizing discussions of Black people as contributors to British and global history, all schools effectively prepared Black children for a second class citizenship.

In 1974 the Schools Council and National Foundation for Educational Research funded a four-year study of current English curriculum, with the intended aim of

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95 Coard, How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal, 9.
developing new multicultural curricula. In 1978, the investigative committee presented a 300-page report, but the report’s funders refused to publish it without considerable editing of the first five chapters. In a series of articles about this report, the London Times educational correspondent, Diana Geddes, suggested that the controversy surrounded the report’s framing of the problem of multi-racial schools.

The report’s original authors, all former educators, took issue with the ways in which teachers dealt with issues of race. The common argument against multi-cultural education, that “young children do not notice colour unless their attention is deliberately drawn to it” was used, the authors suggest, as “a way of covering up ‘negative attitudes’ toward black and Asian children.” For instance, the report cites the example of a teacher who, “when she read to children in an infants’ class, sat the white children in turn on her knee but stood the black children beside her.” The report ultimately argued that British schools were hostile places for Black children, most jarringly using the example of a child who “in her first term in an infants’ school in the Midlands was found scrubbing her hands almost raw, trying to get the colour off.”96 The report’s authors denied the possibility that “[c]hildren living together will create their own future.”97 Thus, these authors posited that curricula could never be divorced from ideas about race and racism itself.

Publication of the report, eventually entitled Education for a Multi-Racial Society: Curriculum and Context, was delayed for five and a half years because of these disputed chapters. The report’s funders suggested that a discussion of racism was not part

97 Townsend and Brittan, Multiracial education, 13.
of the original mandate and “presented a one-sided picture of race relations in schools”,
while the authors argued that the context provided in these chapters was necessary. The
relationship was so contentious that when the report was finally published, without the
initial five chapters, it was without the names of its authors: Robert Jeffcoate, Shirley
Hadie, Rosalyn Street-Porter, Mary Worral and Elaine Brittan.98

While a discussion of race and racism was the dividing line between the
researchers and the report’s funders it is also likely that they disagreed on another issue as
well. Geddes’ article suggest that Jeffcoate et al originally proffered a critique of the
educational system that would have necessitated changes in the larger English society. As
originally written, the report was heavily based on the authors’ belief “that racialism is
here to stay in Britain and that schools have a duty to demonstrate overtly their
involvement in and allegiance to the concept of a truly multiracial society by means of
developing a multiracial curriculum.”99 With this framing, the development of multi-
cultural educational curricula would have meant accepting the realities of a multicultural
England. In other words, schools could no longer prepare Black children for a second
class citizenship.

A similar controversy surrounded the Committee of Inquiry into the Education of
Children of Ethnic Minority Groups. Just before the Rampton report was published in
June 1981, Sir Anthony Rampton was dismissed from his position as director of the

98 “School Report defended by authors.” London Times, February 13, 1978, 4 & Diana Geddes,

Brittan was previously co-author of the Schools Council report, Multiracial Education: Need and

research committee and five other members resigned in solidarity with him. Rampton was replaced by Lord Michael Swann, who headed the research and publication for the committee’s final report, *Education for All* (also known as the Swann Report), published in 1985. The tenor of these reports differ markedly. The Rampton report came to the conclusion “that racism, both intentional and unintentional, has a direct and important bearing on the performance of West Indian children in our schools.” Throughout the report, the authors refused to place the onus for West Indian student failure solely in the hands of West Indian parents and at various points held teachers and school administrators responsible for educational inequalities. And, most importantly, they reminded their audience, presumably education administrators and teachers, that West Indian parents, like all migrants, were workers.

West Indian parents, both of whom may be working shifts, may have particular difficulty in attending school open evenings and they may have to rely more heavily on school reports. We should, therefore, like to see all schools providing at least two full written reports each academic year and making greater efforts to provide more frequent opportunities for meetings between parents and teachers.\(^{100}\) West Indian parents had been particularly maligned in early reports on race and education for not conforming to White standards in terms of their involvement in their children’s education. The significance of these criticisms will be discussed further below, but it is important here to note that the Rampton report acknowledged that their inability to conform was based on a set of economic circumstances outside of their control, not their unwillingness to see their children succeed. Even though the Rampton report did not

\(^{100}\) Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children of Ethnic Minority Groups, *West Indian Children in Our Schools*, 42.
receive unanimous support in schools or Black communities, it did create a public debate around its successor, *Education for All*.

The massive 851-page Swann Report includes a detailed summary of *West Indian Children in Our Schools* and considers the affect of multicultural education on a range of students of color and immigrant children. Most of the report focuses on the performance of Black children as the term had been defined throughout the 1970s (Indians, Pakistanis, West Indians), but includes shorter discussions in its latter chapters on Chinese, Cypriots, Travellers, Vietnamese, Italians, and ‘Liverpool Blacks’ (the mixed race children of African sailors and White Englishwomen, whose communities date back to the late nineteenth century). But the document was not without its own controversies. Several members left in the process of researching and writing the final report, almost all of them in a disagreement over the report’s conclusions. In November 1984, “Mrs Ann Dummett and Father Michael Hollings resigned because they did not like the way in which Lord Swann... had rewritten the chapter on under-achievement to shift the emphasis from the schools’ responsibility to socio-economic factors.”

The Rampton report discussed “socio-economic” realities to assert that expectations of assimilation were harmful and unfair to Black students and families. The Swann report agreed with this argument and even asserted that poverty, aided by racial prejudice and discrimination, created an “extra level of deprivation” which “contribute[d]…

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Dr. Bhikhu Parekh, political scientist, also resigned from the committee in 1981. The report says that he left to become Vice Chancellor at the University of Baroda in India. He left after Rampton was dismissed and some of the Committee resigned in support, so at this point I do not know if there was a relationship between these events.
substantially to underachievement in school.” However, the Swann report equivocates on the role that teachers played in this equation:

In short, some teachers hold stereotype attitudes and some do not, while sometimes the teacher expectancy effect work and sometimes it does not. This is hardly surprising; the educational process involves a complicated interaction between teacher and taught, teacher attitudes and stereotypes no doubt vary greatly, as do pupil attitudes. Clearly we are faced with a very complex and ill-understood phenomenon.

In other words, the Swann report said that racial discrimination, as it affected teacher-student relationships, was arbitrary. And while it is not entirely true that, as “Ernie Harris, chairman of the National Association for Multiracial Education, shouted at Lord Swann: ‘You have let teachers off the hook and you have let the Government off the hook with this racist rubbish” it was true that the Swann report placed very little, if any, responsibility with teachers on the failure of their West Indian pupils. By locating educational underachievement in poverty generally, rather than racial discrimination, Education for All ignored the fact that West Indian pupils as a group performed worse than their White and Asian counterparts, even those with similar economic backgrounds.

Almost certainly the adjusted tone in the Swann report was a direct reflection of critiques aimed at the Rampton report, which was repeatedly offered as a plaintive excuse throughout the text. The real problem with the committee’s last report is that it offered little palpable hope that a multicultural educational system could be developed or that it


103 Ibid, 77.

104 “Committee dogged by trouble,” 5.
could succeed. As Warwick Jessup put the issue in a letter to the editor in the *London Times*:

Sir, Following the Swann report... is it not obvious that children from ethnic minorities, as far as is practically possible, should be instructed in their own culture and tradition, as well as in English and European culture? Would not such an education be of benefit to other children as well and conduce [sic] to mutual understanding?\(^{105}\)

In his letter Mr. Jessup makes no mention of White children being educated in Asian or Afro-Caribbean cultures. As he envisioned it, Black children were to be educated in their “own” cultures and to understand White society, but should have no expectation of reciprocity. But these were not the curricula changes Black parents envisioned

*“Immigrant” Parents and Community Schooling.*

As mentioned above, there are no clear records of how many children migrated to England or how many entered the school system. What is clear, however, is that by the 1960s Black parents and English teachers were on a collision course, at the very least because of the difference in their expectations of the educational system. Beryl Gilroy, one of the few Black teachers in England in the 1950s, helps to understand those different expectations for the earliest migrants. On reflection of her schooling in British Guiana, in opposition to the British educational system, Gilroy had this to say:

School at home was a serious place - a place of struggle and encounter. It wasn’t a place where children were expected, except on special occasions, to enjoy themselves. School was work- mostly unpleasant work... There the emphasis had been on routine and the children learned by doing, which meant doing exactly as the teacher said. The teacher was expected to be as punitive as the ‘good parent’. Symbols of power such as straps and canes were perfectly acceptable to the West Indian parent... In Guyana the teacher was expected to control her class and the class accepted this

control. In school children did not initiate, ask questions without permission, disobey or argue with the teacher.\textsuperscript{106} In fact, education by rote and discipline was previously a feature of the English educational system, on which most colonial schools were based. And even though the educational system in the Caribbean was different, possibly of a lower quality, than in Europe, migrants spoke of that system as at least consistent. Coard asserted that in the West Indies, “the child is not expected to talk and ‘talk back’ as much in the West Indian classroom as he is here, in the English classroom.”\textsuperscript{107} And Jamaican migrant Sam King, passenger on the \textit{MV Windrush}, remembers his education similarly to Gilroy: “The three Rs were very important... We did grammar and my mother was very progressive that we learn the classics... if you didn’t know your times table you would get a spanking by time you were about twelve.” For these earliest migrant children then it was likely that teachers who expected them to ask questions or participate in class beyond answering direct questions might have been frustrated and come “to interpret this apparent shyness and relative unresponsiveness as indicating either silent hostility or low intelligence.”\textsuperscript{108}

Teachers often complained that West Indian parents, especially, were not interested in their children’s education. For instance in the Spring Grove study the authors posit that Black parents, “as a group... seem totally uninterested” in their children’s education and if they should ever visit the school it was mothers, not fathers, who did so. In 1981, the Rampton report made sure to indicate that West Indian parents were

\textsuperscript{106} Gilroy, \textit{Black Teacher}, 15, 76 & 94.

\textsuperscript{107} Coard, \textit{How the West Indian Child is Made Educationally Sub-Normal}, 14.

primarily workers and thus not always able to attend school open houses, in the face of just such observations from teachers. While the Rampton report was correct, it is also possible that West Indian parents were used to an educational system wherein teachers took on the responsibility of parenthood while their children were in school. It is possible that migrant parents assumed, on some level, that sending their children to school was the bulk of their responsibility. While there, parents expected their children to be educated and disciplined by their teachers like a parent. It is also possible that parents believed that, underlying the work of teachers, was a form of care. These migrants might have been initially likely to place absolute trust in the English educational system, which explains the delay in Black parental activism to which Bernard Coard addressed his pamphlet.\footnote{109}

It was only as Black parents began to learn about their children’s problems in schools that this began to change. In his pamphlet, Coard shared a striking conversation relayed to him just before he began work on the book:

Two West Indian teachers in South London have reported to me the cases of white teachers who sit smoking in the staff-room, and refuse to teach a class of nearly-all-Black children. When on one occasion they were accosted by one of the Black teachers, they stated their refusal to teach ‘those niggers’. These incidents were reported to the head teachers of the schools, who took no action against the teachers concerned. In fact, the heads of these schools had been trying to persuade the children to leave school when they had reached the school-leaving age, even though their parents wished them to continue their education... Therefore the teachers in this case conspired to prevent these Black children from furthering their education by simply refusing to teach them.\footnote{110}

Gilroy also discusses the casual use of racial epithets in remembering her time at a Catholic school in south London. She returned to school after a two-week illness. During her absence, the headmistress taught Gilroy’s class a poem for recitation, “Ten Little Nigger Boys.” In her effort to calmly resolve the situation, Gilroy asked her headmistress: “Tell me, Sister...what do I do to make them look the part- paint them with boot polish to look like me?” The class poem was changed. As an adult, highly educated and sure of herself and her capabilities Gilroy remembers being able to stand up for herself, a luxury Black students would have been denied. While not representative of Black parent experiences, or even West Indian migrant experiences, these snapshots offer a different way of understanding Black parents’ behavior and Black children’s experiences, rather than just assuming apathy and low intelligence as many White teachers were wont to do.111

This does not mean, however, that migrant parents did not adapt. Bernard Coard remembered that he wrote his pamphlet to Black parents because he “wanted to get them conscious of the problems, and organised to deal with them. I wanted them to feel personally spoken to; to recognize that this was a problem that they had to get up and tackle; to not rely on any others to do on their behalf.”112 Similarly, the Redbridge’s Black People’s Progressive Association recommended in Cause for Concern that West Indians “organise themselves into self-help groups... The position of black people in this

111 Gilroy, Black Teacher, 83.
country is now so serious that there is nothing to lose by joining together.”113 And by the early 1980s, it seems that they had.

During the research phase for the Rampton report, the Committee faced considerable “opposition from ethnic minority pressure groups who felt that it would put too much emphasis on black family structures and not enough on teacher attitudes to racism in schools.”114 This was not an arbitrary fear considering the 1967 warning by the Commonwealth Immigrants Advisory Council against letting foreign-born parents exert any influence over the English educational system. Facing these early criticisms, the Rampton report devotes considerable space to West Indian parental involvement concluding:

We have found no evidence to support the view that West Indian parents are not interested in their children’s education - indeed they sometimes show more interest than other parents in what the school is doing. In some cases, however, the expectations, views and worries of West Indian parents about their children’s progress seem to be misunderstood and sometimes, as we have found, even disregarded by teachers.115

In much the same way that the Scarman Report later blamed Black parenting for the 1981 Brixton riots (ignoring Black parents’ previous work against police harassment), numerous education reports located Black underachievement on absentee parenting. In fact, parents had been actively working since the 1960s against dispersal programs, and the early 1970s around ESN classifications to present critiques of the English school system and offer their children alternatives.

113 Black Peoples Progressive Association, Cause of Concern, 9.
114 “Committee dogged by trouble,” 5.
115 Committee of Inquiry into the Education of Children of Ethnic Minority Groups, West Indian Children in Our Schools, 42.
Black activists understood English schools as hostile places, no wonder then that Asian and Afro-Caribbean students performed below their capacity. The Haringey Black Pressure Group on Education asserted that “Every day our Kids are faced with Racist Teachers, who give them a hard time, because they dont [sic] understand our Children.”¹¹⁶ This grim picture was widespread and in some ways seemed insurmountable. Thus Bernard Coard ended his pamphlet in 1971 with a list of suggestions for parents whose children had been, or were threatened, with transfer to an ESN school. One of these recommendations, supplementary schools, became an important feature of Black British educational activism:

We should start up supplementary schools in whatever part of London, or Britain, we live, in order to give our children additional help in the subjects they need. These classes can be held on evenings and Saturday mornings. We should recruit all our Black students and teachers for the task of instructing our children. Through these schools we hope to make up for the inadequacies of the British school system, and for its refusal to teach our children our history and culture.¹¹⁷ Coard was not the impetus for supplementary or Saturday schools as some were already in existence when his work was published. He urged parents to find or start supplementary classrooms: “Don’t be the last to get your child in one!”¹¹⁸

Supplementary schools were important because, while much of the work in which Black parents engaged was meant to highlight the perceived failures of English schools they were very often “singled out... as ‘troublemakers’, when they went into the schools and articulated this response.” Thus they chose

¹¹⁶ The Haringey Black Pressure Group, 1.
¹¹⁸ Ibid.
separatism as as another activist strategy, which supplementary schools exemplified.\textsuperscript{119}

Many Black women’s groups throughout England spearheaded supplementary or Saturday schools for children and adults based on a “recognition of the need to challenge racist assumptions about the intelligence of our children.”\textsuperscript{120} For instance, the Manchester Black Women’s Co-op, which eventually became the Abasindi Co-operative, ran a Saturday school for children, six years and up. The teachers included community members and students from Manchester University, including the Organisation for Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) and Brixton Black Women’s Group co-founder, Olive Morris. As Co-op member Diane Watt remembered, the Saturday schools functioned thusly:

I think the focus was around issues around culture and identity. So, using the three Rs; but placing it a bit in that cultural context… So even maths and English were on the curriculum, it wasn’t the maths and English they were doing day in, day out at school; it was the maths and English which enabled them to understand, to engage with their cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{121}

As one parent whose daughter was transferred to an ESN school put it, activists “came to set up the Saturday school, because everyone was saying if the schools wouldn’t educate our children, we should do it ourselves… They taught the kids about Black history and showed them that they had nothing to be ashamed of because Black people are as good as

\textsuperscript{119} Bryan et al, \textit{The Heart of the Race}. 63.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid, 71.

anyone else.” In this way supplementary schools served an educational and psychological purpose as parents understood the assault on their children was both intellectually and emotionally damaging.

Supplementary schools were intimately connected to other forms of Black community activism like Black progressive bookstores and Marxist, Black Power organizations. In his study of Black British bookshops Colin A. Beckles posits that these stores “engaged in the housing, production, and distribution of Black counterhegemonic discourse. Thus, within the bookshop site, there is a process of (re)articulation by which marginalized subjects resist the dominant group’s construction of their identity by producing and disseminating alternative, valid definitions of Black identity.” These bookstores were funded by the local communities and often emerged out of Black activist efforts. The Black Liberation Front Party (BLFP) started the Grassroots Bookshop in West London and in North London John LaRose, who had been involved in the Black Education Movement since the 1960s and founded the Black Parents Movement in the 1970s, co-founded New Beacon Books. These shops created and provided educational material to supplementary schools, some of which were connected to one another: New Beacon eventually spawned the George Padmore Supplementary School in 1969; the BLFP started the Marcus Garvey School and Headstart; Black radical teachers in Hackney, West London started the Kwame Nkrumah School; and the Black Unity Freedom Party opened the South-east London Summer School.123

122 Bryan et al, The Heart of the Race, 70.

The numerous Black bookstores sold reading material at various levels, but all presented alternative and positive images of Black people, mostly African-descended. Popular books would have included writings by Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael, who visited England in 1965 and 1966 respectively, and authors from the Caribbean, such as Walter Rodney and Eric Williams. Also, the role that LaRose (New Beacon) and Jessica Huntley (Bogle L’Overture) played in the publication of *How the West Indian Chid is Made Educationally Sub-Normal* would have ensured that the work was featured prominently on their shelves as well as other Black British productions emerging out of England’s Caribbean Arts Movement.

But for young children in English schools, the bookshops produced and catered to their need for images which “countered the negative portrayals of Black life.” John LaRose, speaking specifically of the decision to start New Beacon asserted that he “saw publishing as a vehicle which gave an independent validation of one’s own culture, history, politics - a sense of one’s self - to break the discontinuity, so that they [Black people] get some sense of what they need to know to transform their lives.” While Jessica Huntley and her husband Eric decided to open Bogle after visiting the Black radical bookstore Drum & Spear in Washington D.C. “because we saw the need. The teachers were saying they couldn’t get resource materials. And there were no Black books, no books about Black people. And the kids were saying that they didn’t know anything about their history... We wanted the literature to be exposed to our communities.”

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124 LaRose and Huntley quoted in Ibid, 54 & 55-56.
In all likelihood, there was considerable overlap in personnel between the Black organizations, the bookshops and the supplementary schools. John LaRose and Jessica Huntley’s names are present in all of the sources, even as the names of other individuals and specific information about most of the supplementary schools has so far been lost to history. It is likely that these sites have been understudied if only because these schools emerged out of a pressing need and were thus organized spontaneously, often with a revolving door of activists willing to donate their time to find materials, teach courses, photocopy readings, and find spaces to hold classes. What is clear is that those involved saw these supplementary schools, bookshops and any meeting of community activists as centers of cultural and political work, which “(re)presented community-valid definitions of Blackness well beyond the shores of England.”

Bookshops, and supplementary schools, could also become sites for the performance of a politics of care. Beckles argues that, because all members of the community were welcome to use the bookshop as an “‘information well’... A major role of the bookshop members was that of informal community advisor and parent.” And Jessica Huntley’s memory of her experience is telling: “Kids come to you and say they have problems with their parents. Or could you come with me to see my mum because of something or another. Or you’re going to the courts. So its [sic] not just the advice, its [sic] literally things to do with day-to-day life. And it’s always Black people I raise up.” Black educational activism was very much about providing for Black youngsters what they perceived the State and the school unwilling to give them. At the same time it was

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125 Ibid, 63.
never just about education itself. It was about self-esteem, the dislocation of migrants and their children, politics, history, etc. In other words educational activism was a community matter at the local, national, and sometimes international level.  

The existence of supplementary schools were a direct counter to the prevailing notion that black parents did not care about their children’s education. Black parents’ educational activism consciously formed the basis of alternative definitions of British culture and citizenship, within an African Diasporic activist politics. By demanding the development of a multicultural curricula Black parents fought against the passive erasure of their cultures to make it easier for their British-born and British-raised children to thrive within English society and culture. At the same time, parents wanted to reframe the nature of that culture. British society was already statistically multiracial, but it was not necessarily multicultural. By inserting Afro-Caribbean, African and African American writings into community-created educational spaces Black activists created for themselves, and their children, an alternative cultural citizenship which did not equate “English” and “British” with whiteness.

However, it is important to juxtapose these Black-affirming separatist spaces with the marginalization of Black children within the educational system. At the OWAAD’s first National Black Women’s Conference in 1979 education concerns occupied much of the conference discussion and the subsequent activism that emerged. In the first four issues of the organization’s newsletter FOWAAD! the group featured at least one article on education per issue, especially the creation of “sin bins,” remedial classes for students

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126 Ibid, 59.
in need of more attention. In fact, all of these articles focused on the efforts of the Haringey Black Pressure Group on Education.

The Haringey group emerged from “moves made by sisters in the United Black Women’s Action Group” on June 24, 1979. The meeting’s participants met specifically to discuss sin bins, which they understood in much the same way as Coard considered ESN schools before them:

> These ‘sins bins’ as they are called are simply dumping grounds for all the unwanted ‘disruptive’ pupils whom the school cannot handle. A disproportionate number of the children [who] attend them are Black. The effect of setting up more sin bins can only result in even larger numbers of Black youth being deprived of their right to education, and their right to an educational system which caters for their particular cultural, linguistic and social needs.\(^{128}\)

Parents were also skeptical of the ways in which “disruptive pupils” were identified, specifically at the local Wood Green School, planning to set up sin bins in September 1980. Wood Green’s guidelines identified “‘stammering, nail biting, desk-drumming and over-sensitivity’... [and] ‘Timidity, apathy, depression, anxiety, defiance, refusal to work, lying, stealing and truancy’... among the long list of ‘emotional and behavioural’ difficulties” which would have made a child eligible to removal to the special classrooms. Clearly, the Haringey group, and presumably other parents’ organizations involved in the same effort, saw the educational system as desirous of very literally segregating Black students from their White counterparts by any means possible.

Black parents immediately doubted that sin bins might give their children what supplementary schools were designed to provide. Instead of viewing these classrooms as


\(^{128}\) Ibid.
potential sites for Black children to received specialized help, they understood them as punishment. Compounded with their isolation, the Haringey group believed their children would be further bombarded with negative images of themselves and people of color globally. Thus, without the community-approved and self-affirming messages in Black bookshops and Black texts, sin bins became another way for English schools to problematize Black children and abandon their responsibilities to them.

*Limited Alliances*

Ever since its inception, the use of the word “black” to unite people of Asian and African descent from the Caribbean, South Asia and Africa was tenuous at best. It always involved a conscious effort; individuals had to understand themselves as Black, whether they were Sri Lankan, Jamaican or Asian Trinidadian. Politically there could be no difference, even if culturally each individual was distinct. In the case of educational inequality there was much difference in experience that was never fully circumvented.

Because this project has been most interested in the experiences of West Indians there has been relatively little discussion of the importance of language in educational reform. This is a reflection of the heavy focus on West Indian pupils throughout official reports. Since West Indians performed the worst on standardized tests and were the largest “immigrant” population, this attention does make sense, however Asian students were also a population in particular need. While it would be impossible to cover a detailed history of educational inequalities and Asian parental activism in this space, one case, based in Bradford, Northern England is representative and fascinating.
In April 1984, Ray Honeyford, headmaster of Drummond Middle School offered a serious critique of the move towards multicultural education when he published an article in the conservative magazine, the Salisbury Review. In, “Education and Race- an Alternative View,” Honeyford attacked what he called the “race relations lobby” and “multi racial zealots” who wielded an undue amount of influence over state and local education programs. At the time, Bradford had a sizable population of Pakistani immigrants, mostly Muslims, and Drummond was roughly fifty per cent Asian. In the article, the headmaster outright blames Asian and West Indian parents for causing their children’s failures in schools and asserts that the English government had been far too “tolerant” of the whims of migrant parents. At the heart of Honeyford’s article was the belief that Black children and their migrant parents should conform to the English educational system, not the reverse.129

Roughly half of Ray Honeyford’s diatribe against multiracial education was focused on his experience with Asian parents. For instance, in relaying the circumstances of a meeting held for Bradford’s LEA to voice the schools’ concerns with supposed excessive absences of Asian students, Honeyford does not discuss parents’ objections to the school’s analysis. Rather, he opines the use of translators even “though there have been freely available English classes in the area for at least a decade.”130 He also refers to the “hysterical political temperament of the Indian sub continent” which he clearly felt was out of place in an English locale. He opines that “There was much shouting and fist


130 Ibid.
waving” and accused “One Anglicized Asian” of shouting “bullshit” throughout the meeting. Headmaster Honeyford used racist stereotypes to malign migrant parents as a means to avoid their expressed anger at the school and staff. His entire article is a discussion of the “foreignness” of migrant, especially Asian, parents as a means to delegitimize their concerns and shame them for not assimilating. By ignoring the material realities of working class migrant families Honeyford displaced any blame that might have been laid at the feet of the English educational system or teachers for student underachievement.131

Honeyford’s article was not an aberration or a result of his “frustration,” as he later claimed. Rather, it had become a habit for him to publish articles criticizing Asian and Afro-Caribbean youth and their parents for essentially ruining the English educational system. Before he published in the Salisbury Review, he sent letters to the London Times Educational Supplement regarding the underachievement of West Indian pupils, where he asserted “that the fashionable way of explaining comparative black pupil failure in British schools as a function of teacher prejudice and an alien curriculum was almost certainly bogus... The roots of black educational failure are, in reality, located in West Indian family structure and values, and the work of misguided radical teachers whose motives are basically political.”132 Honeyford also makes reference to West Indian single mothers, whom he clearly saw as dysfunctional. Such an analysis rested on the belief that West Indian parents did not allocate adequate time to supporting their children educationally and were all too willing to blame the school, the State, or racism for failure.

131 Ibid.
132 Ibid.
There was also a distinct intersection of racism and classism inherent in his criticism.

But Bradford’s Asian parents were not deterred. Headmaster Honeyford was disciplined by the Bradford LEA after Asian parents complained about his article. Unhappy with just a reprimand, over 200 Asian parents “asked for their children to be transferred from” Drummond, submitting their letters in English and Urdu. Parents continued to call for the Headmaster’s resignation until he took sick leave in March 1985, after almost a year of steady campaigning from parents. He was later suspended and the “Honeyford Affair,” as it came to be called, made its way to Parliament and then the High Court. Even though Honeyford won this case, the Bradford City Council appealed the decision. When the headmaster arrived at his school at the beginning of the 1985-1986 school year, he was met with protestors outside of the building and “more than half of his pupils absent.” The National Union of Teachers even expressed their support for Honeyford’s removal and in December of 1985, the headmaster left his job.133

The importance of this victory can not be overstated. Even though Headmaster Honeyford asserted repeatedly that his words had been taken out of context, Asian parents refused to believe him or accept his presence as an educator for their children knowing how he felt about their communities. Their victory can be attributed to their strength in numbers. In about ten per cent of the city’s schools Black students were at least half of the student population, and at Drummond more than ninety per cent of the students were Black, Asian and Afro-Caribbean. At the same time, the Pakistani Muslim

population made clear that they refused to be assimilated, which would mean abandoning their mother tongues and religion, simply because they had settled in England. At one point they even “proposed to take over five schools and run them according to Islamic principles… in effect, issuing an ultimatum: either you allow us to keep our culture intact within your system, or we go outside it.”\textsuperscript{134} Their victory was a resounding definition of the multi-cultural England in which they planned to live.

\textit{Conclusion}

Criticizing new multiracial curricula and race relations planned for London and Berkshire county schools in 1984, Professor Richard Flew suggested that, with these changes, schools would become “instruments of revolution.”\textsuperscript{135} While not his original intention, Professor Flew actually outlines why educational activism became an important part of Black British activism writ large. Schools, and the education of British children, were sites for defining British identity and cultural citizenship. Black activists, many of them parents, understood that altering the parameters of knowledge was foundational.

Political theorist Bhikhu Parekh wrote in 1985 that “Multicultural education is not a departure from, nor incompatible with, the Liberal idea of education. Its inspiring principle is to sensitize the child to the inherent plurality of the world, the plurality of beliefs, ways of life, cultures.” This is a representative description of the multicultural education that Black parents envisioned throughout the 1970s and 1980s. An English educational system based narrowly in the British experience, which privileged the ways


in which Britain understood the world was not benign or inevitable. Nor would it have
been impossible to pivot that lens. For instance, England’s first Black Studies programs,
in secondary schools and universities, emerged out of the Black bookshops, especially
New Beacon. Black studies in this context highlighted African histories, the effect of
colonialism (privileging the ideas and responses of colonized peoples) and exposed
students to the writings of Black activists, novelists and poets throughout the African
Diaspora. Even the parameters of these courses, seeing the interconnectedness of Black
people globally, was a critique of the provincialism of the English educational system.
For a country that had spent much of its very recent history affecting the farthest reaches
of the world, English school children had been taught very little about those places. The
luxury to limit one’s knowledge was one that the British had endorsed in primary and
secondary education and throughout its colonial holdings, but it was not one that
Commonwealth migrants could afford in the Mother Country.\textsuperscript{136}

Very often citizenship calls to mind political rights, economic responsibilities, and
today especially, service in the armed forces. But the social citizenship, the emotional and
psychological feeling of belonging, has often been denied to people of color, especially
those designated as “immigrants.” One can argue that education was the perfect platform
for Black migrants to stake a claim for a social citizenship, not for themselves
necessarily, but for their children. Education has varied societal functions, including
teaching children society’s structure and expectations of the individual. Dadzie, Bryan
and Scafe assert that inequality in education made clear the “true nature” of the Black

community’s relationship with the State. This chapter has demonstrated the ways in which inequalities in educational achievement were bound to discussions of migration, citizenship and national culture. The idea of a “multi-cultural” England emerged out of these debates. Even though assimilation was, by the late 1980s, an often unpopular model, it persisted. With disproportionate support from the British state and Black activists, multi-cultural England is still a contested space. One thing that has not changed is that, popular or not, England is a multi-cultural and multi-racial country, simply by the make-up of its population. It remains to be seen, however, if those cultures have severely shifted the exclusively White “English culture” that Commonwealth migrants encountered in the post-World War II period.

If education is concerned to develop such basic human capacities as curiosity, self-criticism, capacity for reflection, ability to form an independent judgment, sensitivity, intellectual humility and respect for others, and to open the pupil’s mind to the great achievements of mankind, then it must be multi-cultural in orientation. Monocultural education not only does not fully develop these qualities and capacities, but tends to encourage their opposite. It is simply not good education.

-Bhikhu Parek

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137 Bryan et al, The Heart of the Race, 58.

On June 28, 1978, the California Supreme Court decided on the *Regents of University of California v. Allan Bakke*. Allan Bakke applied to the University of California at Davis’ Medical School twice, in 1973 and 1974, each time he was rejected, even though “disadvantaged” and “minority” students were admitted with lesser qualifications through the University’s special admissions program. A middle-class White male, Bakke alleged that UC Davis had discriminated against him by not considering his application under their special admissions program simply because he was a White male. The *Bakke* decision has been understood, popularly and scholarly, as the beginning of the end of the affirmative action gains initiated through *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954). The *Bakke* case has been most closely connected to rising, or falling, numbers of Black and Latino students in American colleges and universities, however, there has been little discussion of how this case was connected to, and exposed, educational inequalities at the primary and secondary levels.

While not reliant on admissions criteria, American public schools can, in many ways, be just as exclusionary as the ivory towers of undergraduate and graduate admissions. In the East Bay city of Oakland, California, decades of residential segregation made the city’s educational resources both separate and unequal. However, in contrast to the national fight for desegregation, the Oakland Unified School District was majority persons of color in this period of study. Thus, in a time where desegregation was
cast as a Black-White issue and integration was the order of the day, Oakland’s history
turns that story on its head. With only a short commitment to desegregation, by the city
government and community activists, the prevailing issue with Oakland educational
inequalities was a function of funding. In other words, community activism regarding
educational parity focused not on busing initiatives or social interaction, but on equitable
funding of the city’s schools, whether they were in the most affluent or poorest
neighborhoods. And Black activism around equitable educational opportunities sought to
expose the ways in which quality education had been preserved for the White minority.

A Migrant City

The City of Oakland sits directly in between its two most famous neighbors. Across the
bay is San Francisco and, along its western border, Berkeley. Some residents and scholars
have argued that Oakland grew up in the shadow of San Francisco, especially, searching for
an identity of its own. Before World War II, the city was primarily White, with a small
number of African Americans, mostly the descendants of Black gold rushers (8,482 Black
residents out of a total population of 47,182 in 1940). The expanse of wartime industry,
specifically shipbuilding in Bay Area ports (San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond)
attracted tens of thousands of migrants from across the country, especially the Southern
states. By 1944, Oakland’s African American population had almost quadrupled to
21,770.139

White and Black southerners moved to the East Bay, mostly from Louisiana,
Texas, Arkansas, Mississippi and Oklahoma, immediately contended with discrimination

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from the native population, Black and White. Viewed as backward, Southern migrants faced systemic discrimination in housing, sometimes employment, and in the receipt of social services. In some ways this was a response to their numbers, which “greatly exceeded the region’s capacity to provide necessary goods and services to its old and new residents.”

While Southerners were universally despised, historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo asserts that White residents and migrants used their racial similarity to maintain racial separation, which “softened or blurred their cultural or class differences.” For migrants “Whiteness was [their] currency of assimilation, guaranteeing their eventual acceptance as permanent residents.” This is similar to Britain just after the war, where Caribbean and Asian migrants were considered “undesirable immigrants” while Italian and Eastern European immigrants were believed to be assimilable because of their race. African American migrants to the East Bay faced a social marginalization their White counterparts could often avoid. However, in the East Bay, Lemke-Santangelo asserts that established Black residents could be just as hostile to Black migrants, afraid these newcomers would disrupt the careful balance between White and Black people that existed before the war. As one Black resident said at the time, “I think they [Black migrants] were more aggressive, really, in many ways [than natives]. Less friendly. They tended to be more suspicious of whites... A little unpleasant in... the remarks they made about whites and that sort of thing.” In this way, African American migrants, like

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140 Ibid, 70.
141 Ibid, 70 & 71.
Caribbean and Asian migrants to England, were often forced to rely on one another, their families and communities, rather than outsiders.¹⁴²

For most Black migrants, housing was often their first concern. Upon arrival, they stayed with family or friends from back home, but immediately began looking for a more permanent situation, especially if children or other family members would be joining them at a later date. Much of the housing available to Black migrants was temporary, substandard, derelict and sometimes without basic sanitary and health needs. After the war, the housing available to Black migrants was just as problematic. Wartime dwellings were demolished, especially those with large Back populations, and displaced residents scrambled to find homes. If they stayed in Oakland, many ended up in the West Oakland area, which had a long established pre-war Black community, or later in East Oakland. For those able and interested in buying homes, the prevalence of restrictive covenants prevented them from doing so in the city’s better neighborhoods. Thus, those who stayed did so with very limited options. Corralling Oakland’s Black residents within certain areas obviously had an important impact on the city’s schools, but not entirely what one might expect.¹⁴³

By 1950, the city’s Black population was roughly 48,000, which then almost doubled in the following decade to twenty-three per cent of the total population.¹⁴⁴ After the war there was a general exodus of middle-class White Oaklanders, to either neighboring suburban areas or into the Oakland hills. Thus, while Oakland remained a

¹⁴² Ibid, 74.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 86-87.

racially diverse city, White and Black people increasingly lived farther away from one another; with African Americans and Latinos confined to increasingly rundown neighborhoods in neglected sections of the city. And, considering that these two groups, along with growing numbers of Asian Pacific Islanders, were the statistical majority, individual schools tended to be racially mixed. However, this did not, in and of itself, mean an equality of experience.

Desegregation

Education policy expert David Kirp asserts that “substantial desegregation never came to Oakland,” a reality which must be understood not only within the city’s racial mixture, but also differing ideas about desegregation’s importance for a large, urban city in California.\textsuperscript{145} After the passage of \textit{Brown v. Board of Education}, various local and educational boards throughout the country implemented controversial measures to transport White and Black students around the city to achieve racial parity. In Oakland, however, desegregation was a tricky subject. In his 1963 report to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, Ira Michael Heyman notes that many Oakland schools, especially high schools were racially mixed.

The racial composition of the schools on all levels varies form largely Caucasian to predominantly Negro concentrations. In general, the senior high schools, having larger attendance zones, have less racial imbalance. Historically, Oakland’s high school districts have run from the Bay to the

hills. This resulted (with one exception) in heterogeneous mixture of socioeconomic classes.\footnote{Ira Michael Heyman, \textit{Civil Rights U.S.A.: Public Schools in the North and West: Oakland} (Washington D.C.: United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1963), 4.}

These large residential enrollment districts forced students to attend at lest nominally integrated school environments, which allowed local officials to believe that the city did not need to adopt a desegregation plan.

In 1961, Oakland built Skyline, its sixth high school, which elicited intense anger among certain sectors of the population. Skyline High was erected in the Oakland hills with residential attendance boundaries that “stretched 10 miles across Oakland’s hills and brought into a single attendance area, for the first time, the one overwhelmingly white and wealthy section of Oakland. The student body... was therefore almost entirely white, while each of the other high schools became substantially more nonwhite.” The Oakland chapter of the National Association for the advancement of Colored People (NAACP) took their objections to the city’s school board, charging that the attendance zone effectively created “a private prep school supported by public funds.” The NAACP, joined later by the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Oakland Teachers Association, sought to redraw Skyline’s boundaries and wanted the Board to formally adopt a desegregation policy.\footnote{David Kirp, “Race, Schooling, and Interest Politics: The Oakland Story” \textit{The School REVIEW} 87:4 (August 1979): 359 & 360.}

The Oakland school board can be understood as representative of a number of local bodies at the time; overwhelmingly White, economically privileged, and

\footnote{The one exception was McClymonds high school, situated in West Oakland, which, in 1940 was 12 per cent African American, but at the time of Heymans’ study was 97 per cent Black. Clearly the shifting populations during World War II had an obvious affect on the school’s surrounding community and make-up of the student population.}
conservative. The Board was an elected, seven-person committee. In 1963, six of the seven members lived in the Oakland hills and were relatively affluent. The Board’s statistical make-up had remained consistent since its inception in the Progressive Era. In fact, the Board was historically “almost entirely conservative, Republican, drawn from the business and legal communities, and white” even though the city’s population had changed drastically from the pre-war period. The conservative nature of the school board explains, to some degree, their refusal to make a formal desegregation policy part of their agenda.

Kirp asserts that “Until desegregation became an issue in Oakland, school politics was a humdrum affair. School board meetings were brief, sparsely attended, and noncontroversial in character.” Oakland’s Board of Education formally resisted desegregation under the belief that “To the extent that segregation existed... The segregation was de facto: it had not been caused by the schools and was not the schools responsibility to undo.” However, as the controversy unfolded over the next two years, the Board did concede to open enrollment policies meant to lessen racial polarization. Although Kirp asserts that for those who wanted a fully developed desegregation plan, liberalizing efforts “mattered less than [the School Board’s] unwillingness to assert [desegregation] as its objective.”\(^{148}\)

At the end of his report on Oakland schools, Heyman suggests that the Oakland Unified School District was “at the threshold of dealing in a meaningful way with

\(^{148}\) Ibid, 355, 358 & 362.
education problems of Negro students.”149 However, the author almost belies this assertion immediately:

While the record does not support a conclusion that past actions have been motivated by bigotry, it does show insensitivity to and ignorance of the unique problems of Negro pupils. This has been exacerbated by the refusal of school officials to talk frankly about race in public. This reluctance has obstructed recognition of problems and effective treatments of them. It has also nourished the suspicions and distrust of many Negroes and has made it impossible for the board to point to facts showing a much greater degree of equal treatment than is generally believed to exist.150

While not the main thrust of his report, Heyman correctly locates what would continue to be a problem for the School Board and individual schools. Local communities of color, especially African Americans, did not trust that the school board or local administrators had their best interests at heart. Thus their opposition often emerged out of distrust and in the light of past animosities, rather than exclusively based on current events.

Community initiatives

Just as the School Board seemed willing to consider more effective desegregation policies, the Black community was less receptive to this focus. Kirp asserts that desegregation never became a pervasive issue among Black Oaklanders for a variety of reasons. First, the NAACP, which played a major role in bringing the issue to local attention, could never claim to speak for the entire Black population. For instance, as the NAACP was planning a sit-in to protest de facto segregation another group, the Afro-American Association, organized a “‘study-harder” demonstration at predominantly black McClymonds High School. Although the two efforts were not intended to conflict with each other, they did.” Because of this “factionalism,” when the issue of

149 Heyman, Civil Rights U.S.A., 50.
150 Ibid.
desegregation seemed to be faltering, new groups brought other concerns and tactics to the fore.\textsuperscript{151}

One can not view California’s engagement with desegregation, or lack thereof, through the frame used in the South for instance. Desegregation was not a Black-White issue because of the presence of large numbers of Mexican-Americans, who had often been the target of segregation statues. Rather “black Californians... a population of less that 1 percent of the state’s total on the eve of World War II... inhabited an ambiguous racial status.” After the war, however, young migrants were often coded as delinquents and in the aftermath of the \textit{Brown} decision, segregation in the state’s schools increased. In this way, it is important to understand that while it is unlikely that students of color were barred from attending certain schools, they still might have experienced the educational system negatively.\textsuperscript{152}

California schools tended to operate on a tracking system. In Oakland, Donna Murch describes the tracking system as “like a social pyramid with a small elite group termed ‘X’ at the top and children placed into descending tracks from A to D. The migrant majority ended up in the two lowest levels; their families’ relative poverty and recent arrival from the South guaranteed them a place a the bottom.” At the same time, young migrants were also coded as delinquents, by school officials and law enforcement agents, which resulted in disciplinary measures to control their behavior. In \textit{Living for the City: Migration, Education and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland}, \textit{California} Murch asserts that control, rather than education, became the predominate

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\item \textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 364.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 49-50.
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experience of Black youth in schools especially when they “entered junior high school on the cusp of adolescence.” At this point, “the numbers of black teachers receded and the gaps in the curriculum became more obvious.” Murch’s study posits that in Oakland schools the education system constantly attacked Black youth self-esteem and sense of well-being. Until the mid-1960s the majority of Oakland’s teachers were White, especially in the junior and senior high schools. And while Black teachers would not automatically assured positive experience for Black students, the lack of teachers able to understand their cultural backgrounds can be understood as an important lacuna in their educational experiences.

The one exception to this patterns was McClymond’s High School. In the late 1950s through 1960s, McClymond’s student population was majority Black, as were its teachers, and its location in West Oakland’s historic Black community helped “reinforce.. pride” in the school and surrounding area. Even here, though there was dissatisfaction with “its academic rigor and treatment of students.” In 1957, a small group of Black parents accused the school of low expectations of students, resulting in low student performance. “They cited poor rates of college attendance... and a recurring pattern of school counselors and officials discouraging students from continuing their educations.” Murch asserts that there were considerable problems with the school’s curricula. The school administration sacrificed basic education training for a focus on “discipline, comportment, and hygiene over academic achievement.” Students were being prepared for menial, low-skill work, many lacking basic literacy skills, rather than any form of

153 Ibid, 48 & 49.
higher education or post-secondary excellence. The school, however, cited students’ lack of preparation for high school as the real reason for failings. Black parents were desirous of reforming the school, although the school administrators seem to have been hostile to even this possibility. Murch says that this dialectic, which persisted throughout the 1960s “encapsulated the painful divide between black families and the leadership of the Oakland schools.”

In 1970, the Oakland Unified School District hired its first Black superintendent of schools, Marcus Foster. Kirp asserts that Foster’s appointment “was able to substantially satisfy the city’s black leadership... that the Oakland schools were now treating seriously the educationally and politically rooted concerns of the black majority.” Marcus Foster was previously a principal in the Philadelphia school system, and he entered his tenure in Oakland with the desire to modernize what had been an acutely criticized school system. His earliest initiatives were to remake the relationship between the community and the city’s schools. First, Foster implemented new screening measures for potential principles where “applicants... would be screened and interviewed by a panel of community members and students... [believing]... That this process would enable the panel members to ‘discern such intangible factors as psychological stance, personal qualities, and commitment to uphold Black community interests.’” In his study of Marcus Foster’s superintendency, Jesse J. McCorry asserts that the breadth of Foster’s work sought “to make operational his notion of ‘shared power’ between the schools and

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155 Kirp, “Race, Schooling and Interest Politics,” 381.
While not universally popular, Marcus Foster’s work with the Oakland Unified School District was, arguably, just the kind of leadership the community needed.

Within this frame one can see how desegregation efforts do not quite make sense for the Oakland context. Busing the relatively small White population from the hills to schools in the flatlands and moving Black, Latino and Asian American students from their local schools to an institution with a similar racial make up would not have fixed the problems evident in McClymonds or even the controversy surrounding Skyline. Rather, the only possibility for improving this situation was a commitment to raising the quality of the education provided in the flatlands (including materials, facilities and teacher qualifications) to those available at Skyline.

**Quality Education in Oakland Schools**

By the late 1960s the educational inequalities within the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) were stark. Accord to one study “40 percent of Skyline pupils went on to college and only 2 percent were unemployed two years after graduation. In contrast in an almost entirely black high school [most probably McClymonds], only 5.4 percent of the graduates continued on to college and 15.5 percent were unemployed.” There were some observers who believed that this resulted from low Black intelligence. Randal Kennedy, however, asserts that “Racist perceptions of blacks have given energy to polices and practices (such as racial exclusion in housing, impoverished schooling, and stingy social welfare programs) that have facilitated the growth of egregious, crime-spawning conditions that millions of Americans face in urban slums and rural backwaters across the

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Therefore, one can not separate the material inequalities between the city’s neighborhoods and local schools.

In an editorial reprinted in the *Oakland Tribune*, former national president of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins, asserted an important reality of Black educational activism by the 1970s.

As long as Negro Americans who have been in this country since 1619 have to fight - literally fight - for equal education for their children with whites who have been here but a fraction of the years since 1619, no study, no study of any race problem in North America can be believed.\(^{158}\)

Educational inequalities have served a specific function in maintaining racial inequality in post-Civil Rights America. At the most basic level, perpetually low achievement among the nation’s Black children have meant that there would be very little social and economic advancement for successive generations. At the same time, since most public schools are representative of the neighborhoods in which they sit, poverty bears heavily on the ways in which poor students (of color) interact with the educational environment. Thus, educational achievement can never just be about the individual student’s aptitude or specific teacher performance.\(^{159}\)

For instance, by the mid-1970s it had become a common problem for educators and parents to complain about the alarming rate of illiteracy in high school graduates. In February 1975, the Oakland Education Association (OEA), a teacher’s union, reiterated its desire for the school district to form “a task force of teachers, community


\(^{158}\) Roy Wilkins, “Negroes Progress Has Been Minimal” *Oakland Tribune*, January 9, 1975, 14.

representatives and others to recommend how to improve students’ reading and math skills.” Executive Director of the OEA, Harold Boyd Jr. asserted that “The grim facts speak for themselves... ‘Many of our students are coming out of public schools unable to function effectively because of reading deficiencies.’” Considering the almost two-decades of Black parental ire at McClymonds’ ability to send their students to college, it is entirely likely that a large proportion of the students who left school as functionally illiterate were Black, Latino or Asian and that the issue of illiteracy was likely not of the same level of concern in the hills as in the flatlands.

The most prevailing problem that the OUSD faced throughout this period of study was financial deficit. Many Oakland schools seem to have been impoverished, reporting a lack of textbooks or paper for copying assignments. In one instance, state policy required schools to retrofit their buildings in case of earthquake or close until such time as they could begin construction. Oakland schools could not afford to either refurbish their buildings or begin construction of new ones, so, in early 1975, a number of city schools were preparing to teach their classes in trailers on school property during the next academic year, unless a solution could be devised.

Facing what seems to have been the uncertainty of perpetual deficits, a number of decisions made by the School Board are at the very least confusing. In early 1975, Oakland’s interim superintendent Robert Blackburn said the District would “not to seek up to $3 million or more from a federal program that hinges on transferring students for racial balance... The program is only for communities with ‘a district-wide desegregation

plan,’ which is not Oakland’s priority. The district’s priority is improving instruction”161
While desegregation had ceased to be a priority for the OUSD, the school district had
never managed to reach either racial parity or equality of educational opportunities in its
schools. Which is not to say that there had not been improvement, including “reduced
racial separation... new multi-ethnic programs, [moves] toward ethnic balance in its staff
and... strong minority minority hiring policies.”162 But is is to say that the financial
situation was dire.

At the same time as Superintendent Blackburn turned down federal desegregation
funding, the OUSD was charged with chronic “mismanagement” of more than $9.3
million in the previous school year by the state board of education. The investigation
began in June 1974 as a result of local parents’ concerns about the city’s application for
state and federal funding.

[P]arents on the District Advisory Committee were unwilling - as is
necessary under state and federal regulations - to ‘sign off’ or formally
agree to Oakland’s application. They were unhappy with the way the
money had been spent the previous year, they felt their children weren’t
getting all they should... And they protested that school officials hadn’t
involved them in the new fiscal year’s planning process.
When the State board submitted their report they found it was not corruption which had
cause this problem, but “mismanagement - at least not being able to account for where
the money was.”163 The State ordered the OUSD to review its books and account for the
money within three months.

Blackburn admitted that the city’s school district had faced considerable challenges recently, specifically the 1974 murder of Superintendent Marcus Foster and Blackburn’s serious wounding by members of the Symbionese Liberation Army. However, he also blamed increased levels of truancy on the school’s economic shortfalls, attempting to displace school administrators’ failings in creating the “hectic” environment of the previous school year. As a part of their mandate, the state board of education warned that if the OUSD were unable to provide a full accounting of their finances, “special enrichment programs for the urban poor and educationally disadvantaged may be canceled.” Possibly in deference to this reality, the board approved OUSD’s budget, but only through half of the 1975-1976 academic year. Thus, it is important to consider how vulnerable these students were when considering the increasing financial problems faced by the school district.164

Teacher complaints

At the same time as the State sanctioned the OUSD for financial mismanagement, another group was becoming increasingly outraged at their budgetary instability. OUSD policy at the time was to “warn” teachers in the spring of their possible dismissal. This policy had long been a point of contention with local teachers’ unions for the fear and confusion it created. On May 6, 1975, roughly 150 Oakland Education Association and American Federation of Teachers union members picketed outside the city’s administrative building. Later that evening at the city’s board of education meeting, “More than 400 parents, teachers and interested citizens” protested proposed cuts in

164 “Schools May Lose $9.3 Million in Aide” Oakland Tribune, March 2, 1975, 1
teaching and medical staff for the city’s schools. In one speech, Harold Boyd of the OEA said that the school district would do better to focus on “the truancy problems that are causing us to lose millions of dollars by loss of ADA [average daily attendance]’ to alleviate budget cuts.”

It would be interesting if the months of protesting which followed this event were unique and led to substantive changes in how the city’s educational system operated and managed their money. But it is even more fascinating that it was not. In the *Oakland Tribune* articles covering these events journalists, teachers, parents, educational administrators all focused on how normal this turn of events had become in recent memory. The threat of teacher pickets had become a regular occurrence. And facing a $3.7 million deficit for the upcoming school year, the school board believed itself to be incapable of avoiding some lay-offs among teachers. The effect of financial instability would have severely affect the functioning of Oakland classrooms and the educational possibilities of the city’s students. Teacher frustration as the city’s financial crises, and problems with the lack of necessary materials, emerged throughout the numerous articles surrounding this particular moment. Teachers repeatedly threatened to strike and, the next school year, they did. However, what does not become clear throughout these articles are the students expected to learn in this environment. In a school system with high levels of illiteracy, impoverished classrooms and disgruntled teachers there was a noticeable lack of discussion regarding student behavior or even student ideas about how the schools functioned.

165 “Tears in Annual Plea to Board” *Oakland Tribune*, February 26, 1975, 3.
Absentee parents

It is likely that students were not featured in the *Tribune* coverage of the OUSD’s problems because their parents were largely absent as well. With one exception, parents emerged in these records as a homogenous entity who participate in teacher strikes or various school board committees, but exerted no independent will of their own. This means that there is little opportunity to distinguish between parents in different neighborhoods, of different races or varying economic classes. Thus, in the events emerging in newspapers, the battle was between the OUSD, State Board of Education and teachers.

This marginalization of parents, particularly parents of color, is demonstrated clearly in one article. After the announced budget cuts, representatives from a local Black parents’ group, Blacks for Education, attended a school board meeting on March 18. In his presentation to the Board, vice chairman of the group, Lawrence Joyner, suggested that the OUSD adopt a “tripartite collective bargaining” scheme. Joyner posited “that parents and community organizations have been ‘screaming loud against the system in every conceivable way in an effort to improve the delivery system for quality education.’” Faced with a continued marginalization of Black parental fear about their children’s education, Blacks for Education wanted increased input in the running of the schools system: “if parents are to insist on accountability and improved quality of education in urban schools, it is essential that parents be seated at the negotiating table and represented by those whose major concern is the ultimate effect on the quality of education.” While there is no archival trace of this organization yet, Joyner’s claims
cannot be dismissed. In essence, Joyner argues that parents must be a body to whom teachers and the school district are held accountable in the completion of their duties.\footnote{166 "Parent Role in School Bargaining Asked" \textit{Oakland Tribune}, March 19, 1975, 1.}

While there is not indication whether or not the school board took Blacks for Education seriously, considering that they virtually disappear it is likely that they did not. This is especially likely considering the American Federation of Teachers’ take on the expertise regarding educational needs. “The AFT... has boldly proclaimed that no one was more qualified to know what was best for children than the teachers, especially as it relates to minority and poor students.” Joyner’s reaction to this statement is important. “Parents have recognized that teachers do not know what is best and have proclaimed that they know best. Trilateral negotiations offer an ideal opportunity for all experts to share in shaping the ‘real’ educational policies.” It would be interesting, whenever evidentiary information emerges to consider parental opportunities for affecting educational policy either outside the system or from within.\footnote{167 Ibid.}

\textit{Conclusion}

The history of educational inequality in Oakland is not easily explained or identified. California, even in light of its history during the 1960s and 1970s, has been incorrectly understood as disconnected from the kinds of racism existing in the South, for instance. Often that construction makes some sense when one ignores the post-World War II history of Oakland. But from the 1950s onward, Oakland became a majority Black city, with large numbers of poor families, but the local city government was still run by affluent Whites. The movement towards Black representation through the city’s
government and institutions did not, however, necessarily foment the kinds of social, political and economic opportunities imagined. It might be too easy to say that these advancements were forestalled solely because of failures in the educational system. However, as has been discussed here, a complex history of residential segregation, migrant discrimination and increasing poverty within the city’s communities of color, made the experiences of the city’s students intimately connected to these other trends.

Most specifically, examining educational inequalities in a city like Oakland must be an important contribution to the historiography. As the city exhibited only a fleeting involvement in school desegregation, it is vital that scholars consider how segregation was not the only, or even the most important, factor contributing to educational inequalities. Rather, the distribution of wealth, among the city’s population and toward public schools, demonstrates that with or without segregation children of color still could not receive the kind of education necessary to thrive within American society. Students educated in Oakland’s poorest schools were just a few miles away from California’s premiere public university, however the distance could seem far greater. Without affirmative action policies, access to higher education rested almost exclusively on one’s high school education. While still unclear, all available sources suggest that, for Black and Latino students, this meant that the gates to higher education and social advancements were all but closed.
On August 25, 1981, the *London Times* printed two stories reflective of the social climate within Britain. In “Riot inquiries: Brixton and Moss Side: Force’s softly, softly task to find coloured recruits” journalist Tony Samstag discusses the Metropolitan Police Service’s (Met) difficulty attracting more Afro-Caribbean and Asian applicants. In the aftermath of the Brixton street riots in April of the same year, the Met had once again come under fire for their strained relations with Black communities. It was believed that a greater representation of Black police officers would help alleviate fears of racism within the Met’s ranks. The riotous events of 1981 made clear that English streets had become embattled sites wherein Black and White Britons struggled over the meanings of English citizenship.169

Just below this article John Chartres published a report from Manchester regarding the public inquiries into the previous month’s riots in the neighborhoods of Moss Side and Rusholme. During the Hytner tribunal, named after the judge who led the proceedings Benet Hytner, local community activists were openly hostile towards the


inquiry and those involved. In fact the Moss Side Defence Committee, which included a number of Black parent activists, organized to boycott the events and sent out a press release “to warn people that information which they give to the Hytner inquiry could well find it’s way to the police.”170 While the Moss Side committee was worried about the legal implications of cooperating, Chartres’ article illustrates the social problems.

Chartres’ entitled his article, “Parents blamed for trouble”, but this is actually misleading. Relying heavily on an interview with a Mr. William Fredericks (Jamaican migrant, Moss Side resident and father of eight), Chartres attempts to depict the “lack of parental discipline” as a cause for the riots, although it is unclear if this was the conclusion of the Hytner inquiry of Chartres himself, or both. Mr. Fredericks, however, laid the blame elsewhere, asserting that parents’ inability to discipline their children “because of fear of legal action” was an indication of perpetually strained relationships between Black communities and police authority not parental neglect. He makes clear that Black youth had not rioted without cause: “If you can find better policemen than those who have been working in Moss Side... I would like you to bring them forward.” Charters article also illustrates that there was a distinction to be made between migrant Black parents, like Mr. Fredericks, and their mostly British-born children. The difference in their experiences in 1981 was one based on decades of struggle over Black settlement in England, where migrants attempted to lay claim to their right to settle in the UK as members of the post-colonial British Commonwealth, while being dispossessed socially of these legals rights. In this way, Mr. Fredericks’ most telling quotation in Chartres’

article may be read as recognition of this process and possibly even of Chartres’ framing:
“I believe the enemies of the black people in this country are men who are using us for
their own ends.”¹⁷¹

The riots in the late 1970s and early 1980s in neighborhoods throughout London,
Birmingham and Manchester were larger versions of what had actually become a
relatively normal part of Black British life. Black activists specifically believed that local
police forces were targeting their children for harassment in public spaces, including
through the use of antiquated British law. In response Black activists, often parents,
began to organize for the protection of their children.

*The Immigrant Problem*

The migrants aboard the *Empire Windrush* precipitated the development of the modern
multi-cultural England, but that transition was shaped by recurring conflict. Originally
recruited on labor contracts from the far reaches of the disintegrating British Empire,
migrant workers moved to cities like London, Manchester and Birmingham to help
rebuild the country after the devastation of World War II. However, almost immediately
there emerged some ambiguity over who these migrant workers were and how they fit
into British society.¹⁷²

It is likely that the foundations for a fraught relationship between police and
Black communities were laid in 1958. That August gangs of young “teddy boys,”


¹⁷² There were small but settled populations of Asian and African descended people resident in England
before 1948. For a detailed description of these communities see Steven Fryer, *Staying Power: The History
of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984); Paul Gilroy, *Black Britain: A Photographic History*
(London: Saqi, 2007); Ron Ramdin, *Reimaging Britain: Five Hundred Years of Black and Asian History*
teenagers dressed in dapper clothing based on the Edwardian dandy, rampaged in the Nottingham and Notting Hill neighborhoods of central London, home to working class Black migrants at the time. They threw rocks at windows and attacked any Black person on the street. Eventually these sporadic attacks evolved into a race war, as more Whites joined the melee and no Black person, male or female, adult or child, was safe. Some witnesses reported seeing police cars around the neighborhood as Black people were attacked, but officers offered little protection.

As the Black community lost hope that the police would rally to save them, they organized their own community protection details; men in groups walked women and children home from train stations and carried weapons to dissuade confrontation. By the end of the summer the daily attacks waned, but the Notting Hill area remained tense at the possibility for renewed violence. Months later, on May 17, 1959, thirty-two year old Antiguan migrant, Kelso Cochrane, was stabbed to death by six White youth, his death being the final straw. Taken together, the Notting Hill riots and Cochrane’s murder helped cement the very real possibility of violence as a reality of Black British life.

Sociologist Ian Loader argues that policing and punishment have a social function, which conveys “meaning and plays its part in the creation of culture.” Specifically in the English context, the iconic image of the English police officer, or

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“bobby” who patrols a community with which he is familiar, had become a symbol of British law and order.\textsuperscript{176} The appeal of the bobby, with his crisp suit and high rounded hat, lay in his connection to the community, he was not an impersonal policeman completely unrelated to his patrol beat. That this image emerged in the 1950s alongside sporadic instances of racist violence demonstrates that the bobby’s allure was one which made sense in the context of White English identity but not for Black Britons. In other words, the society that created and invested in the image of the bobby was not meant to include Black migrants.

As fear and anger mounted towards migrants after Notting Hill, Parliament began to debate the possibility of creating new immigration restrictions specifically targeted at Commonwealth migrants. These debates culminated in the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, which implemented migration quotas, limiting movement to England to individuals holding government-issued employment vouchers, and restricted where those migrants could live. Later the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1968 and Immigration Act (1971) further restricted migration by creating the “right to abode” in British nationality laws, which phased out the CUKC status and made a distinction between British subjects born in the United Kingdom and those born elsewhere in the Commonwealth. The former were given the right to live and work in the UK, while the latter could only achieve this right if they, or their parents, were CUKCs by birth. Thus, the unfettered access previously accorded to all members of the British Commonwealth eroded, paving the way for distinctions between British-born citizens (mostly White) and

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
Commonwealth nationals (mostly non-White). Throughout all of these revisions British citizenship was shaped by a presumed whiteness, framing the debate as one of immigration rather migration.

The reasons for such a construction can be clarified through the words of Conservative politician Enoch Powell. Powell’s infamous 1968 “Rivers of Blood” speech cast immigration as a threat to British identity and a race war was the natural outcome. Powell’s politics might best be exemplified by the National Front (a right-wing nationalist political party) slogan: “Keep Britain White.” As a selection from his 1972 book *Still to Decide* makes clear, Powell saw no place for Black migrants in Britain.

Of the great multitude, numbering already two million, of West Indians and Asians in England, it is no more true to say that England is their country than it would be to say that the West Indies, or Pakistan, or India are our country. In these great numbers they are, and remain, alien here as we would be in Kingston or in Delhi; indeed, with the growth of concentrated numbers, the alienness grows, not by choice but by necessity. It is a human fact which good will, tolerance, comprehension and all the social virtues do not touch. The process is that of an invasion, not, of course, with the connotation either of violence or a premeditated campaign but in the sense that a people find themselves displaced, in the only country that is theirs, by those who do have another country and whose home will continue to be elsewhere for successive generations.\(^{177}\) Powell’s speech can be understood as a revisionist history meant to strip Commonwealth migrants of their place in the social fabric of the British polity. For instance, Powell disavows the very real and recent history of British colonialism, wherein the British West Indies, India and Pakistan actually were the property of the British Empire. At the same time he makes no mention of those cities which had become members of the British Commonwealth by that time, which surprisingly did include Kingston and Delhi. Thus,

\(^{177}\) Enoch Powell, “Still to Decide” in *Hurricane Hits England*, 140.
even as Powell constructs Commonwealth migrants as the epitome of alien entities with no right to build lives in England even he must admit that he calls them foreign “in all but the juridical sense.”

It is clear that English politicians and Black migrants were engaged in a debate even if they were not directly speaking to one another. If politicians wanted to limit Commonwealth migration, Black settlers refused to be written out of English history. Thus, in the aftermath of the Notting Hill riots and Cochrane’s murder, Black migrants began to lay claim to their settlement by creating cultural and political spaces for themselves within British society, unwittingly fomenting the creation of new British identities. In the process they brought the debate onto those streets which had so recently been sites of xenophobic, White rage.

Black and British

In the immediate aftermath of the Notting Hill riots Black people began to organize across the boundaries created by various countries of origin and racial lines to publicize their experiences in the Mother Country. For instance, Trinidadian-born, New York-raised communist Claudia Jones created the *West Indian Gazette* and joined other Afro-Caribbean and Asian newspapers to provide firsthand accounts about events relevant to Black people in Britain, most especially instances of violence. That these tended to be events virtually ignored in mainstream English newspapers was also indicative of the oppositional nature of migrant communal identities.\(^{179}\)

\(^{178}\) Ibid.

Another direct result of these events was the Notting Hill Carnival. Modeled after Trinidad’s Carnival festivities the event showcased colorful floats, dancers and musicians in various Caribbean styles as well as food booths and local artists selling their wares. The Carnival is still held annually during the August Bank holiday (the last weekend of the month). The first Notting Hill Carnival was held in St. Pancras Town Hall in 1959. The original organizers had at least two goals in creating the event. First, some believed that planning a Carnival would bring together Caribbeans from various racial groups, for instance those of African and Indian descent, and those from different islands in one large display of Caribbean cultures. The long term effect of such pan-Caribbean solidarity would be to create an organized West Indian community in England as a form of self-protection against future instances of White violence.\(^{180}\)

Secondly, it was believed that the event would also provide positive images of Black people to the nation at large as a way to improve public perceptions and embed these images within English society. Clearly such a desire was based in the belief that exposing White Britons to Caribbean cultures, food, music and people, could stop further displays of anti-migrant violence.

The Notting Hill Carnival eventually evolved into a three-day outdoor event. Each day featured a parade of floats decorated to represent a Caribbean country, dancing by troupes and spectators, live and recorded music, food stalls, the sale of alcohol (mostly beer), and art displays by Black artists from around the country.\(^{181}\) While the Carnival


\(^{181}\) This is a description of the Notting Hill Carnival when I attended in August 2010. These parts of the event have remained fairly consistent since the 1960s even as the leadership and sponsors have changed.
became an important aspect of Black life in Britain, the Notting Hill area evolved from the working class, migrant neighborhood of the late 1950s. In the mid-1960s the area was the subject of redevelopment projects that displaced poor Black families living in virtual slums at the caprices of shady landlords.\footnote{See Jan O’Malley, \textit{The Politics of Community Action: A Decade of Struggle in Notting Hill}. Nottingham (England: Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation for Spokesman Books, 1977).} New single-family housing replaced apartment buildings forcing Black families to move elsewhere for affordable housing. Notting Hill’s new inhabitants, mostly White (immigrant and British-born), lacked an historical connection to the Carnival, but the event continued to be held there in deference to the area’s historical importance. But as the number of attendants grew each year, the event began to foment considerable ire among local residents, which exploded in 1975. A tense encounter between revelers and residents emerged when organizers introduced large sound systems to play music, mostly reggae, throughout the day. This year also saw a rise in reported muggings, further frustrating the local community.\footnote{Peter Evans, “Notting Hill carnival starts in flurry of controversy” \textit{London Times}, August 28, 1976, 2; George Clark, letter to the editor, September 3, 1976, 13; Malby Crofton, letter to the editor, September 8, 1976, 13.}

As a response, there was increased police presence at the 1976 Carnival, where an attempted arrest of a young man for alleged pick-pocketing devolved into a riot that lasted for the next two days.\footnote{Stewart Tendler, “250 are hurt as Notting Hill carnival erupts into riot” \textit{London Times}, August 31, 1976, 1.} The outrage at the riot was a clear indication of the split between White and Black Britons. Mainstream newspapers, best exemplified by the \textit{London Times}, focused their attention on the chaos of the event and “lawlessness” of Black youth, but remained uncritical of the police presence or behavior. However, the
Black community was most outraged at the way Black youth had been treated by the police.

*Race Today*, a long-running (1969-1985) Black British journal published by the Race Today Collective, a community activist group, saw the 1976 riots as a watershed. “The open defiance to our rulers and their representatives, which young blacks displayed on the streets of Notting Hill, shows that a whole period in the history of our presence here in Britain has come to an end. A new stage is about to emerge.”

To fully understand what this new stage was, it is important to consider what Black people perceived to be at stake during the Carnival events.

As the British economy entered a recession in the early 1970s and with rising unemployment, Black migrant workers were no longer the necessity they had been during the immediate post-war period. In “Carnival, the State, and the Black Masses in England” Cecil Gutzmore argues that the Notting Hill riot was a representation of the police attack on Black “cultural” forms such as music, dress and speech, specifically performed by Black youth. Gutzmore suggests that police considered Black youth to be inherently delinquent and thus the simple act of walking down the street “jauntily” invited police intervention.

In such a formulation, the Carnival, based on a Caribbean tradition held in celebration of Caribbean cultures, would have been a fertile ground for these clashes. Understood in this way, repeated encounters between police and Black youth reported on the pages of *Race Today*, occurring outside of dance clubs, at concerts and anywhere

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youth congregated in large numbers seemed almost inevitable.\textsuperscript{187} For some Black activists, the harassment of Black youth became a significant feature of Black British life in the midst of an economic recession. As the importance of Black labor diminished, police harassment contributed to a concerted effort to make Black people feel even more unwelcome in the country. And while it was not clear at the time, the single incident (Carnival) became representative of myriad other such instances. In the aftermath of Notting Hill, Black community members began to wonder if the simple presence of Black youth on British streets had become an unsafe position.

\textit{Fires in the courts}

In May 1975, Cliff McDaniel, a Black student at the George Padmore Supplementary School in Hornsey, North London entered into an altercation with a group of White students from a different school on a city bus. When the police arrived, Cliff apparently “received a severe beating [by the officers] in full view of teachers.”\textsuperscript{188} Black activists believed that the police seemed to take the White students story about the order of events and were unhappy that many of their children were questioned without parental presence. The situation deteriorated even more when Cliff was eventually arrested. In response to these events parents, including Trinidadian-born John La Rose and his wife Venezuelan native Irma (members of the Race Today Collective and parents of Cliff’s friends


\textsuperscript{188} Frances Webber, “Teachers in Uniform” \textit{Race and Class} 25 (1983): 76.
Michael and Keith), formed the London Black Parents Movement (BPM). Over the next decade, BPM chapters were founded throughout London and nationally, with Bradford and Manchester having the largest membership outside of the capital. In fact, each local chapter could identify a specific incident, similar to Cliff’s case, which placed Black youth welfare and perceived police injustice at its center. For some people, Notting Hill struck a chord that ran much deeper than an attempted pick-pocketing arrest.

Much of the work recorded by London and Manchester BPM chapters concerned the struggle to provide their children with legal defense in the criminal court system. In one such example, a large group of Black students left a school athletic event on May 12, 1976. One of the schoolchildren threw a bottle at a parked police car and when confronted by police officers, a fight ensued. As the events unfolded, those students, who came to be known as the Wood Green 18 (after the neighborhood in North London where the incident took place), were prosecuted for various charges, including the oft-used affray (public use or threat of violence), which allowed police officers to arrest “without warrant anyone he reasonably suspects.” Race Today published an in depth discussion of the trial of six of the Wood Green 18 (Danny, Errol, Vernon, Hopeton, Joseph and Cameron).

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189 Many of the parents had been involved in workers and immigrants’ rights organizations in the 1960s as well as the Black Education Movement, which developed in the early 1970s. This same incident also fomented the creation of a Black Students Movement, which eventually went national and worked closely with the BPM for obvious reasons.


Danny was the only boy of age, and as minors, the other boys’ last names were withheld.
In the expose, *Race Today* authors accused court-appointed barristers for failing to provide the young men with a sound defense and in most cases never even consulting with them or their families before the trial. And what little preparation there had been, parents argued, was haphazard, as barristers very often sought plea bargains, rather than actually presenting a case for their clients’ innocence. This was the case for Joseph and Hopeton, while Vernon had no representation, and Cameron was “given a different barrister almost everyday, one of whom [could not] even remember his name after spending the morning session supposedly defending him.” Danny and Errol’s representatives, on the other hand, were prepared for trial and the boys “managed to have several meetings with their solicitors and barristers before… court.”

While the article is largely an indictment of the justice system, there is an interesting discussion of the role played by the local BPM and Black Students Movement (BSM) in the proceedings. The article points out that Danny and Errol’s families were involved with the local BPM and used the organization’s resources to provide their sons with the best representation they could access. The BPM and BSM also protested outside of the courthouse every day of the trial and gave support and advice to the other four boys as their lawyers’ shortcomings became clear. While all six boys were found guilty and received various forms of punishment, from fines to jail sentences, it seems clear that an important function of the BPM was to give parents the attempt to protect their children, suggesting that the possibility of protection was preferable to the helplessness of watching a child be overrun in court.

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192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
Central to Black community distrust of the Met was the belief that Black children were unsafe in the presence of police officers, which conflicts with conventional understandings of police officers’ role in society. This was illustrated in an incident in the northwest London neighborhood of Harlesden. On June 24, 1976 a group of youngsters (six girls and one boy) ranging in age from fifteen to twenty-six, were walking home from a local nightclub, Burning Spear. On their way, the girls saw a young boy being forcefully arrested by the police and his sister yelling for her brother’s release. The group went to intervene but were attacked by police and later arrested. Before the group went to trial in October, local parents organized the Brent Defence Committee (BDC) to aid in the girls’ hearing. The BDC produced an informational flyer, wrote to the Home Secretary, and helped plan informational meetings with the Afro-Caribbean Youth Organization, another group formed after the incident to disseminate the defendants’ version of events.

The trial placed the antagonism between the police and Black youth on display as it essentially hinged on the words of the Burning Spear defendants (Rosa Toussaint, Hyacinth Matthias, Monica Wright, Virginia Joseph, and minors Shirley and Olive) and the police officers who arrested them.\(^{194}\) The BDC reported, based on the defendants’ accounts, that during the melee the officers shouted such incendiary phrases as “you black bitches I’ll do for you, shut up”, “your women are animals look at the way they behave” and “fucking black bastards,” while beating and arresting them.\(^{195}\) The police,

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\(^{194}\) Because they were minors at the time, Shirley and Olive’s last names and any information about their lives outside of the trial were withheld from newspaper accounts.

however, said that they were in the area after receiving complaints of a group of youngsters banging on doors after leaving the club and asserted that there had been no original arrest of a young boy or his sister. That the two sides could not agree on even the most basic of facts is perplexing, but not entirely surprising.

Just after the assault, BDC members Rosemary Toussaint (Rosa’s mother) and Reverend Hewlitt Andrews drafted a letter to the Home Secretary, Rt. Hon. Roy Jenkins, wherein they labeled the growing hostilities between the police and Black youth as “alarming.”\textsuperscript{196} They argued that the police language was absolutely despicable, but only the tip of the iceberg of police misconduct. For instance, they informed the Home Secretary that the parents of the youngest defendant, Olive, were not immediately notified that she had been detained, one of the girls was beaten so thoroughly that she lost consciousness, and four of the girls were denied the chance to choose their own solicitors. Toussaint and Andrews ended their letter with a strong accusation, which lay, for them, at the heart of the matter. “Recently, as Home Secretary, you have had much to say in rebuking the National Front for such activity as provoking riots and violence against Britain’s black community. Why is it then that, on the equally serious questions of police provocation, racism and physical violence against the black community you have said nothing at all?”\textsuperscript{197}

Considering the seriousness of the charges against the Brent police, the Home Secretary’s response to the Committee seems inadequate. In the official reply, written


\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
well after the case had been decided in court, the Home Office disavowed even the possibility that the police could have acted inappropriately and refused to “accept the allegation that the police discriminate against colored people.” In fact the bulk of the letter is dedicated to refuting all of the allegations against police racism and ignored the issue of strained community relations out of hand. 198

The State’s denial of police misconduct figured into the Burning Spear trial as well. In many ways, Hyacinth and Rosa’s lawyer, Mr. McDonald, approached their defense with the understanding that police racism would be ignored in the trial.199 Mr. McDonald attempted to illustrate the chasm between police officers and the defendants, positing that there was no chance that each side could have seen the event in the same light. Unfortunately, Mr. McDonald was continuously interrupted while addressing witnesses as the magistrates attempted to reign in his questions and assumptions and in November all six girls were convicted of affray. The magistrates reached their decision even though there were a number of local residents, Black and White, who corroborated the girls’ version of events. Significantly, these witnesses confirmed the defendant’s story of a young boy being abused by the police and physical and verbal abuse against the defendants. On the other hand, the prosecution was unable to produce any independent witnesses to corroborate the police version of the events.

All of these encounters illustrate just how deeply many Black Britons were disconnected from mainstream social processes. That Black bystanders at Notting Hill

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199 Mr. McDonald is never given a first name in the article nor is his race mentioned; however a careful reading of the description of the proceedings and the tenor of the article suggests that he is Black. His immigrant status is also unknown.
automatically saw an attempted arrest of a suspected pickpocket as threatening, rather than a routine part of police duties, and that all six Burning Spears defendants were convicted essentially on the word of police, just as their parents feared, were symptoms of the chasm which Mr. McDonald attempted to bring to the court’s attention. And after Notting Hill and Burning Spear, *Race Today* reported a growing trend of “street fighting between young blacks and the police” suggesting that these confrontations had “become common place in the black communities throughout Britain.”

*The Politics of Care*

The involvement of parents in their children’s defense was not merely a reaction to the dire circumstances. Parents were joined by local activists, not always related to the children, who wanted to make sure that the defendants’ received justice. In so doing, they made the protection of these Black youngsters a political platform, evidenced by the many “defence” organizations that emerged in the immediate aftermath of these arrests. An individual parent’s love for his or her child was made central to combatting larger structures of racial oppression. Fathers and mothers advocated for their children, but at least one group of activists believed that Black women had an experience distinct from their male counterparts.

The Organisation for Women of Africa and African Descent (OWAAD) announced their formation in the University of Manchester’s African Student’s Union’s newsletter in February 1978. By the end of the year they changed their name to the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, because “we soon realized that if

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the main purpose of OWAAD was to take up the struggles of Black women living in Britain, it would need to involve and represent women of both Asian and African origin, because we have so much in common.”

OWAAD wanted to identify, analyze and organize around “issues which concern us because we are Black, female, working-class or all three,” and from the first issue of their newsletter, FOWAAD!, they identified the nature of Black children’s interaction with representatives of the British State as one of their chief concerns.

In an editorial, “Who Cares? The Problems of Black Children in Care,” regarding the high presence of Black children in various forms of State care (mental institutions, juvenile prisons, and foster care) the editors worried about the way in which Black children became “criminalized by their frequent contact with the Law.” Throughout the article the authors suggest that Black women had to bear the brunt of these encounters as the primary caregivers. For instance, if there was a problem at school mothers, who frequently worked nights so that they could be home to send their children to school, were notified of a child’s predicament. Thus, while it is difficult to discern the actions of individuals in Black parent’s organizations, OWAAD allows one to suggest that mothers might have been highly represented in the membership, and possibly leadership, as they frequently interacted with authority figures on their children’s behalves.

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This article also suggests that Black children were criminalized over time. Repeated interactions with various State apparatuses only made Black youth more wary and distrustful of authority. In turn Black youngsters were unlikely to look on the police in any circumstance as friends or allies, which could make them uncooperative, thereby supporting police beliefs about Black youth criminality. If true, this would then make a healthy relationship between Black people, young and old, and the British police an impossibility and might also go some way in explaining the reaction of Black onlookers at the Notting Hill Carnival and the role of Black parents in the trial of the Wood Green 18.

The role of the BPM in the defense of the Wood Green 18 illustrates their interaction with a politics of care as well. At the crux of Black parents’ complaints was the idea that police officers had responded out of proportion to the simple incident of a bottle being thrown, thereby placing at least some of the blame onto the police force for the legal outcome. While the records do not say what the parents or boys thought a just outcome would look like, their anger at the lack of defense provided to Joseph, Hopeton, Vernon, and Cameron lay in the lost chance to relay the boy’s side of the story to the court. At the same time, the BPM and BSM worked to provide Danny and Errol with effective representation, such as collecting materials for their solicitors and barristers, demonstrating their belief that Black parents had a role to play in the process of providing justice for their children. In this way the parents of the Wood Green 18 and Burning Spear defendants made the act of protecting their children from police action and inadequate representation a political platform. Realizing the unlikelihood that other
institutions would take care of their children these events forced parents, many of them migrants, to lay claim to an alternate reality of English life, which cast doubt on the function of British law and order.

SUS: A Pattern?

The frightening part of all of these events was that a simple police interaction spiraled out of control. In fact, the possibility for everyday events to become more serious than one could have imagined undergirded all Black youth interactions with the police. It was not long before Black parents began to speculate as to why. According to OWAAD, the campaign to repeal Section IV of the 1824 Vagrancy Act began with “a handful of sisters in Lewisham” sometime in 1976, by putting local community groups in contact with one another in the first “Scrap SUS” campaign.204

The 1824 Vagrancy Act was developed in the aftermath of the Napoleonic war to deal with the masses of former soldiers and tramps flooding the streets of London. By expanding the local constable’s power to remove vagrants from the city’s streets to stop them from harassing “productive” members of society the law in essence criminalized homelessness. Eventually the Act fell into disuse and was all but forgotten by the turn of the twentieth century. It was revived, Black parents argued, to harass Black youth on the streets of London.205

Section IV, colloquially known as “sus” (short for suspicion), became the focal point of Black parents’ anger. The code was a preventative measure aimed at stopping

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205 When the Vagrancy Act was passed London’s streets were patrolled by unpaid, elected constables. The Metropolitan Police Service formed five years later through the Metropolitan Service Act (1829).
street crime, specifically pick-pocketing and later car theft and criminalized the “intent to commit an arrestable offence and [gave] the police power to arrest [a] ‘suspected’ person or reputed thief loitering in public places with intent to commit crimes.”

Black parents argued that the law unfairly targeted Black youth and, as a police officer’s word was the only evidence necessary to prosecute and convict a defendant in magistrate’s court, arrest was tantamount to conviction. The campaign to rescind sus eventually contributed to the expansion of the Black Parents Movement.

The Black People’s Scrap SUS campaign officially formed in the South London district of Deptford in 1979. The group organized a national conference to spread information about sus and coordinate national efforts. Some of the panels presented to the roughly 150 attendees, were “Black People, Police, and the Courts,” and “SUS and the Black Family.” Black mothers and youth affected by the law were invited to speak to attendees. OWAAD suggested that the conference and campaigns against sus had “politicized so many Black people who were not interested in politics before.” At the same time, OWAAD made sure to situate the Scrap SUS campaign within Black community efforts; “it is important that the Black community be seen to be organizing and fighting for something on its own behalf, instead of relying on white ‘liberals’ to fight its battles for it.” It is likely that they made such a statement to distinguish their work from the developing debates around sus in Parliament, which differed dramatically.

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206 Ian Bradley, “‘Sus law’ is not aimed at blacks, MPs told.” London Times, February 22, 1980, 2.
209 Ibid.
The Deptford group’s efforts can be situated within a community-wide fear over sus, as a means to harass and unjustifiably arrest Black people on English streets. The issue had become so pervasive that by the late 1970s Black artists expressed critiques of the code in their work. Jamaican-born dub-poet Linton Kwesi Johnson’s 1974 collection of poetry, *Tings and Times*, featured the artist’s take on the problem of sus. “Sonny’s Lettah” tells a haunting story of two brothers, Sonny and Jim. Written from the point of view of older brother Sonny in the Jamaican vernacular, the titular letter is a sad missive to their mother. “Mama, /I really doan know how fi tell y’u dis,/ cause I did mek a salim pramis/ fi tek care a lickle Jim/ an’ try mi bes’ fi look out fi him.../but none-di-els’/ mi sarry fi tell y’u seh/ poor lickle Jim get arrest’.”

While waiting for a bus home the two brothers were approached by a police van and officers attempted to arrest Jim, even though the young man pleads that “him naw thief/ nat even a but’n.” When Jim resisted, Sonny says the police began to beat him: “Mama,/ mek Ah tell y’u why dem dhu to Jim.” Unable to watch his brother get attacked, Sonny intervenes and in the process one police officer is killed: “Mama,/ more policeman come dung/ an’ beat mi to di


210 Mama,/ I really don’t know to tell you this,/ cause I did make a solemn promise/ to take care of little Jim/ and try my best to look out for him.../ but nonetheless/ I’m sorry to have to tell you/ poor little Jim got arrested.’

211 he’s not a thief/ not even [of] a button

212 Mama,/ make me tell you what they did to Jim

Ibid.
While never describing Sonny and Jim’s citizenship status, one can assume that both boys were within their neighborhood, on streets that they knew intimately, which can be inferred from the context through which Sonny warmly describes the time of day: “It woz di miggle a di rush howah/ wen everybody jus’ a hustle an’ a bus’le/ fi goh home fi dem evenin’ showah.”

In another, and possibly more haunting, discussion of the perils of sus, British-born playwright, actor, and director Barrie Keeffe’s 1979 play “SUS” casts the ordinance as a means to harass and degrade Black people as part of the country’s institutionalized xenophobia and racism. The play centers on the interrogation of Leon Delroy during election night 1979, which brought Conservative politician Margaret Thatcher into office as Prime Minister. The two White police officers, Karn and Wilby, see Thatcher’s impending election as a potential remaking of the government’s relationship with Black people. Their anticipation grows alongside Delroy’s sense of injustice at his predicament.

Before the interrogation commenced, Karn asks Wilby why Delroy believed he had been arrested.

Wilby: I reckon he thinks it’s sus.
Karn: And he didn’t make no racket, no screaming his rights or-
Wilby: No.
Karn: He must have been picked up on sus a few times then.

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213 Mama, more policemen came down/ and beat me to the ground.../ they charged Jim with sus,/ they charged me with murder.

Ibid, 27.

214 “It was the middle of the rush hour/ when everyone is hustling and bustling/ to go home for their evening showers/ me and Jim [where] standing waiting for the bus,/ not causing any fuss.” Johnson, “Sonny’s Lettah”

Ibid, 25.
Wilby: He’s the sort of geezer [man] you would. I don’t like the look of his beard...
Karn: Pick a bloke [man] up so often on sus he don’t even notice it. Ought to fit him up now and again, to relieve the fucking monotony for him.\textsuperscript{215}

Over the course of the interrogation, Karn and Wilby eventually inform Delroy that they believed his pregnant wife was murdered earlier that evening, his three children were in the care of social services and, after some time, that they believe he was responsible for the crime.

As the interrogation proceeds the police officers use Delroy’s unemployment, use of the dole (welfare services) and race as evidence of his guilt and their language develops from a superficial conviviality to display an entrenched racism. At one point Wilby compares Delroy’s wife’s death to the death of the officer’s dog, later accusing Delroy of being an absentee father: “The time they [Delroy’s children] needed their father he was drinking in the pub. The time your wife and their mother died, you were drinking in the pub.” Eventually the officers repeatedly refer to Delroy as “nigger” and refer to Jamaica as “nig-nog land.” The verbal abuse culminates with Karn, the senior officer, berating Delroy:

\begin{quote}
You should have cleared out Delroy. When you had the chance. Oh, I wouldn’t like to be a nigger in the new England. Yesterday they voted for the price of bacon and a tenner off your tax. They talked about supermarkets and jobs. They never mentioned what was going to happen to the likes of you. There won’t be no protection now. I think the results tonight prove everybody’s got a bit sick of all that. Sick of civil fucking liberties, and Anti Fucking Nazi League having riots in our decent streets and thousands of honest cops have to be dragged out to stop fucking Yids and Pakkis and Indians and God-knows-who bashing hell out of a dozen stupid, inarticulate red-necked Fascists. They got sick all right... I think
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{215} Barrie Keeffe, \textit{SUS} (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979), 7.
you lot step over the mark from now on and there’ll be no fucking dole, mate - just a one-way ticket home.” 216

The officer’s make repeated reference to Delroy “returning home” and seem non-plussed when he tells them “I was born here.” Delroy’s actual citizenship status is less important than his race in deciding his status as an outsider. 217

After being beaten and taunted with his wife and unborn child’s deaths, and suggestions that he will never see his three surviving children after being imprisoned for killing their mother, Delroy seems defeated. In the last act of the play, however, the coroner calls the police station to inform them that there was in fact no murder committed. Delroy’s wife died from an ectopic pregnancy that her doctor, who refused to make a house call to see about her pain, did not diagnose. At such information, Karn and Wilby seem as unsympathetic to Delroy’s pain as they had before, worried mostly about saving face. Karn says, “Blame the fucking doctors, don’t blame me.”

For Black activists, focusing on sus connected seemingly disparate events throughout London neighborhoods. Organizations like the Scrap Sus Campaign and OWAAD, and artists like Johnson and Keeffe argued that in all of these locations sus made a “crime” of being young and Black on English streets. These arrests were politicizing moments, possibly similar to Delroy who, when asked by Karn if he was a political person responds: “Yesterday I’d have said no. Today... It begins.” 218 Ian Loader

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Nig-nog: A term used to describe a Black person, much the same connotation as “nigger.”; Yid: derogatory term for a Jewish person.; Pakki: derogatory term for a Pakistani, often used against any person presumed to be of Middle Eastern descent. [All terms used in the UK.]


218 Ibid.
argues that police and the iconography of policing hold a “symbolic power... of legitimate pronouncement: a power to diagnose, classify, authorize, and represent both individuals and the world, and to have this power of ‘legitimate naming’ not just taken seriously, but taken-for-granted.”

Thus, repeated sus arrests helped to construct Black youth as perpetual criminals and, in the popular narrative, did not allow Black youth to offer an alternative construction of events. In such a framework, Black activists, especially parents advocating on behalf of their children, were not simply confronting each particular offense, they were confronting a set of beliefs.

**SUS: A Parliamentary Debate**

Black parents understood the problem with sus in police officer’s use of the code to victimize their children. However when sus entered Parliament in 1979, the conversation differed in tone. Within the Parliamentary debate there were two distinct camps arguing for the law’s repeal. The first consisted of the aforementioned “Scrap SUS” campaigns, run by Black activists/parents who focused on the disproportionately high number of sus arrests on Black youth. To bolster their claims they pointed to Metropolitan Police Service statistics, which stated that of the 1,894 sus arrests in 1979 in London, forty percent (767) were Black (Afro-Caribbean or Asian), even though Black people were only 4.2 percent of the city’s population.

They also pointed out that because Black youth-police relations were contentious, repealing sus would go a long way in changing the tenor of these encounters. The other sus opposition consisted of legal scholars,

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members of Parliament, judges and local politicians who argued that the real problem with sus lay in its legal implications.

The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee reviewed Section IV in January 1980, taking testimony from the Metropolitan Police Service, community groups, Members of Parliament, and legal scholars. In May the committee recommended the immediate and total repeal of sus. They echoed the Scrap SUS campaign’s argument that its repeal would alleviate Black youth-police relations, but more importantly they argued that the law itself was so vague as to go against the basis of British legal principle positing that “It is not generally acceptable, in English law to exact penalties for forming a criminal intention.”221 The report questioned the idea that police officers could correctly identify criminal intent and that intent without the actual commission of a crime counted as a crime in and of itself. And while sus arrests did need two outward identifiers of intent, such as loitering or “trying a door handle” to steal a car, most opponents of the law were unconvinced that there was enough evidence in these cases to sustain an actual charge. Or, in other words, the evidentiary standard was higher for the actual commission of a crime than the intent, meaning in many cases that police officer’s words carried the same weight as finding stolen property in someone’s possession, for example.

While these two strands agreed in principle that the law should be repealed, they gave different weight as to how and when a repeal should happen. After the House Committee made its recommendation, the legal argument gained precedence over the social in all further mainstream discussions. Unfortunately, this thread missed the

important work that Black parents asserted needed to be done to unravel the system underlying police harassment. There was an implication in the Parliamentary discussion that, simply by repealing sus, relations between the police and Black communities would automatically improve. This year-long debate effectively displaced Black parents’ anger over the harassment of their children, which had serious implications for Black youth and the activism of their parents. And while Parliament continued to debate the theoretical applications of sus and the possibility of replacing it with a similar law, the South London borough of Brixton in Lambeth council demonstrated that Black communities did not have time to wait for the outcome.

*The Last Straw: Brixton ’81*

In the 1960s Brixton became an important center of Black communal life in England. Black and Asian migrants initially settled there for affordable housing. But by the late 1970s Brixton was a classic example of the economic decline in urban areas with empty retail spaces, abandoned construction sites, and derelict housing. Poverty and unemployment made the neighborhood a tinderbox of conflict and one of the areas’ boundaries, Railton Road, bore the moniker “the front line” marking the battleground “of defence against the police,” demonstrating the tension which lay just underneath the surface. However, Brixton was also the haven of Black activists. Before and after her time at the University of Manchester, Black feminist activist, and co-founder of OWAAD, Olive Morris squatted in various buildings in the area, participated in Black

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222 Lambeth is an administrative borough in London, of which Brixton is a part.

revolutionary and Marxist demonstrations, and helped to found the Brixton Black Women’s Group. Brixton was also home to radical bookstores, cafe, record shops and Caribbean dance clubs.

On the evening of Friday April 10, 1981 a young Black boy, Michael Bailey, was seen running through the streets of Brixton, being followed or pursued by a small group of other Black boys. Michael collided with Police Constable Margottia, who realized that Michael was injured and his abdomen soaked with blood. The group of boys following Michael began yelling for PC Margiotta to let him go and in the confusion Michael ran away. After a convoluted pursuit throughout the neighborhood, a local White family put Michael into a cab heading to the hospital, but the police intercepted it, took Michael out and called an ambulance, fearing that the boy might die in transport. While waiting for the ambulance on Railton road, police officers gave Michael first aid, but were quickly surrounded by Black community members shouting at them, fearing that the police had not called an ambulance and were, in fact, withholding care. After another altercation, Michael was wrestled from the police and deposited into another cab, which did make it to the hospital safely. He was released the next day. After Michael was gone, the crowd was dispersed, but a smaller group of disgruntled youth began throwing bottles at police officers and their backup, resulting in six arrests and six injured officers.224

While the rest of the evening passed without incident, the next day, also known as “Bloody Saturday,” there was increased police presence throughout Brixton. Some of the officers were in the area just in case there was a recurrence of the previous night’s

224 “History of the Metropolitan Police” accessed online on October 10, 2011 http://www.met.police.uk/history/brixton_riots.htm
problems. However, many of the officers were part of the Metropolitan Police’s “Operation Swamp 81,” which flooded the area with plainclothes officers to deter street crime. In fact, Operation Swamp had been running in Brixton for several weeks and officers were making just the kind of sus arrests that started the Scrap SUS campaigns and Parliamentary debates. The increased number of officers and heightened community alert made a routine sus search in the afternoon a catalyst for a much larger event. The riot that ensued throughout the afternoon and into Sunday included looting, arson and violence, resulting in sixty-five civilian and 299 police injuries. Broadcast on local television stations, the riot took over 1,000 police officers to quell and it was only in the aftermath that Black youth were reinserted into the national debate over sus and the policing of Black communities.

The 1981 riots were built upon a history of multiple confrontations between police and Black youth. These clashes were not incidents between resident and foreigner, as was arguably the case with the events of 1958. Rather, they were confrontations between English-born residents, which demonstrates the pitfalls in the continued construction of issues around race as “problems of immigration.” At the same time, these clashes illustrated that because of their migrant status, parents born in the Commonwealth and their British-born children had vastly different expectations of their relationship to the British State. For instance, when conservative Members of Parliament expressed their desire to repatriate Commonwealth migrants in 1962, while migrants were the intended target of this legislation, their British-born children were involved as well. Would they have been expected to “return” to their parents’ countries of origin (which they may never
have visited)? And should they remain, who was expected to care for them? The question then was how did the British-born children of Black migrants fit into British society. In many ways, the Notting Hill carnival was meant to answer such a question as it attempted to carve out this space, however for such a plan to work the larger society had a duty to incorporate the sociocultural, economic, and political needs of Black British people.

Just days after the riot the Home Secretary William Whitelaw appointed Lord Leslie George Scarman, judge, to investigate the details of the incident. Lord Scarman’s report marked a significant change in the mainstream discussion of policing in Black communities. After Notting Hill, Burning Spear, and the Wood Green 18, local and national officials were unwilling to consider police misconduct. And during the Parliamentary debate over sus, many conservative members of Parliament seemed dismissive of the Black community’s anger at the use of sus to harass their youth. It was believed that repealing sus alone would have a “symbolic” affect on police relationships with Black communities and subsequently improve community relations. However, the Brixton riots shook the foundations of this argument.

Throughout the report, Lord Scarman is clearly uncomfortable discussing police misconduct, but even he could not escape the fact that there were serious problems affecting Lambeth’s Black community, which were exacerbated by dysfunctional policing. “The policing problem is not difficult to identify: it is that of policing a multi-racial community in a deprived inner city area where unemployment, especially among young black people is high and hopes are low.”225 Scarman supports the suggestion that

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seemingly arbitrary sus arrests and prosecutions effectively punished Black youth who were already facing considerable social dislocation. To remedy these methods, he argued for sus’ repeal and concerted effort to remake the relationship between Black communities and the police. Unlike the Parliamentary debate, Scarman does not dismiss the anxieties of Black youth; in fact the entire first third of his report is a sympathetic description of their experiences. For instance, Lord Scarman concludes the first section:

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\text{The accumulation of these anxieties and frustrations and the limited opportunities of airing their grievances at national level in British society encourage them to protest on the streets. And it is regrettably also true that some are tempted by their deprivations into crime... They live their lives on the street, having often nothing better to do: they make their protest there.}\]

Section IV of the 1824 Vagrancy Act was repealed by the Criminal Attempts Act, which commenced on August 27, 1981.\textsuperscript{227}

\textit{The Same Immigrant Problem}

The Scarman Report was an important recognition of Black youth experiences, but it was not so for their parents. At the same time as the sus debate developed in Parliament, there were three concurrent social issues featured frequently on the pages of the \textit{London Times}: immigration, anxiety over youth crime rates and discussions of parental responsibility in youth offenses. These themes surface in Scarman’s analysis as well. He admits that Black migrants and their children faced continued inequality in England, which in part explains youth crime and transience. However he also posits Black parental “negligence” for

\textsuperscript{226} Scarman, \textit{Brixton Disorders}, 3.

\textsuperscript{227} The Criminal Attempts asserts that a person can be arrested “If, with intent to commit an offence... a person does an act which is more than merely preparatory to the commission of the offence, he is guilty of attempting to commit the offence.” Not surprisingly, the ordinance has been criticized by Black activists of perpetuating the same kind of harassment as sus. Most recently, the law was blamed for inciting the riots in London August 2011.
youth crime generally and the Brixton riots specifically.\textsuperscript{228} But if Black parents had been forcefully advocating for their children throughout London at least as early as 1975, why did Lord Scarman blame them for the Brixton disorders? And why had Parliament marginalized their concerns in the debates over sus?

It is possible that the problem in 1981 was related to the problem of the early 1960s. In \textit{Race Politics in England and France}, Erik Bleich argues that in England the debate over immigration reform centered on defining an “acceptable” immigrant.

As they recruited workers from beyond their shores, British leaders periodically raised questions about the ‘best’ immigrants for Britain… Concerns about absorbing racially or culturally different newcomers exposed an underlying tension throughout the postwar era between those who favored white immigrants of ‘good stock’ to the exclusion of ‘coloured’ immigrants, and those who felt a strong commitment to the multiracial Commonwealth.\textsuperscript{229}

However, as mentioned above, “immigrant” was a legal misnomer that continued to dominate political and social discussion of Black British communities. The Scarman report allowed British-born children, incorrectly labeled as “immigrants,” to be brought into the sphere of the English polity, but he did not do the same for Black migrant parents.

Lord Scarman’s report spends a number of pages locating Black parental failures and foreign cultures as part of their children’s delinquency. For instance, while discussing Black families in England the author asserts: “In raising their children, the older generation of black people had to do without the support of the extended network of kin which is a feature of traditional West Indian society,” suggesting that migration had...
deconstructed West Indian family models to the detriment of Black children.\textsuperscript{230} Scarman also focuses particular attention on Black motherhood:

\begin{quote}
it was, and largely remains to-day, the custom for women—mothers, grandmothers, and aunts—to hold the extended family together. They offered security to the young, the old, and the disabled members of the family: and they imposed a strict discipline upon the children… Mothers, who in the West Indies formed the focus of the family became [in England] in many cases wage earners who were absent from the family home.\textsuperscript{231}
\end{quote}

For Lord Scarman, it was Black mothers who had failed, even if their perceived failures were understandable. That the report took such a position while refusing to implicate the Metropolitan Police in contributing to strained relations between police and Black communities could only have been made by ignoring the previous years of community work against sus, spearheaded by Black parents.

The way in which Black migrant parents’ fears for their children and critiques of racism in British policing were erased must be understood in the context of their framing as immigrants. Situated as the wrong sort of “foreigner” Black migrants were fighting against perceptions of their children as delinquents, at the same time as they faced a society that still constructed them as immigrant interlopers. Thus, Lord Scarman’s rhetorical division between Black migrants and their British-born children was indicative of the continuing way in which perceptions about British citizenship were inherently affected by race and migration, regardless of legal doctrine. This is best exemplified in his discussion of Brixton’s Black community. In reference to Black parents Scarman suggests that “As immigrants to a strange country, they undoubtedly experienced

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{230} Scarman, \textit{Brixton Disorders}, 8.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Ibid, 8-9.
\end{itemize}
problems in adjusting to a different culture and way of life, as well as on occasion, hostility and discrimination from the host community.” While for their children, he offers this description: “They (the second generation, whether born in this country or not) and the third generation which is now emerging share, for the most part, the aspirations and expectations of other British young people.”\textsuperscript{232} By focusing on the cultural assimilation of Black youth to highlight the supposed dislocation of their parents, Scarman in many ways validates Black youth experiences (of police harassment) while erasing their parents’ fears of structural racism as the foundation for this behavior.

Central to Black parental activism was the warning that Black children were on a collision course with the police and only substantive changes to police policy could alter the course. As early as 1976, in the aftermath of the Notting Hill riot, Black activists suggested that while sus was abhorrent it was only one manifestation of police racism against Black people. However Lord Scarman refused to entertain accusations of racism, stating that “The direction and policies of the Metropolitan Police are not racist. I totally and unequivocally reject the attack made upon the integrity and impartiality of the senior direction of the force.”\textsuperscript{233} While the author was willing to admit that there might be “occasional” instances of racial prejudice from individual police officers, he was “satisfied, however, that such a bias is not to be found among senior police officers.”\textsuperscript{234} Ultimately the report admitted that sus might have been used too often against Black youth but that was an understandable result of policing multiracial inner city areas, rather

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{232}{Ibid, 8.}
\footnote{233}{Ibid, 64.}
\footnote{234}{Ibid.}
\end{footnotes}
than institutional racism within the Metropolitan Police or Britain as a whole: “It was alleged by some of those who made representations to me that Britain is an institutionally racist society. If by that is meant that it is a society which knowingly, as a matter of policy, discriminates against black people, I reject the allegation.”\textsuperscript{235} That the Scarman report refused to deal effectively with the accusation of institutional racism in policing hung over British race relations for the next decade, with disastrous effect.

\textit{More than sus: A conclusion}

The riotous events between 1976 and 1981 represented a new phase of Black life in England. The “immigration” debates of the late 1950s and 1960s emerged as the result of a crumbling colonial identity. In the aftermath of White violence, Black migrants defended themselves by further entrenching their cultures within English society. But by the 1970s, British-born Black youth wanted more. Raised in English society, in English neighborhoods and schools, with little more than skin color and their parents’ stories to indicate their relationship to other countries, this second generation was all too familiar with frustrated expectations. While their parents’ citizenship status was made suspect by “foreign” birth, the 1970s and 1980s youth could lay claim to a cultural citizenship to bolster their legal status. However, police harassment through sus demonstrated that race made them perpetual outsiders in the only country they called home.

Four years after the Brixton riot of 1981 there was a resurgence of Black youth uprisings suggesting that Lord Scarman had incorrectly placed the problem of British policing onto Black parents’ shoulders. In early September 1985, after the police raided

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid, 11.
the Villa Cross pub in the Birmingham neighborhood of Handsworth, hundreds of local youth took to the streets looting, vandalizing local buildings and throwing firebombs. A few weeks later, on September 18, 1985 the Metropolitan Police forcefully entered Jamaican migrant Dorothy “Cherry” Groce’s Brixton home, looking for her son Michael. In the siege, Inspector Douglas Lovelock shot Mrs. Groce, paralyzing her from the waist down. Word of the shooting spread, incorrectly telling of Mrs. Groce’s death. After a protest outside of the police station, the situation escalated into a two-day riot with looting, fires and vandalism of buildings and cars. In the following weeks there were subsequent riots in the Broadwater Farm neighborhood of Tottenham in North London after the death of forty-nine-year-old Cynthia Jarrett, who fell over during a disturbance with the police while her home was being searched as a result of her son Floyd’s arrest.

These incidents share many similarities to those of 1976-1981. Specifically, each disturbance began with a police encounter with a member of the Black community, although it is interesting that in the cases of Brixton and Toxteth it was Black mothers who eventually paid the price for police intervention, not their children as had been the trend in the late 1970s and early 1980s. And while the initial events incensed the local communities, it is likely that the unsatisfactory outcomes did not help matters: in the case of Mrs. Groce, Inspector Lovelock was acquitted of “malicious wounding” and Cynthia Jarrett’s death was eventually ruled an accident. Black fear and anger at police harassment in their communities persisted even as their critiques seem to have been ignored; at least until the death of Stephen Lawrence.
On the evening of April 22, 1993 in the Plumstead neighborhood in Southeast London, 18-year old Stephen Lawrence was stabbed by a group of White teenagers while waiting at a bus stop with his friend Duwayne Brooks. While the Black community felt the attack was obviously motivated by racism, as one of the assailants was heard to have said “What, what, nigger,” the police were less certain. Two suspects were arrested, but the Crown Prosecution Services dropped their case in July for insufficient evidence. In 1994, Stephen’s parents, Doreen and Neville (both Jamaican migrants), launched a private prosecution against five suspects, including the original two, but were forced to drop their charges against these two for insufficient evidence as well. The other three were acquitted after the trial.\(^{236}\) Even with this setback, the public outcry would not let the matter rest. In February 1997 the *Daily Mail* ran the headline “Murderers: The Mail accuses these men of killing. If we are wrong, let them sue us” identifying the five suspects prosecuted in 1994.\(^{237}\) That same year Home Secretary Jack Straw appointed Sir William Macpherson to investigate the police handling of Stephen’s case.\(^{238}\)

In his findings, Macpherson indicted the entire police investigation into Stephen’s death. The report begins severely:

> There is no doubt whatsoever but that the first MPS [Metropolitan Police Services] investigation was palpably flawed… Nobody listening to the evidence could reach any other conclusion… [but] The underlying causes of that failure are more troublesome and potentially more sinister. The

\(^{236}\) In the British courts, criminal proceedings can be brought by the State (Crown Prosecution Services) or a private individual/organization.

\(^{237}\) To this date none of the suspects have attempted to sue the newspaper.

impact of incompetence and racism, and the aura of corruption or
collusion have been the subject of much evidence and debate.\textsuperscript{239} Macpherson later asserts that his investigation laid bare the complaints from the
Lawrences, and other Black parents, “the hitherto underplayed dissatisfaction and
unhappiness of minority ethnic communities, both locally and all over the country, in
connection with this and other cases, as to their treatment by police.” \textsuperscript{240} And in the final
word, Macpherson does what the Scarman Report previously refused to do and asserted
that the British police were institutionally racist. In 2003, the Criminal Justice Act
overturned prescriptions against double jeopardy, on Macpherson’s recommendation. And
in 2006, investigators opened a fresh investigation into the Lawrence murder and arrested
two men who had been identified as involved in Stephen’s death in 1993, Gary Dobson
and David Norris, in connection with Stephen’s murder.\textsuperscript{241} Both men were found guilty

The Macpherson report’s vindication of Stephen’s two migrant parents in 1999
would have been impossible in 1976, 1981, 1985 or even 1995. It is fitting that the
inquiry into Stephen’s death and the media fervor emerged out of his parent’s efforts,
with the help of their local community. That the Lawrences took their son’s death as the
impetus to fight is completely in line with the ways in which other Black parents in
England placed youth welfare at the heart of their activism. The Lawrences eventually
divorced from the strain of their efforts and Stephen’s father Neville returned to Jamaica
to escape the anxiety of the previous years and threats to his life. But Doreen’s

\textsuperscript{239} Sir William Macpherson, \textit{The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry} (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office,
February 1999), 4.

\textsuperscript{240} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{241} Dobson was previously acquitted of the charge in the 1994 trial.
subsequent work may be a reflection of the continuing relevance of a politics of care. After the Macpherson report concluded, Mrs. Lawrence was made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for her work to seek justice for her murdered son. She and Neville also started the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust and Doreen continues to work regularly around issues of racist crime with governmental and non-governmental organizations. In the course of her efforts to uncover how and why her son was murdered Mrs. Lawrence has fought to preserve the family she and her ex-husband created in London with their three children; the life that was shattered, to some extent, with Stephen’s death.

“In the course of [the campaign for justice for Stephen] I had to get used to people always telling me how dignified I was, as though that were something unusual. There was an implication to my ears that other black people don’t behave like this, but I know that they do. There have been hundreds of thousands of people like me, women who have lost what was most precious to them in the world and who have had to go on with their lives. Some are still waiting for justice.”

-Doreen Lawrence 242

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242 Lawrence, And Still I Rise, x-xi.
Who Runs Oakland?: African American Citizenship and Police-Community Relations

“The price for police protection must not be the relinquishment of civil rights.”

“Perhaps the most valuable asset these officers can possess is credibility with the communities they serve. Effective Policing depends to a large degree on the cooperation and support residents.”

-United States Commission on Civil Rights

On May 20, 1985 Oakland Police officers arrested a fourteen-year-old boy, Maurice Phillips, on suspicion of stealing a camera. A week after his arrest, Maurice was transferred to Children’s Hospital in a comatose state, where he died the next afternoon. Subsequent to his death, the Oakland Police Department (OPD), after a brief investigation, said they “found no evidence that excessive force was used during the arrest.” In the Alameda County coroner’s preliminary report issued on June 7, it was determined that Maurice died “due to natural causes... a hemorrhage caused by a malformation of blood vessels inside his brain.” Before the coroner’s report was issued, however, Maurice’s mother, Dorothy Frazier, charged that the police had brutally beaten her son and were responsible for his death.

Even though the coroner eventually refuted Ms. Frazier’s accusations, one can not separate her initial claims from the context in which she made them. Just two months


before Maurice’s death, the Oakland chapter of the National Association for the 
Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) filed a civil lawsuit in federal court on behalf 
of twelve people “who claim they were brutalized or unlawfully arrested by Oakland 
officers in separate incidents, most of which occurred between February and December” 1984. This was the sixth such lawsuit filed against the OPD by the NAACP. That same month, another suit was filed in the court against the San Francisco Police Department for “condoning brutality against Hispanics by a group of ‘violence-prone’ officers in the Mission District,” asking for $1.6 million in damages. These allegations were just the most recent complaints by communities of color alleging police harassment and brutality against Black and Brown communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. Thus, it is entirely likely that Ms. Frazier made her accusation out of a very real fear that the police had actually caused her son’s death.245

These events in early 1985 were the result of decades of strained relationships between Bay Area police organizations and the communities of color which they ostensibly served. The Oakland Police Department has a checkered past in their relationship with local residents. By the mid-1970s they had become famous for a contentious, often violent, relationship with African American Oaklanders. The OPD’s frequent clashes with the Black Panther Party throughout the late 1960s and 1970s engaged national attention, but locally it was very often cases like Maurice Phillips’ that captured public attention and demonstrated OPD offenses. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Black community members, led very often by the NAACP, fought to expose what

they understood as racist harassment by the police, attempting to exert some oversight on
police behavior and make the OPD accountable for protecting the rights of African
American citizens. This struggle, which eventually resulted in the formation of the
Oakland Citizens’ Review Board, centered the safety, rather than control, of Black
Oaklanders as a primary aspect of police mandates.

A history of struggle

Because the African American community in the post-World War II period was
dominated by Southern migrants, one must approach this history from their perspective.

Southern Black migrants to the East Bay experienced their time there in a manner distinct
from their White counterparts. They settled in the Bay Area in large numbers but very
rarely found support from established Black residents. Like White migrants they were
understood as backward and uncivilized. Thus, more often than not they struggled to
access necessary services. In her history of Oakland’s Black Panther Party, historian
Donna Murch asserts that young migrants and the children of Southerners, “faced a world
that their parents did not understand and responded by creating political organizations
that articulated not only their grievances but their vision for a different future.” Chief
among those concerns for migrants and successive generations was the Oakland Police
Department.²⁴⁶

Historian Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo asserts that police, like all civil servants,
viewed White Southerners as eventually assimilable, but saw Black migrants as
perpetually backwards and criminally prone. Donna Murch concurs, asserting that

²⁴⁶ Lemke-Santangelo, Abiding Courage, 70-71 & Donna Murch, Living for the City: Migration,
Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California (Chapel Hill: University of
North Carolina Press, 2010), 5.
migrants were repeatedly identified by “Police and social service agencies ... as the fountainhead of crime and disorder” by the mid-1950s, which led to targeted instances of harassment and incarceration. Eventually “the OPD began to systematically surveil and criminalize black migrants.” This process took the form of false imprisonment and harassment similar to Anna Lee Harris, “a young housewife who had been jailed arbitrarily and subjected to three days of venereal tests that later proved negative” or Andrew L. Hines “who was fatally shot in custody after police picked him up on ‘suspicion of loitering.’” Incidents such as these resulted in a 1950 legislative hearing on police brutality within the Black community, led by Los Angeles assemblyman Vernon L. Kirkpatrick, which resulted in a censure “for [the OPD’s] failure to discipline misconduct.” Because Southern migrants outnumbered the pre-existing Black East Bay population, if, as both authors suggest, police harassment was unequally aimed at Black migrant communities, these experiences, and the resultant distrust, would have spread throughout East Bay Black communities, informing their view of local police.

In May 1966, Oakland Police Chief Robert J. Preston attempted to give testimony before a public hearing of the Northern California subcommittee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, however he was heckled repeatedly by Black members of the audience. Even though the Department had “instituted a civil rights training program for all administrative and supervisory personnel... conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation” in 1956, several people in the audience booed and accused the OPD of “using brutality, spying, intimidation, and corruption in a campaign against Negroes and

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247 Donna Murch, *Living for the City*, 38.
Mexican-Americans.” One particularly irate witness, Curtis Lee Baker, “called Oakland police ‘Mississippi Ku Klux Klan hillbillies.’” At the end of Baker’s testimony, he told the hearing “that there soon might be a need for martial law in Oakland,” and also advocated the creation of a police review board. Such a reaction made Chief Preston’s claims that the OPD was “operated fairly and well” at the very least suspect.248

In the 1967 Kerner Report on recent riots in urban areas like Watts, California; Newark, New Jersey and Detroit in the 1960s, the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders discussed a pervasive anger within Black communities of improper police behavior. The report mentioned “deep hostility between police and ghetto communities,” which was evident in Oakland as well. At the 1963 hearings for the California Advisory Committee Black community members from organizations like the NAACP, Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Urban League gave testimony alongside police officers of various rank. Black leaders testified that,

> Many Negroes in the area dislike and distrust the police, whom they view as the tangible symbol of white authority. These Negroes feel isolated from the community at large. For them this leads to... the expectation of unfair treatment from police officers... Many Negroes see police saturation of their neighborhoods as a product of bias. These people interpret such police action as harassment rather than the maintenance of security.249

The report also suggests that the expectation affected not only how Black parents raised their children, with the expectation of unfair treatment, but also youth criminality. At the same time, local Black leaders pointed out that while brutality was a hot button issue,


they were also worried about day-to-day forms of harassment. Both groups spoke of the
tendency for “police officers [to] treat Negroes belligerently. All agreed that the
belligerence was normally oral -- uncivil language, profanity, the use of epithets such as
‘boy’ when referring to a Negro adult.”

These local and national reports on police behavior, shone a light on the strained
and quickly deteriorating relationship between mostly White police forces and the
communities of color they policed. And throughout the 1960s, “Oakland was viewed by
federal and state officials and by the press as a ‘racial tinderbox’ - a community that
might well be engulfed in rioting the scale of Watts and Detroit.” Public policy expert
David L. Kirp asserts that “This prediction demanded very little imagination. Oakland
shared with other communities the problems of economic stagnation overcrowded
housing; an under-financed educational system; and high unemployment, especially
among young blacks.” And much of the fear at impending riots centered on the

The Black Panthers officially formed in 1966 with Huey Newton and Bobby
Seale, child migrants to the East Bay. Newton’s family left Monroe, Louisiana in 1945
eventually landing in Oakland, while Seale migrated to Berkeley with his family while
young. Both young men grew up in the East Bay and became politicized by frequent
interactions with local police, juvenile halls and inadequate schools. Murch asserts that,

Given their age, race, and class, migrant youth had little power to counter
abuses by police and penal authorities through established channels.

250 Ibid.

251 David L. Kirp, “Race, Schooling, and Interest Politics: The Oakland Story,” The School Review, 87:4
(August 1979), 357.
Instead, in the years to come, they invented new modes of resistance... The places in which they encountered state power - schools, police, youth authorities, and even parks and recreation - became essential to their growing racial and class consciousness.\textsuperscript{252}

This consciousness emerged in the Panther’s first contribution to Black revolutionary activism: the “Ten Point Program.” Numbers seven through nine directly reflected their experiences with police harassment and brutality:

7. We want an immediate end to POLICE BRUTALITY and MURDER of black people.
   We believe we can end police brutality in our black community by organizing black self-defense groups that are dedicated to defending our black community from racist police oppression and brutality...

8. We want freedom for all black men held in federal, state, county and city prisons and jails.
   We believe that all black people should be released from the many jails and prisons because they have not received a fair and impartial trial.

9. We want all black people when brought to trial to be tried in court by a jury of their peer group or people from their black communities, as defined by the Constitution of the United States.\textsuperscript{253}

The Panthers’ ideologies and tactics emerged out of a specific history of Black youth harassment by the OPD. Murch asserts that by “focusing on the issue of police brutality, Huey Newton tapped an immense reserve of anger, especially among teenagers and young adults.” Thus, one of the earliest Panther initiatives was police surveillance, to witness and document instances of OPD harassment. By focusing on police behavior, the Panthers “fed not only on historic resentments of black youths against police harassment but also on their repeated arrests and exposure to the brutal whims of the California Youth Authority... [and] contributed to a growing distrust of all local government among African Americans.” Thus, events like the Panther’s armed demonstration in the state

\textsuperscript{252} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 44, 45 & 68.

\textsuperscript{253} Quoted in Ibid, 129.
capitol, on March 2, 1967; the death of seventeen-year-old Bobby Hutton at the hands of
the OPD on April 6, 1968, which Bobby Seale remembers was preceded by rumors that
some officers were planning an attack “to get rid of” the Panthers; and the numerous
shoot-outs in which Party members engaged must be understood within a longer history
of police harassment and clashes with Black people. Nor can these incidents be divorced
from the suspicion and distrust which they engendered.254

At the same time, while the history of the Black Panthers has focused inordinate
attention on these violent, sometimes fatal, incidents, one must also consider how it was a
pattern of “mild” forms of police harassment which informed ordinary citizens’
experiences. The Kerner Report mentions that, while instances of police brutality angered
community members, it was likely that “the strength of ghetto feelings about hostile
police conduct may even be exceeded by the conviction that their neighborhoods are not
given adequate police protection.” Thus, it is important not to let the sensational
experiences of a group like the Black Panthers or suspicious deaths like Maurice Phillips
overshadow those every day experiences of police misconduct or inattention. As will be
seen, ire at police use of abusive and racist language, unnecessarily rough behavior
during arrests, and unfounded arrests only served to make the deaths of Black people at
the hands of Oakland police officers all the more suspicious.255

Race and representation in the ranks

254 Ibid, 134.
In 1967, Chief Preston was replaced by Charles Gain, who quickly implemented a slew of new and progressive policies which alienated many of his White subordinates. Soon after he was appointed the new Chief, Gain changed the colors of police vehicles from black and white to brown and white because black was “too funereal... [he also] replaced the traditional police shield on police cars with the new Oakland city emblem, an oak tree, and the words, ‘police services’ under it. He explained that this would get away from the ‘occupation army’ idea.” And, when two police officers got drunk while on duty and fired their guns into the Oakland headquarters of the Black Panther Party in 1971, Gain suspended the men and eventually filed charges against them.

Gain’s progressive policies were based on the belief that officers, especially patrol officers, spent more time intervening in domestic situations “maintaining and solving problems.” He believed that “Poverty, pollution, under-and un-employment, inadequate education and housing, and poor public transportation have placed what seems to be an insurmountable burden on our governmental system” to which the police had a duty to respond because they had a social welfare as well as law enforcement capacity. Thus, he changed the academy training curricula to reflect the social welfare function of the OPD, rather than solely their role as law enforcers.

Chief Gain was a divisive figure who exposed the cleavages between the White police and the Black community. He and his wife were members of the NAACP and he “recognized that the city’s increasing diversity required far-reaching changes in policy.” To his credit, “Many longtime observers of Oakland believe[d] Gain’s initiatives helped save Oakland from burning when a contagion of riots swept the nation’s cities.” Likely
because of his desire to reform the OPD, Chief Gain received considerable support from some sections of the Black community. Unfortunately, this favorable view was not shared by his majority White officers.256

In late 1971, “a group of young, conservative militant” officers, led by twenty-two-year-old rookie, Ned Nubbin, initiated a union vote about Chief Gain’s tenure. The results, 375-110, issued a no confidence position towards Gain as Oakland’s Chief “and proposed that he retire” in February 1972. Primary among their complaints were recent contract negotiations. A section of officers felt that Gain had not obtained for “them enough in salary increases and additional fringe benefits.” They believed that Gain had abandoned his position “as an advocate for their demands” in line with the pattern of previous chiefs. Chief Gain responded that changes in their negotiation system made it improper for him to do so, but the contract negotiations seem to have been just the tip of the ice berg.257

Gain, “one of the most liberal police chiefs in America” seems to have been viewed as too liberal for his notoriously conservative, and majority White, department. Their other concerns were that his measures transformed “the police department from a law enforcement body to a social welfare agency,’... That his disciplinary action [was] overly harsh... that he fail[ed] to back up his men in public controversies” and that he


The response to Gain was not monolithic. The Black Panther Party was skeptical of his policies, even his reasoning for disciplining the two officers who shot at their headquarters. See Bobby Seale, Seize the Time: The Story of the Black Panther Party and Huey P. Newton.

257 Lembke, “Police Explain Vote of No Confidence in Chief” Los Angeles Times, December 11, 1971, A26 & “Oakland Chief: Hero to All but Own Men” Los Angeles Times, November 28, 1971, AA.
“coddle[d] blacks.” They also “disapproved of his invitation to the public to file complaints if they thought a policeman’s procedures or conduct were improper.” Chief Gain asserted that he did support his officers: “I back them when they’re right, which is most of the time.” For Black onlookers then, the issue was really that Chief Gain refused to allow White police officers to run roughshod over Oakland’s residents, most of whom were Black, Latino and Asian. One White senior officer said that he felt Gain tried “too hard to please blacks... ‘It’s obvious. The black officers support him.’” This officer even presented Gain’s membership in the NAACP as damning gossip: “there’s a story going around that Gain and his wife are life members of the NAACP.”

It was true that at least some Black Oaklanders supported Gain’s policies, with members of the city’s Black Caucus, a coalition of sixty Black organizations, calling for those who did not support the chief to resign. In fact, Paul Cobb, Black Caucus chairman, called the OPD “the citadel of racism” and praised Gain’s policies as part of dismantling that reputation. Another Black supporter, Donald P. McCullum, “a prominent...attorney and former president of the Oakland chapter of the NAACP” said that,

Chief Gain has done an outstanding job... He has insisted that the department respond to needs of the citizens they serve in the central city. His attitude toward honest, strict, equal, enforcement of the law has contributed to a general cooling effect in Oakland. The citizen on the street feels generally that the Oakland police will be hard but they will be fair and that Chief Gain will not tolerate any lawlessness from members of his department.”

258 Lembke, “Oakland Chief: Hero to All but Own Men,” AA.

In 1971, African Americans were thirty eight per cent of the city’s population, which stood at 357,000.

259 Lembke, “Oakland Chief: Hero to All but Own Men,” AA.
Another supporter asserted that Gain’s policies put forth the idea that “you can’t control crime without looking to the social causes, and he’s right.” Chief Gain’s policies were meant to address the obviously deep-seated distrust Black Oaklanders felt for the OPD. In 1975 he stated that,

self-enforced isolation was, and is, detrimental to the police and a disservice to the public. The police must open their organizational windows to let in fresh new ideas. They must be prepared to solicit help whenever and wherever it may be found, conditioned only by their responsibilities to their clientele: the public.260

It is important to note that, at the time of the no-confidence vote, Gain enjoyed support not just from the Black community but from the Oakland Black Officers Association (OBOA) as well.261

Thus, the controversy of Chief Charles Gain demonstrated that for some people, “the law and order slogan... served as a thinly veiled code with which to signal sympathy for and solidarity with whites upset by the social, political, and cultural changes brought about by the upheavals of the 1960s, particularly the Civil Rights Revolution.”262 White officers viewed the communities (of color) that they served as people to be acted upon, rather than for. This was not a monolithic position of course, but Gain seems to have been among a relatively small minority within his own department. This is at least partially evident in the fact that Gain’s moderate policies were construed as antagonistic to White officers. The nature of these complaints demonstrate that White officers felt that Gain’s responsibility was to serve police interests, not the community’s; especially not if serving

260 Gain, “Foreward” in Agents of Change.
261 Ibid.
the city’s residents involved any scrutinization of police behavior. Also, that the majority
White police department (at the time there were only 48 Black officers out of 721), were
openly antagonistic to Black people, and other Black officers, would prove to be an
important bone of contention later.

On another note, the reasons for this relationship likely stemmed from the
transformation of the city’s racial make-up in the post-World War II period. The
economic boom during wartime quickly disappeared and the region’s economy sagged.
Because of strict housing segregation and restrictive covenants, most of the city’s Black
population was quarantined in West, and later East, Oakland. Many White and some
affluent Black residents, on the other hand, left the city for burgeoning suburban areas
like Orinda, Lafayette and Alameda, or moved into the equally segregated Oakland hills.
This pattern of white flight, a national trend in the postwar period, included many of the
White men who made up the city’s police forces. By the early 1970s, this separation
between Black and White Oakland, specifically between White officers and Black
residents of the flatlands, created a particular chasm that might go some way in
explaining the divergent opinions regarding Chief Gain.263

Race and representation in the ranks

It is entirely possible that the controversy over Chief Gain’s policies was only
exacerbated by the change in the racial make-up of the OPD happening concurrent to his

263 See Lemke-Santagelo, Abiding Courage, 93-94 and Robyn Ceanne Spencer, “Inside the Panther
Revolution: The Black Freedom Movement and the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California” in Jeanne
F. Theoharis and Comoro Woodard, eds. Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America (New

Chief Gain left the Oakland Police Department in 1973 and moved to the San Francisco Police Department.
He implemented many of the same policies across the Bay with much the same result among White officers
and Black residents.
tenure there. The Oakland Police Department hired its first African American officers in July 1943, Adam C. Bridges and Leon S. Daniels, as “duration officers” because of the chronic shortage of able-bodied young White men during the war. Until the 1960s, all of the Black men who served in the OPD were “emergency officers” as opposed to regular recruits and they remained fairly small in number.

In 1967, as a result of the California Supreme Court case _Penn/Stump v. City of Oakland_, the Oakland Police Department initiated an affirmative action program to hire officers of color to better reflect the city’s racial makeup. These affirmative action programs were mirrored in police departments throughout the country as part of a national trend to decrease antagonisms between White police departments and communities of color. At the August 1963 hearings for California Advisory Committee to the United States Commission on Civil Rights, police from the San Francisco, Oakland, and Berkeley police departments asserted that hiring Black officers “helps in gaining the cooperation of the Negro community” however, they all admitted that it had been difficult to attract qualified candidates. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the OPD hired a number of Black, Latino and Asian officers, although African Americans remained the largest ‘minority’ representation on the force through this period of study. Even though the city was more than fifty per cent people of color, these populations were no more than twelve percent of OPD officers in 1974. 

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264 The Penn/Stump Consent Decree also saw the department make hiring more female officers a priority, but like with officers of color, this happened very slowly.

The 1971 battle over Chief Gain illustrated a fundamental difference over the ways in which police understood their role in the community and how African Americans envisioned that activity. White officers primarily, if not solely, saw themselves as law enforcers, believing their judgement to be virtually infallible. This, and likely the close bond between officers who risked their lives in the course of their duties, led them to close ranks with one another when confronted with community complaints. It was believed, by local and national policy observers, that bringing more officers of color onto the force could dismantle this isolation.

In their 1976 investigation of police-community relations, the Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights began their report thusly: “A major conviction of the Advisory Committee is that a police department best serves the community when the composition of its force, at all levels, reflects the composition of the public it serves.”266 The National Minority Advisory Council asserted that Black officers “both reassure public perceptions about fairness and... ensure that fairness is fact. Adequate minority representation enables [the] police department to reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of the communities they serve.”267 Equal Employment Opportunity schemes therefore were not just about representation they were about justice, which could not be serviced by an all-White police force, especially not in a racially and culturally diverse area. Police officers who did not understand the citizens whom they served, but

266 Florida Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Policed by the White Male Minority: A Study of Police-Community Relations in Miami and Dade County, Florida (Washington D.C. October 1976), iii.

also did not consider themselves accountable to them, would be unlikely to treat people of color fairly.

In 1975, there were 692 police officers in the OPD, eighty-eight of whom were African American. The OBOA first organized in 1969 and more than seventy of the department’s eighty-eight black officers were members. By 1985, Black officers had become roughly twenty-two per cent of the force, with a relative increase among Latino officers. There was clearly something to be said for representation, however, the Oakland case shows that token representation would not improve the experience Black civilians when they encountered the police. At the same time, it was also fairly difficult for Black officers to do their jobs when they were not considered valuable members of the Force. Without the respect accorded to their White counterparts, it is unclear how Black police officers would be able to affect change in the realm of police-community relations.268

A Forum

On Thursday, February 6, 1975, members of the OBOA, the Oakland chapter of the NAACP and local ministers gave testimony to the Oakland City Council about police insensitivity to the local Black community and Black officers. Raymond Clark, president of the OBOA, told the Council that he received a cartoon in his residential mail depicting a caricature of a black police officer wearing a large natural hair-do and a ring in his nose. The picture bore this caption: “Heh! I is your friendly Oakland Policeman come to call... Please open da doo’ Suh!” The cartoon was apparently the last straw for the OBOA. Rather than lodge a complaint with the department itself, they decided to go over the

Chief’s head and air their grievances to the Council and wider public. Clark stated “that he believe[d] the cartoon came from within the department because it was mailed to several others as well and in each case the sender knew the appropriate names and addresses.”

The OBOA were joined by some of the city’s Black leaders. After Clarke’s testimony, Reverend J. Alfred Smith, pastor of East Oakland’s Allen Temple Baptist Church and president of the United East Oakland Clergy, and members of the NAACP charged the OPD with racism. They brought the Council’s attention to, what they believed, was a growing number of incidents of police brutality and harassment of Black community members. Implicit in the testimony given to the Council that evening was an indictment of Chief George Hart, who replaced Chief Gain in 1973. Reverend Smith’s testimony is particularly indicative:

This is not the first time I have spoken to the council about the Oakland police... In the past I have come to give support, to be in accord with the style of Chief (Charles) Gain. But I come back with a different kind of gospel today. We want this council to investigate the concerns of black police officers.

In the subsequent City Council-led investigation Hart would prove to be a divisive figure, and in the context of the no confidence vote just four years previous, Reverend Smith’s assertion suggests that there remained a deep chasm between the OPD and the wider Oakland community.

The city council responded that evening by creating a three-member subcommittee to investigate these claims: Joshua Rose (the Council’s only Black

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270 Ibid.
member), Joe Coto and Deputy Mayor George J. Vukasin. The Committee held their first public hearing about the claims two days later, however, before this meeting Chief Hart issued a statement on the allegations.

While the City Council seems to have been genuinely concerned about the allegations, Chief Hart was less than receptive. He dismissed the veracity of the civilian claims out of hand and chastised the Black officers for not bringing their grievances to departmental attention, subtly calling into question their statements as well. But most importantly, he cast his department (read: White officers) and himself as the injured parties in the situation. Hart said that he was “deeply disturbed” by the charges because they did “a grave disservice to me and to all members and employes [sic] of the department who have worked with dedication to provide all citizens of Oakland with effective fair and impartial services.”271 Throughout the inquiry, Hart seems to have taken each claim of OPD racism personally, while being openly hostile to those who made the accusations. However it is important to note that, for community members to stand alongside Black police officers demonstrates that it may be possible to draw a link between the treatment of Black citizens and Black officers in this time period. Or, as some would insinuate throughout the 1975 probe, for White officers, Black officers and Black civilians were one and the same.

At their first meeting on February 8, 1975 the three-member City Council committee directed City Manager, Cecil Riley, to compile a report on claims of police

271 Ibid, 1.
harassment of Black residents and intra-departmental discrimination against officers of color. Riley was to investigate five specific areas:

[1] Community relations efforts by police and whether they should do more... [including] scrutiny of the department’s Internal Affairs Division, how it handles citizens’ complaints[,] about the volume of complaints since the departure of former Police Chief Charles Gain. [2] Affirmative action policies, hiring, recruiting, screening, training and the numbers of minority group persons in the department. [3] Policies for promotion and picking officers for advanced training. [4] Alleged racial slurs, whether there is ongoing training to prevent racism, whether a racist cartoon mailed to a black officer came from within the department and whether the department took any steps to find out. [5] Information either supporting or refuting the eight charges of racism [made by the OBOA].

The context of the OBOA and Black community’s complaints presented to the Council offer the greatest insight into the dysfunction of the relationship between the police and Black Oaklanders. Black officers charged that,

Racial slurs have been directed at black officers from within the department and there have been no reprimands... Black and white police officers have nearly come to blows over how to make arrests... The president of the Oakland Black Officers Association received a racist cartoon... A black deputy chief has had less qualified officers promoted over him... The department administration [Hart] is insensitive to the welfare of the black community and his insensitivity has filtered down through the ranks... Police divisions such as traffic, intelligence, internal affairs and crime analysis have few or no black officers... The ratio of black officers to white is cause for concern... The NAACP has received an increasing number of complaints charging improper or unjust treatment of blacks by police.

After charging the City Manager with his task the City Council Committee asked the NAACP and local ministers to collect oral and written testimony from community members. However, the event was not without some skeptical observers. One audience member, Lorenzo Franklin, who told the Oakland Tribune’s staff reporter that he attended


273 Ibid.
“as a ‘citizen and taxpayer’”, raised objections to the Committee’s plans. “Black people, he said, would not have enough say about how the investigation is conducted.” Many of these same complaints were expressed as early as the 1963 public hearings, and indicate, that at least for some sections of the Black community very little had changed in the interim.

In mid-March Cecil Riley presented his report to the City Council’s subcommittee of Councilmembers Coto, Rose, and Vukasin. In his introduction to the 146-page report, Deputy City Manager, Gerald Newfarmer, concluded “that individual racist acts have occurred... but that the record is clear beyond a doubt that the Oakland Police Department is neither a racist institution nor insensitive to the needs and desires of the minority communities within the city of Oakland. There is racism, but it is not institutional and it is normally not overt.” They also refuted the claim “that racial discrimination is in the system and it happens without being disciplined when it is discovered.” Riley’s report seems to have absolved the police of any wrong doing, at least of any systemic or intentional racism, but this was not a surprising outcome, as the City Manager and Deputy City Manager compiled the report with Oakland Police Chief George Hart.

After receiving these findings, the subcommittee admitted that their inquiry had been “frustrated” because they had been unable to obtain specific information about police racism. Apparently there was an assumption that the local NAACP and religious leaders would present their evidence alongside Riley and at least some people were

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confused as to why this did not happen. The City Council issued a call to the general public to report instances of racism either to the City Council or the police directly. Two days later, the president of Citizen’s for Law and Order blasted the City Council’s inquiry. Calling the investigation “harassment,” Earl W. Huntting said that because “No one has appeared to substantiate these charges... [that] should be sufficient reason to call this witch-hunt to a close.” He continued:

Chief (George) Hart is running a good department and should be left to do his job, not spend his time defending his department against the harassment of individuals and groups that hit and run, make charges in a public meeting and then refuse to substantiate those charges in the same type of public meeting.277

Huntting’s suggestion that Black community members were making accusations to sully Chief Hart’s reputation or were simply crying wolf is an interesting indication of the differences between White and Black Oaklanders. The claims made by the NAACP were vague but not arbitrary. But even more importantly, those made by the OBOA were specific and came from within the department. Thus, it is curious that Huntting seems to have ignored Black officers’ complaints. But these comments were made with the obvious assumption that the Black community did not plan to ever present evidence to the City Council, which was far from the case.

In March, the NAACP informed Council member Vukasin that they would need more time to compile their information. When they were ready, they organized a series of public forums where community member were invited to give testimony about abuse at the hands of the OPD. The three meetings, occurring from late April to late May, were


While the news article does not mention Huntting’s race, considering the climate of the time it is most likely that he is White.
intentionally held in the city’s largest Black communities, the first in East Oakland at the Allen Temple Baptist Church on April 21. At the public hearings, “citizen after citizen charged police with harassment or racially biased conduct.” Some of the testimony referenced three recent shootings by police, explaining that the community did “not understand the sudden increase in slayings.” Repeatedly, community members complained about the use of racist, abusive language when they encountered the police and the anger they felt when these officers were not reprimanded.278

At the second meeting, held at Evergreen Missionary Baptist Church in West Oakland, more than seventy people attended, with fifteen speakers (including three White residents). At this meeting, Reverend Smith “chided Mayor John Reading for criticizing the hearings as ‘irresponsible attacks.’” The president of the NAACP, Alphonso Galloway testified that his office began to receive more citizen complaints since George Hart became chief and they “now rank second in his office behind employment, and... have surpassed complaints about housing.” Aware of potential skeptics, Galloway “added that he realized that not every complaint is valid but that some people are afraid to make complaints for fear of retaliation.” Citizens also “told of frustrations in dealing with the Internal Affairs Division [IAD] and, in some instances, said they [IAD] did not pursue their complaints because they felt nothing was being done.” One citizen, Robert Koerber, told of his own encounter with internal affairs where he says “he was threatened, charged with perjury and laughed at.” He told the gathering that “citizens could not expect results unless there was a civilian review board,” while another citizen called IAD “a big

joke...strictly on the police side." Some of the attendees discussed their disappointment with Chief Hart, especially as compared to former Chief Gain, whose tenure they regarded as “an era of exceptionally good police-community relations.” There were over eighty attendees at the final meeting, which lasted over two hours. One community member, Millie Bell, representing the Bay Area Repression Committee stated the issue clearly. Bell implied that everyone, besides those affected, were ignoring a common problem and charged that the City Council “never would ‘have acted on their own unless being confronted by the black community.’”

Black Officers’ problems were oddly similar in nature. The OBOA complained of having reported instances of racism without receiving an adequate reply, or none at all. But the most important issue which the sub-committee was forced to confront was the reality that, even though there had been initiatives to hire more officers of color, they had not been particularly successful. The department set a goal of racial balance at fifty-three per cent White, thirty-one per cent African American and eight per cent Latino for 1980, but figures from February 1974 “of 79 per cent white, 12.6 per cent black, 4.4 per cent Spanish-surname and 3.5 per cent ‘other’” had some worried that a truly representative force would not be reached by the deadline. In this regard, Black officers complained that the OPD had done very little to retain Black officers who, they believed, worked in an openly hostile environment. The OBOA told the Council that, of the few Black officers in the OPD, only four had received high rank. There were only two other high-ranking

281 “Police Hit as Bias Hearings End” Oakland Tribune, May 20, 1975, 11.
officers of color, one Latino and one Asian. Thus they argued that even with their increased representation, there was little opportunity for career advancement. Thus, if there was truly a problem with racism in the Oakland Police department, officers of color were not in a position to change those trends and would not be in the foreseeable future. The OBOA reminded the Council of the offensive cartoon, which was also circulated within the department. They also told of an incident where “Several white officers, overheard using racial slurs in discussing black officers, were the subject of an internal affairs investigation but none was disciplined.”

Haunting all of these forums was Chief George Hart. At one meeting, he sat silent while community members who were supposed to be served by the OPD, leveled a litany of accusations at him and his officers. For some people, especially those who previously supported Chief Gain’s policies, Hart was as much a part of the problem as the individual officers who featured in these encounters. It would be impossible to know what he was thinking in those moments, but his position can at least be inferred from his movements afterward. After the first public meeting, Chief Hart issued a thirty-one-page report refuting the claims made the previous week.

In this report, Hart said that an officer who used a racial slur while making an arrest received “only a written reprimand... because the internal affairs investigation was misfiled for several months before being recalled to the chief’s attention.” The officer was later “removed as a field training officer.” He asserted that Black officers had not

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achieved higher rank in large numbers because they were hired recently (in the previous three years). In presenting the report,

The chief was asked where the greatest opportunity for racism is within the department. ‘Just by virtue of size and the interpersonal nature of the assignment, patrol.’ He said, ‘on the other hand, there is great camaraderie in patrol, growing out of necessity for mutual support and protections. The man next to you can save your life. The only color we care about is blue.

This seems to fly in the face of Black officers’ accusation that Black and White patrol officers were getting into physical altercations with one another while on their beat. It is not surprising that Chief Hart would attempt to support the OPD, White police officers, and his own performance but, similar to the stance taken by Citizens’ for Law and Order, it seems to have happened at the expense of Black officers. That both Black police officers and Black civilians accused the police of racism should not have been dismissed lightly, and yet that is what Chief Hart seems to have done.

It is difficult to gauge the impact of this process. Likely the ability to give testimony was useful on an individual level, allowing one to share one’s experiences or realizing that others had encountered similar behavior. But beyond that it is unclear. If justice was the goal, the desired outcome would have included sanctioning the police, and possibly Chief Hart, while also mapping out initiatives to address and positively affect police-community relations. While the former occurred in some measure, the latter did not.

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285 “‘Racism’ Probers Hear Police Chief” Oakland Tribune, April 19, 1975, 2; “Police Chief Answers Bias Allegations” Oakland Tribune, May 4, 1975, 10-11.

286 “‘Racism’ Probers Hear Police Chief” Oakland Tribune, April 19, 1975, 2.
In September, the City Council released their official report wherein they
“acknowledged that the police department is far overbalanced with white officers.” They
also said:

It has been said that if the city is free of racism, a crusade against it is not
necessary. We agree with that concept. So far no one has stepped forward
to testify that the Oakland city government enjoys that reputation... In its
review of the allegations, the special committee could not say that the
charges were not valid in view of the fact that admittedly we are living in a
racist society which is improving but is still some ways from the ideal.\footnote{Gene Ayres, “Oakland Police: Bias Report Issues” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, September 17, 1975, 14F.}

They called the testimony given by community members “grievous [but] made no clear-
cut responses to citizen accusations that high-level insensitivity to the black community
has filtered down through the ranks or that the department has institutional racism
within.” The only concrete recommendation the report made was to allow the sub-
committee to meet “indefinitely” on the issue of police conduct and suggest that the City
Council invite testimony from community members. Unfortunately, there was a general
apathy over the report. “Although there were outbursts of temper and emotion during its
months of work, the committee delivered its report at a sparsely attended meeting.”\footnote{Ibid.}

In fact, Vice Mayor Vukasin, the man who had immediately responded to community
complaints in forming the committee, was not even present. There are likely a number of
reasons for the cool response, not least of which the almost three months lapse between
the end of the investigation and presentation of the report. But what is most interesting
are the ways in which Back community members attempted to offer a perception of the
police which cast their behavior as criminal. They called into question the idea that the

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288 Ibid.
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OPD was capable of keeping law and order if they were willing to harass innocent community members in some fashion.

*The only color is blue?*

In his 1931 study of corruption and police officers behavior, journalist Ernest Jerome Hopkins asserted that corrupt civil servants led to criminal activity in the citizenry:

> Usurpative [sic] conduct of public officials is the greatest possible breeder of hatred and disloyalty toward law and government itself. No nation whose paid agents were lawless, and trampled upon public and individual rights, ever had anything but a disorderly people and a serious problem of smoldering rebellion and crime.289

Hopkins’ assertion seems particularly applicable to this period of study. There was much discussion in the 1960s and 1970s about rising crime rates, especially street crime (murder, muggings, etc). Often this criminal activity was attributed to African Americans in inner-city areas, and criminal behavior was used to justify or excuse police misconduct. But Hopkins’ assertion allows one to reconsider the frame through which one understands criminal behavior. This is especially true in light of Murch’s assertion that the Black Panthers, initially cast as violent criminals, framed the need for their organization because of the abuse of police power.

Understanding the police as criminals was an important part of Black Panther ideology. Bobby Seale remembers the group’s use of the word “pig,” most often to describe police officers, was actually meant as a blanket term for, police, bigots, and fascists... A pig is an ill-natured beast who has no respect for law and order, a foul traducer who’s usually found

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masquerading as a victim of an unprovoked attack... who commit murder, brutalize, and violate people’s constitutional rights.\textsuperscript{290}

In this way, police harassment of Black people, and all people of color, was considered but one manifestation of general corruption within the ranks.

In 1950, the Kilpatrick committee “expressed particular concern about the effect of police mistreatment on young migrants... [and] about the future effects of alienating the youth from local government noting that the ‘value of fair treatment of these persons and consequent benefits... To all society cannot be overemphasized.’”\textsuperscript{291}

In many ways the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense was a fulfillment of this oddly prophetic statement. However, there seems to have been little recognition within the OPD that the department had any hand in creating the need for such an organization. This is not to say that the OPD was monolithically opposed to changing their relationship with Black communities, but there does seem to have been little connection made by White Americans (locally or nationally) of the almost two decades of conflict between the OPD and African Americans.

Because Chief Hart was such a divisive figure in 1975, it is important to consider his ideas about policing. Just before the City Council released their final report, the \textit{Oakland Tribune} ran a story on the downward trend of violent crime in the city. Over the previous five years crime rates were rising nationally but Oakland was one of very few cities that had not followed this pattern. They were also the only city to see a decrease in crime over such a long period of time. However, in 1975 the homicide rates were up from

\textsuperscript{290} Seale, \textit{Seize the Time}, 404.

\textsuperscript{291} Murch, \textit{Living for the City}, 39.
the previous year, and there was a general fear about street crime. Interviewed for the story, Chief Hart had this to say:

I’m extremely pessimistic... that any solution [to the crime problem] will be found. I realize that crime is born of social inequity and deprivation, but I absolutely reject the concept that crime is the responsibility of anybody other than the person who commits it. Each person is responsible for his own actions... and when a person breaks the law that person deserves swift and fitting punishment. We have become permissive and over-lenient with criminals... It is important to protect their rights, but it is equally important to consider the victim of crime and his problems. The legislative process has misread what is important to the public, and in my opinion it is important that people stand up and express their values, what they will or will not accept as the standards of society.292

Hart’s comments are an important assertion of the social ills he saw facing the city and the imposition of law and order therein. At the same time it is difficult not to read them against Chief Gain’s policies, which were not dismissive of crime, but were concerned with preventing crime and dismantling distrust within the community. From all available evidence the latter does not seem to have been high among Hart’s goals.

In 1977, the National Minority Advisory Committee on Criminal Justice began a study of the relationship between police departments and communities of color nationally, presenting their report in 1982. The Inequality of Justice: A Report on Crime and the Administration of Justice in the Minority Community gave voice to an important concern about the line between police duty and citizen’s rights. The gives considerable attention to the idea of Black criminality. Considering arrest records, media representations and testimony, they conclude,

that minorities are not only more likely to be suspected of crime than whites, but also more likely to be arrested and less likely to secure bail. Further, after being arrested, minorities are more likely to be indicted than

whites and are less likely to have cases dismissed. If tried, minorities are more likely to be imprisoned and more likely to serve full terms without parole.\textsuperscript{293} The Advisory Council asserts that the inordinate focus on street crime by police officers, often attributed to African Americans and receiving the harshest punishment, “says nothing at all about the criminality of black people. Moreover, the fact that an even higher proportion of persons arrested are poor or impoverished sheds no light whatever on the criminality of the poor. What these facts actually do is clearly identify the focus of police and court activity.”\textsuperscript{294} This assertion makes clear that, at least in some instances Black people were more likely to encounter police officers as dangerous rather than helpful.

\textit{The Inequality of Justice} also presented evidence that Black people are most likely to be the victims of crime but “are more likely to meet disregard, disrespect and indifference as victims.” They continue:

The Council recognizes that police have and exercise discretion. However, the Council is concerned that minority people often receive discriminatory treatment from the police as they exercise that discretion, which results in the violation of the constitutional rights of minorities.\textsuperscript{295} This report returns to a problem identified in Oakland as early as 1963. One complaint of Black Oaklanders in the 1960s and 1970s was that police only entered their neighborhoods to arrest or harass them, not to offer protection. If, as Chief Gain suggested, the community was the police officer’s client, Black Oaklanders had long been accusing the OPD of vastly inadequate service.\textsuperscript{296} The Advisory Council posit that

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\item \textsuperscript{293} National Minority Advisory Council on Criminal Justice, \textit{The Inequality of Justice}, xx.
\item \textsuperscript{294} Ibid, xxv.
\item \textsuperscript{295} Ibid, 229.
\item \textsuperscript{296} Ibid, 1.
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Black people believed that “minority communities are not adequately served by the police.... that the police are nonresponsive [sic] and insensitive to the issues of crime and corruption in minority communities.” In this context, the claims made to the City Council by Oakland’s Black leaders was part of a national trend, wherein African American communities were fearful of the people to whom they were supposed to turn for help and protection.²⁹⁷

In *The Inequality of Justice*, the authors assert that people of color “want to have a police force that protects them and serves their interests. They need police in the community to prevent crime. They do not need officers who, by the use of shakedowns, drunk-rolling and intimidations, become part of the community’s problems.” This report asserts that what people of color, especially Black people, wanted was an honest police force. It is important that African Americans joined the majority of society in understanding the function of police officers as providing honest and fair protection, but asserted repeatedly that this was not how officers presented themselves to people of color. One can then understand the different framings of the 1975 inquiry by Black leaders as opposed to their White counterparts. Rather than a “witch-hunt” as the Citizens for Law and Order called it, the NAACP and religious leaders attempted to expose that a significant threat to social disorder and criminality was police behavior.²⁹⁸

*Citizens Review Board and Community Activism*

In other chapters the politics of care has been demonstrated through writings by Black community activists or detailed descriptions of their work. This case is different for a

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ Ibid.
variety of reasons. First, the leadership in these efforts, the OBOA, NAACP and religious leaders, seemed not to have record their work, or at least not archived them. There does not seem to have been a newsletter, flyers or pamphlets which would help this work access exactly what Black activists thought about their experiences of racism and the City Council’s response. This is likely because much of their work, especially that of the OBOA and religious groups, happened in personal encounters. The likelihood of documentary evidence seems slim at this particular moment. And while the NAACP would have kept records they have yet to emerge. At the same time, the City of Oakland and City Council seems to have been lax when it came to preserving the evidence of their work for reasons that are not entirely clear. And newspapers, while invaluable in detailing these events, do not tell us what regular civilians or officers of various races and rank, thought of these events. There is an understandable but unfortunate focus on leadership, which does not facilitate a clear understanding of the intersection of community activism with ideas about care or love, specifically. However, this does not mean that these concerns did not exist.

For instance, it is unlikely that the OBOA and NAACP presented evidence to the City Council on the same night out of coincidence. Rather they are likely to have done so to support one another’s claims. It is also possible that they believed that one would not have been believed without the presence of the other. While Oakland’s Black community seems to have been deeply distrustful of the OPD, it is clear that for at least some people, this distrust could be overcome to support another African American victim of racism. At
the very least it is clear that this partnership was vitally important in sustaining the attacks leveled against the OPD in the spring and summer of 1975.

Throughout the 1975 inquiry there does not seem to have been a clear discussion of the community’s desires. For instance, did they want more Black officers? Did they want White officers who abused their power to be dismissed? Would Chief Hart’s dismissal have improved matters? Or was an official investigation by an outside reviewer into the issue with more time and support necessary? However, in 1963, Curtis Lee Baker put forth what would become the focus of activism surrounding police-community relations reform: citizen review of police conduct.

On Thursday January 10, 1980 at a tense City Council meeting the Board voted to establish a Citizens’ Review Board to deal with community complaints against the police. More than 1,500 people attended the four and a half hour meeting that concluded shortly after midnight. The eventual vote was unanimous, and a number of people in the audience were “chanting and waving signs protesting alleged police misconduct.” This meeting, like so many others before it was fed by a string of incidents. In this case, community members objected to “police officers’ use of deadly force in protecting themselves while apprehending suspects.” In the previous year nine Black men had been killed in these incidents. “And although in five of those cases the officers involved were non-whites, charges of racism have filled the air and its critics have demanded more civilian control over the Police Department.”

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One such case was that of fifteen-year-old Melvin Black, shot and killed by the police on March 17, 1979. Oakland police received a report about a sniper shooting at cars on the freeway. When they encountered the young boy, they “mistook [his] pellet gun for an automatic pistol.”\(^{300}\) In the aftermath of Melvin’s death, his family and community members called for an investigation of his death. However, in this instance, they pushed for an independent investigation rather than an internal affairs or even city government appeal. In August, African American John L. Burris, a former Oakland city prosecutor, became the first civilian hired to investigate the police in OPD’s history.

At least one thing had changed, however, since the 1975 probe. In 1977, the city elected its first African American mayor, Lionel Wilson. Wilson’s tenure, alongside a supportive City Council led some to believe that the local government would be more open to their demands for justice. But in other respects, very little had changed in Oakland. One community member Mrs. Margaret Pryor said that “In the minds of many people, the police and the DA are one and the same.” The situation in Oakland was such that, “with each new shooting of a minority person by police, more people seem to be questioning whether two agencies that by necessity work closely together can separate those ties when it becomes necessary for prosecutors to scrutinize the actions of police officers.” For this reason, she suggested that “An outside investigator [brought] legitimacy to the process.” It was also likely that Burris was appreciated because he was Black.\(^{301}\)


\(^{301}\) Ibid.
In the resultant investigation, Burris discovered a number of disturbing facts about the case that had either been hidden or overlooked in the internal affairs probe. Officers on the scene fired thirteen shots, five of which entered Melvin Black’s body. Melvin’s death was ruled a justifiable homicide by the OPD, District Attorney and the county coroner. However, in September, Burris’ report “said all evidence indicated that Black did not fire his gun and did not point it at the officers.” Burris concluded that “the conduct of police violated department rules.” The question, which was never satisfactorily answered, was how and why Burris had come to such a different conclusion than all of the other institutions meant to check abuse of police power? And for Oakland community members, the even more important question was why this continued to happen.

It is important that many of the incidents leading to the creation of the Citizens’ Review Board involved officers of color. While White officers were the focus of many of the critiques leveled at the OPD previously, individual officers were a symptom of a structural problem. In the initial report presented to the City Council by Cecil Riley, the Deputy Mayor refused to acknowledge institutional racism. And while the Council’s final report acknowledged racist acts and a lack of training, they do not seem to have considered the reality that the OPD represented, the “tangible symbol of white authority.” In such a frame, it was not imperative that the officers themselves be White, only that their training and the internal checks on police misconduct allowed for, if not supported, the harassment and abuse of Black Oaklanders.

In 1971, Charles Gain said that “The great majority of police do right, so we should weed out the ones that don’t.”\textsuperscript{303} This issue of the individual officer as a bad apple has resurfaced throughout the history of the Oakland Police Department. Single events, tragic cases like Melvin Black or Maurice Phillips, became representative of larger problems. The inadequacy of such a construction, however, was that the details became lost in the official and historical records. This has, in some cases, obscured patterns of offenses committed by single officers or institutional problems regarding accountability and criminal behavior by a \textit{number} of individual police officers. With this reality, not only would Black antagonism to the police persist, but individuals would be unlikely to report instances of abuse, call the police in times of need, or believe any justification for police shootings that resulted in the death of a person of color. By creating the Citizens’ Review Board, the City Council hoped to give civilians an alternative space for their complaints as well as create a body that might actually hold police officers accountable for their behavior. As the Alameda County Supervisor, John George, asserted: “The question is who rules Oakland- the City Council or the police?”\textsuperscript{304} For those in the community who supported the Review Board’s creation, the question might have been more aptly put: whom do the police serve, the community or themselves?

\textit{Conclusion}

The Oakland Police Department has a long history of friction with their local community, but they are not unique in that respect. What does make them unique, especially for this

\textsuperscript{303} Lembke, “Oakland Chief: Hero to All but Own Men: Oakland Police” \textit{Los Angeles Times}, November 28, 1971, AA.

\textsuperscript{304} Ibid.
study, are the ways in which a history of migration and marginalization shaped community responses to their behavior. It would be inaccurate to assert that the entirety of the Oakland city government and services were racist or accepting of racist abuse of people of color. It would also be wrong to suggest that a Black mayor or later police chief solved these problems. But it is important that none of these things managed to change the OPD’s local reputation; in fact it is telling that they did not.

It was hoped that creating the Citizens’ Review Board would go some way in addressing the issues which had long been a feature of life in Oakland. The Board “was founded... to conduct open, independent investigations of citizen complaints” but very quickly faced some logistical problems. Throughout its history it has remained underfunded and understaffed.\footnote{Ali Winston, “Deadly Secrets: How California law shields a small cadre of Oakland police officers involved in violence” \textit{East Bay Express}, October 12, 2011. \url{http://www.eastbayexpress.com/gyrobase/deadly-secrets/Content?oid=3012922&showFullText=true} [accessed April 20, 2012]} By 1991 the Board handled over 700 complaints, but was considered “meaningless” and “ineffective” by some sectors of the local community.\footnote{Ken Epstein, “A badge and an attitude: Growing instances of police abuse in Oakland have residents worried that the police are getting out of control.” \textit{East Bay Guardian}, September 1991, 17.} After roughly a decade of its existence, “only about two officers ha[d] even received a reprimand placed in their personnel records.”\footnote{Ibid.} The most important part of the Review Board had been that its hearings, as opposed to those initiated by the IAD, were open to the public “and offered a window into police behavior,” unfortunately officers were not required to attend and defend themselves.\footnote{Winston, “Deadly Secrets: How California law shields a small cadre of Oakland police officers involved in violence.”}
There is not happy ending, or even significant resolution to this particular story. Rather, the history of the police department demonstrates that there must be continued struggle for police accountability alongside a remaking of police-community relations. Taken together with the previous chapter, this essay suggests that ideas of law and order inherently involve the perceived social inclusion of certain sections of the community. It has been true, in various contexts, that one’s race can divest one of the protection of police services. And it has been in this arena where community activists have attempted to intervene.

“I’ve always felt safe jogging in a park that some would say is unsafe, and I felt safe—until June 1, 1990, when I was accosted and victimized by a member of the Oakland Police Department.”

309 Ken Epstein, “A badge and an attitude: Growing instances of police abuse in Oakland have residents worried that the police are getting out of control.” East Bay Guardian, September 1991, 17.
Peculiar to Us: Women’s Health as Community Activism

Good health is not merely the absence of illness and disease; it is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being. Whether we are healthy, therefore, is determined almost exclusively by our working standards, the standard of our housing, our access to health and welfare services and the treatment we receive from them.\(^\text{310}\)

How can something which brings to women a chance to be free from a life of constant pregnancy (and/or dangerous, illegal abortion) be opposed, by women?\(^\text{311}\)

In 1967, the United Kingdom legalized abortion, through twenty-eight weeks, to preserve the mother’s physical or mental health or if there was evidence that the child might be born with defects.\(^\text{312}\) Like the decision in *Roe v. Wade*, the legalization of abortion was welcomed by women’s activists, but also exposed a deep chasm between access to abortion and reproductive inequalities. Abortion access was framed as a necessity for achieving women’s equality, allowing the burgeoning women’s health movement to often ignore the web of abuses within the health care system faced by (migrant) Black women. The ability to end or prevent a pregnancy before and after 1967 was intimately tied to one’s race, migrant status, and class.

Publishing their first issue in March 1982, *Outwrite: A Women’s Newspaper* was created by a multiracial feminist collective. The editorial staff understood their magazine as a platform “To provide information, opinions, and news of positive achievements of

\(^{310}\) Bryan et al., *The Heart of the Race*, 91.


\(^{312}\) With the exception of Northern Ireland.
women which will be of benefit to women - to organise around, to learn from, to share and to build our strength on.”

Throughout their six year run (1982-1988), the publication featured articles about women’s oppression and activism domestically and internationally, wherein women’s reproductive health were routinely featured. While the magazine’s editorial board was interracial, their articles were dominated by issues that specifically affected women of color, possibly in light of their policy that at least half of the editorial board be made up of Black women (Afro-Caribbean and Asian). As such, throughout their discussion of access to abortion and contraception, they demonstrated a distinct understanding of the goals of women’s health activism as one of reproductive justice rather than the more popularly understood framings of access or choice.

The position of the *Outwrite* editorial staff can be best understood through their publication of two articles. The first, “NAC splits over reproductive rights” details the potential fracturing of the National Abortion Campaign, first organized in 1975 to protect and expand women’s access to abortion under the 1967 Abortion Act. At the eighth annual abortion conference, in October 1983, attendees could not agree on whether the group should remain a single issue campaign or broaden its focus to reproductive rights generally, especially Black women’s “lack of control over decisions to have or not have children.”

While neither measure, to continue as an abortion advocacy group or expand, received the requisite two-thirds vote, the *Outwrite* editors believed that the split was imminent and they welcomed the change.

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314 Ibid.

315 Ibid.
In a later issue, contributor Patricia Wejr, of the Women’s Reproductive Rights Centre, discussed the ways in which access to contraception could be used to limit women’s choices, rather than the reverse. Wejr’s article “Sterilisation and the mentally handicapped: Whose right to decide?” tells the story of seventeen-year-old Jeanette, in the Northeast England city of Sunderland. The city’s department of Social Services, supported by Jeanette’s parents, wanted to have the girl sterilized before she reached legal adulthood. They took their case to the House of Lords for a decision, which they received in the affirmative on April 30, 1987. Throughout her article Wejr does not question the right of Sunderland’s social services or Jeanette’s parents, as her primary and secondary carers, to sterilize her. Rather, she takes issue with the potential legal precedent in permanently taking away a young girl’s ability to reproduce for no other reason than her mental disability. “What the courts have thrown up is that sterilization is not an individual medical issue. A ruling for sterilization in Jeanette’s case would divide the population into those who are fit to reproduce and those who are not.” These articles demonstrate that for women marginalized within English society, access to abortion and contraception could be just as repressive as lack of access. Inherent in these articles and the breadth of Black British women’s health work was a desire to expose the public and private beliefs about who should and should not reproduce, and how the latter could lose their reproductive ability by force.

Throughout their writings, Black British women recounted their relationships with doctors and the medical community where they believed their health was marginalized

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and their bodily experiences discounted in the overall goal to limit their reproduction. They suggested that a mostly White women’s health movement which ignored Black women’s experiences of abuse and exploitation, because of racism and xenophobia, would never speak to their lives. In so doing, these Black women made their bodies central to migrant narratives and the larger fight to protect their communities in the Mother Country.

The right to settle and make a home

Ever since the docking of the MV Empire Windrush, politicians and the regular citizenry agonized over the number of Commonwealth migrants entering British cities. Even though some migrants planned for a temporary sojourn, at least some made their way to England, Scotland and Wales with plans of permanent settlement. However many or few this latter group might have been, the social anxiety that erupted over Commonwealth migration from 1948 through the 1960s demonstrates that even a few was too many.

Migrants experienced the English discomfort over their presence as rejection in their encounters with the White population. Often unable to rent or buy homes in their desired neighborhoods, being told that there were no jobs for “their lot” or being fired because their White co-workers objected to working with a “Colored” are difficult for the historian to quantify. However, the frequency with which they emerge in Black newspapers and oral histories of the time coupled with the governmental edicts aimed at ending discrimination in these arenas (even as Members of Parliament wondered if this discrimination was not, in itself, reason to limit migration) indicate that these were
important pieces of the Black British experience.\textsuperscript{317} However, there was no more intimate manifestation of the British discomfort with Commonwealth migration and the formation of Black British communities than the ways in which the reproduction of Black communities were often cast as a social ill.

On March 10, 1964, the \textit{London Times} ran a small article entitled “Birmingham Birth Control Tests” about a local birth control experiment by the Birmingham Family Planning Association (FPA) to test the efficacy of an intrauterine device (IUD, colloquially known as the coil) in the city’s Sparkbrook neighborhood. The article asserts that the FPA chose Sparkbrook “because it was mainly a colored immigrant area... Immigrants of different religious and social backgrounds lived there and the results could be applied in underdeveloped countries.” The study would use “groups of Pakistanis and Indians, West Indians, Irish immigrants, and an English group.” The FPA also announced a five-year fundraising plan to raise £10,000 per year “for birth control work in underdeveloped countries.”\textsuperscript{318}

The importance of the Birmingham study is manifold. First, identifying a multicultural neighborhood and as a ideal site for medical testing of a contraception could indicate an identification of some of these populations as problematic, especially since three of the four groups identified by the FPA were migrants, and the “wrong sort” of migrants at that. It is possible that the use of Sparkbrook and these three groups of migrants illustrates a general disdain for the rights of Black people (and the Irish)


becoming members of the British polity. Secondly, using a British population to
demonstrate the applicability of contraceptive methods in other countries, particularly
countries in the “Third World,” illustrate that whatever their cultural similarity Black and
Irish people living in Britain were viewed as perpetual outsiders. But the importance of
the FPA’s experiments can only be understood in the context of changing immigration
laws. When the article is thusly situation, it becomes clear that the reproduction of Black
communities in England (biologically, through birth and migration, and socio-
economically, through wage-work) was a matter of utmost importance.

Responding in part to the Notting Hill riots of 1958, Parliament began to slowly
strip Commonwealth citizens of the the rights granted under the British Nationality Act
(1948). The Commonwealth Immigrants acts of 1962 and 1968 made it possible to deny
entry into the United Kingdom to any person without an employment voucher or who
could not prove that they were able to support themselves while there. Specifically
migrants under the age of sixteen (the age of majority in the UK), had to prove their age
and that at least one of their parents was a CUKC, resident in the UK. And finally, the
British Nationality Act of 1981 created the right to abode restricting settlement in the UK
to “patrials,” meaning that Commonwealth citizens born in the Commonwealth after
1983 or not already settled in the UK were treated as foreigners and could only remain in
the UK for a limited period of time.

The slowly closing gap through which West Indian, African and Asian people
moved from the far reaches of the Commonwealth to Britain after World War II, created
considerable fear that the government would limit the entrance of all Black migrants, not
just those deemed to be unproductive. Specifically, the fear in the late 1960s was that, should the trend of immigration restrictions continue, those who had left their children abroad would be unable to reunite with them in the UK. As OWAAD asserted, each law was a “deliberate attempt to restrict our entry and that of our dependents.”\textsuperscript{319} For a population largely built on migration, immigration restrictions proved a threat to their ability to survive which made it even more important that individual families could reproduce themselves in Europe. However, in the popular construction of migrant concerns biological reproduction is almost nonexistent.

In their newsletter, \textit{FOWAAD!}, the Organisation for Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) demonstrated a keen interest in immigration policies. Their writings made clear their belief that immigration laws “have developed into yet another form of institutional racism.” For instance, they demonstrate that the desire to find and deport “illegal immigrants” fomented “the systematic intimidation and harassment of Black people settled here.”\textsuperscript{320} Regardless of one’s migration status, or lack thereof, one’s race made it so that “We are considered to be guilty of being illegal immigrants until proved innocent (and even then we are not spared any of the harassment!).”\textsuperscript{321} This conflation of Black with “immigrant” also featured in activist critiques of the Metropolitan Police Service’s harassment of Black and was an important road block to official understandings of Black children’s experiences in English schools.

\textsuperscript{320} “Issues: Roads to Repatriation” \textit{FOWAAD!}, July 1980, 5.
OWAAD’s focus on immigration policies was echoed in other Black publications, such as *Race Today*, but OWAAD’s specific contribution lay in their centering of Black women’s experiences, to expose the ways in which Black male migrants had been narratively privileged. What little we know of Black women migrants has not been officially canonized in the few histories of Black migration in the post-World War II period. The general narrative of Black British migration begins with the 492 West Indian passengers aboard the *Windrush*. These migrant tales have focused on the experiences of men, especially the famous musicians aboard the ship, such as calypsonian Lord Kitchener and Lord Beginner, ignoring the presence of West Indian women, like singer Mona Baptiste and the twenty-five year old seamstress who stowed away from Jamaica, Averill Wanchove. But even if one focuses on those men, the narrative has stripped the relational aspect of their lives. Men did not emigrate in a vacuum, without a mother, aunt or wife at home, with whom they likely hoped to reunite in the future.

Ignoring the ways in which women were part of the migrant narrative (either as migrants themselves or part of a support system aiding migration) has led to a masculinization of this narrative. Thus, stories regarding the discrimination migrants experienced focus on men’s discrimination in factories (even though women performed factory work as well), or male victims of White violence, for instance because of fears of interracial mixing, even though Black women were not spared the violence at Notting Hill. This is not to say that Black women have been completely written out of this history, but it is clear that the peculiarities of Black women’s experiences have been marginalized.
to center men as historical protagonists. These histories offer little critical discussion of the ways in which women experienced migration, or how gender shaped this process.

In their accounts of migration, Black women talk about the need to support their families at home and abroad, while men seem to have been divorced, in the scholarly work, from this international, familial web. Caribbean migrant and author, Margaret Prescod-Roberts asserts that “the lucky ones were the families where the women went. And the reason for that was that you knew very well that the women were going to be sending back the money, particularly if they left a few children or they had a mother or grandmother back home.” Men however “would come over, maybe leave a family in Barbados, but pick up with another woman in London or New York to reproduce them and do the housework—and start another family.”

This is evident in the single Black male migrating to London, which has become a kind of cultural icon. Men’s ability to have public lives of individuality and freedom is predicated upon women’s responsibility to the family. While men and women left children at home in the Caribbean, it was only West Indian women who spoke of this emotional and financial havoc.

The mental and physical strain of migration was never more pronounced than for Asian women, for whom this experience could involve bodily violations surrounding their reproductive capabilities. On February 3, 1979, The Guardian newspaper’s front page featured in bold letters: “Virginity tests on immigrants at Heathrow.” In the story,

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323 See Samuel Selvon’s Lonely Londoners and Andrea Levy’s Small Island. Levy’s work actually explicitly rejects this framing of male migrants as central to the Black British experience through her character Hortense who leaves Jamaica to reunite with her husband Gilbert, already living in London, however she does represent the same seemingly care-free Black male migrant through Michael Roberts.
Melanie Phillips detailed the ordeal of a thirty-five year old teacher from India, traveling to England to marry her fiance, already living in London.\textsuperscript{324} Before she could officially enter the country, however, she was made to have an examination to prove that she was a virgin and had not previously given birth. Immigration restrictions at the same time allowed an engaged woman to enter the country without a visa so long as her marriage took place within three months. As such, the immigration officer who processed this unnamed woman, “justified the order for a ‘virginity test’ on suspicions that she was traveling with her fiance. If they were already married, she would have needed a visa.”\textsuperscript{325}

The Home Office initially denied the claim but were eventually pressured to admit the event had actually occurred, and many suggested that it was not an isolated event.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to document the history of these encounters, likely because of the intimacy of the violation. As the Indian schoolteacher explained to Phillips:

“A man doctor came in. I asked to be seen by a lady doctor but they said ‘no’... He was wearing rubber gloves and took some medicine out of a tube and put it on some cotton and inserted it into me. He said he was deciding whether I was pregnant now or had been pregnant before. I said that he could see that without doing anything to me, but he said there was no need to get shy. I have been feeling very bad mentally ever since. I was very embarrassed and upset. I have never had a gynaecological examination before.”\textsuperscript{326}


At the time the Home Office said that there were no more than three instances of virginity testing in the United Kingdom, but Bryan et al briefly mention that Asian women were attempting to spread awareness of the practice in the 1970s, suggesting that there were far more than three victims.

This abuse by the medical profession, with the tacit approval of the government, illustrate the foundations on which Asian women especially, but Black women generally, could begin to view (White) medical professionals with suspicion. Nancy Eihrenrich suggests, for women such as these “physicians represent the punitive power of the state, the arm of the law clearly visible behind their white coats.”

These experiences helped shape the politics of Black women’s health activism in the 1970s and 1980s as a matter of reproduction abuse, specifically situating their access to certain kinds of contraception as part of a larger program to limit the numbers of Black people in England. Within this framework they understood “reproductive choice” as a synonym to “population control.”

*Family Planning: A Matter of Assimilation?*

In January 1971, the national Family Planning Association (FPA) began to translate and publish contraceptive brochures aimed specifically at the Asian population, entitled *How Family Planning Can Help You.* Translated from English into Urdu, Punjabi and Bengali the pamphlet recommended “a rest before each baby keeps a wife healthy and fit to look after her family. A husbands [sic] pay packet goes farther... if he does not have more children than he can afford, and he will find it easier to get good housing. He will also be

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able to provide better food for his children.” These translated leaflets emerged after local family planning clinics realized that they were not achieving much success among migrant populations. To this end, they also minimized discussion of overpopulation and economic effects on the country, to “concentrate... on the welfare of the family, and particularly the wife” making contraceptive access a family or community matter. While one cannot read too much meaning into such changes, it does make sense that a migrant population would take issue with a pamphlet encouraging them to limit their families as a means of population control, even if that did underpin FPA efforts.

In April, journalist Clifford Longley published an article in the *Times* attempting to explain different attitudes toward contraception among migrants. Longley’s article suggested that “If immigrant fertility is of concern both to the right wing of the Conservative Party and to the birth control campaigns” the threat of overpopulation was about the only thing the two groups had in common. Longley’s article reiterates the belief that family planning clinics were not particularly attractive to migrant communities: “A clinic conveniently situated for immigrants in one large city had to close after six months from lack of clients yet the exact cause of its failure remains a mystery.” However, what success FPAs did achieve was credited to Helen Graham, co-author of *How Family Planning Can Help You* and assistant director of the FPA, particularly because Graham was careful “to allay suspicion that she was simply trying to reduce the number of black

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330 Ibid.
Graham made clear that her mission was meant to offer help to migrants, rather than impose English morals onto them; not everyone’s motives were so pure.

Longley’s article discusses a pervasive belief that even amidst overpopulation crises Asian families were smaller in Britain than in their countries of origin. The author quotes an International Planned Parenthood (IPPF) expert’s suggestion “that the motivation behind the migrations from Asia to Britain since the war is similar to the motivation behind the acceptance of birth control, namely a desire to improve the economic and social lot of one’s family.” That this Planned Parenthood expert associated smaller families with assimilation or upward mobility, rather than employment or economic limitations in Britain or as a result of the loss of extended family networks demonstrates a potential misunderstanding of migrant motivations and desires. In The Heart of the Race, Bryan et al suggest that medical professionals exhibited a cavalier dismissal of migrant ideas about family and reproduction in their focus on overpopulation and reproductive control, missing “The fact that we may not view our unplanned children in [the same] way within our own culture.” For instance, one could alternately understand smaller families in Britain by migrants as the result of conscious decisions about family planning based on limited and inadequate housing available to migrants. Understood thusly, the FPA’s concern over a lack of response from migrants might have

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331 Ibid.
332 Ibid.
333 hotr, 103.
been an indication that these families did not feel they needed to limit the size of their families anymore than they might already have.

And lastly, Longley’s article discusses a demonstrable difference White understanding of Asian and West Indian attitudes toward contraception and family planning services. While it was assumed that Asians did not visit FPAs because of potential language barriers, it was believed that “young West Indians are the least interested in contraception.” Family Planning Associations assumed “that its normal facilities are sufficient [for West Indians],” but this proved not to be the cause, FPA’s assumed, because of ideas about family and sexual relationships in the West Indies point to important differences from white European custom, and these have more or less been carried on unchanged by immigrants in Britain. Common law marriages or even more casual sexual relationships are customary rather than exceptional, and illegitimacy and promiscuity have less of a stigma attached to them.334

And one White man working on birth control access in a London West Indian community suggested that further assimilation into the English polity might make attitudes towards birth control more widely accepted among West Indians.335 The problem with this man’s position, and really much of the official responses discussed in Longley’s article, is that it pathologizes Asian and West Indian reticence to use contraceptives while ignoring the fact that the larger English population was by no means universally accepting of birth control either.

Population Control: The Role of the State

334 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
In 1964 the House of Lords debated the possibility of implementing population control measures domestically. While they agreed that overpopulation was a potential problem they did not agree that birth control was necessarily the appropriate remedy. Elucidating the barriers to such a possibility Lord Barbazon said “he did not believe that many men and women really wanted large families, but they still wanted and insisted on their elemental pleasures [to have as many children as they wanted]. They would not be deprived of this on the basis of over-populating the world.” Lord Barbazon also, interestingly, believed that, because it was a man’s decision on the number of children he had, it was on him “that restraint should be imposed.” He advocated that any man with more than three or four children should obtain a vasectomy. While Lord Barbazon was in favor of making birth control accessible, as a form of family planning, other Lords were worried about the moral implications of this decision, while others suggested that birth control went against a doctor’s oath to preserve life.336

Seven years later, Parliament had been unable to settle the issue in a satisfactory manner. On April 21, 1971 the Birth Control campaign was launched “to press the Government to provide contraceptives as an integral part of the National Health Service.” The Campaign, and Members of Parliament (MPs) who supported it, wanted to bring “to the attention of Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Social Services, the ‘urgent need’ for state provision for contraception, voluntary sterilization and, as a last resort, therapeutic abortion.”337 The discussion of overcrowding in Britain hinged on the fear that the island’s “limited” space would soon be filled to capacity and the price of its

resources, especially imports, would soar. The debate about whether or not Britain should begin to make contraceptive measures available, free or otherwise, was complex, including contributions from members of the Roman Catholic Church and Church of England, health professionals, politicians, and women’s health advocates. Those opposed to contraceptive access wondered whether the government had the right to infringe on a family’s ability to decide how they reproduced, the foundation of this argument being the belief that it was an Englishman’s right to procreate. However, some wondered if there were certain subsections of the population who should be stripped of this freedom.

If there should be limitations, the general consensus was that poor and poorly educated people were candidates for such restrictions.\footnote{338 For instance, in a letter to the editor of the \textit{London Times}, Susan Edwards asserted:} For instance, in a letter to the editor of the \textit{London Times}, Susan Edwards asserted:

\begin{quote}
As a mother I am impelled to write in answer to the group of specialists concerned with Social Policy (March 2). 1. Surely the root cause of poverty is population growth. 2. Increased family allowances would encourage population growth, especially among the poor. Therefore, I suggest that H.M.G. [Her Majesty’s Government] would do best to stop family allowances and spend the money on free school lunches, school milk and pre-primary education, while encouraging sterilization and abortion to a far greater degree. Abolish poverty, not with increased family allowances, but through population growth control.\footnote{339 Considering that West Indian and Asian families, migrant or not, lived in poorer neighborhoods and, too often, left school with few employment opportunities, the racial implications of such an argument are clear. Edwards’ letter participates in a recurring discussion of poverty and the role of the state in controlling population growth.}
\end{quote}

\footnote{338 Like the Wejr article the mentally ill were another population which was identified as at risk of reproductive restrictions. While this argument was connected and undergirded discussions of poverty, it is in and of itself another historiography that cannot be fully examined here.}

\footnote{339 Susan Edwards, Letter to the Editor, \textit{London Times}, March 5, 1970, 11.}
suggestion that poverty bred large families that could not afford to care for their children without State assistance.

Surprisingly, besides the one article on the Sparkbrook contraceptive study, there was no explicit mention of Commonwealth migrants related to overpopulation until October 31, 1971, when the Times published a letter to the editor for David Enwalls, Secretary of State for Social Services defending the government against claims that they had previously overestimated the fertility of Commonwealth migrants. It is an interesting letter because the claims originated, not in the Times, but in the recently published memoirs of former Labour politician Richard Crossman. The letter stands out as an anomaly.

At their genesis the Birth Control Campaign (BCC) petitioned the House of Commons to make contraception available, often for free, through the National Health Service (NHS). Their overall work was based in the belief that the “Government must act to prevent the consequences of population growth becoming intolerable for the every-day conditions of life”340 The next year, the BCC published a report, A Birth Control Plan for Britain, urging the government to make birth control widely available. The report refuted the idea that unchecked procreation existed as a right.

The principle that parents should be allowed voluntarily to decide how many children they want is not in question....Given strong encouragement and the necessary information and birth control facilities, we believe that almost all couples are capable of restricting the size of their families according to their own family well-being and to the national needs.'341

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340 Pat Healy, “Britain urged to set an example by adopting a policy on birth control” London Times, March 17, 1972, 14.

341 Ibid.
The Birth Control Campaign based their conclusions primarily on the financial burden caused by, what they describe as, “unwanted pregnancies.” In an article about the Campaign’s appeals to Parliament and their report, journalist Pat Healy published figures on the sort of pregnancies the Campaign wanted to prevent. Totaling 87,000 the births in 1969, women who gave birth to illegitimate children, and families with more than four children were estimated to have cost the country £235,000,000 that year. By delineating the economic burden of “unwanted pregnancies” the Campaign and Healy’s article make clear that the foundation of this specific kind of contraception access was based in population control measures aimed at poor, migrant communities. Choosing to have a child out of wedlock is not the same as having more than four children, nor is there necessarily a connection between illegitimacy and large families. In other words, a married couple could decide to have four or five children, which was the argument that Lord Barbazon made in 1964, just as easily as a single woman or unmarried couple could have one child out of wedlock. By grouping illegitimacy and large families under the category of “unwanted pregnancies” the Birth Control Campaign implicitly suggests that there were some people who were not responsible enough to make basic decisions about family size.

By poorly defining “unwanted” pregnancies the Birth Control Campaign also marginalized individual families’ ideas about the number of children they bore. The Campaign offers no discussion of how families might classify such pregnancies. For instance, did an unwanted pregnancy result in putting the child up for adoption, which

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342 Healy, “Britain urged to set an example by adopting a policy on birth control” 14.
would then make the governmental spending that much more important? Was it clear why a woman did not turn to abortion services? Or might it also be true that what the Birth Control Campaign deemed as an “unwanted” pregnancy, might actually have been an *unplanned* pregnancy? If so, that difference is important.

However, the Birth Control Campaign’s biggest contribution to the debate surrounding contraceptive access was to petition the government to make birth control a regularized, possibly free, part of the National Health Service. By making contraception available through the NHS, like abortion, population control would become part of the government’s responsibility to its citizens. The Campaign stated that under the NHS “all forms of family planning, including sterilization, should be free” believing it “illogical that one of the least satisfactory forms of birth control, abortion, was provided inside the NHS and the most satisfactory forms remained outside.”343 In an informational lobbying event for the Labour Party, sponsored by the Campaign, Consultant Gynecologist Peter Diggory “told Labour delegates... that three quarters of couples at risk were obtaining contraceptive advice from chemists [pharmacists], mail order suppliers, barbers and rubber goods shops.”344 This is a confusing statistic considering the presence of clinics run by the national FPA, which had been working to expand awareness of their services. It is difficult to know exactly how many people nationally turned to the FPA for contraceptive information, but clearly Dr. Diggory believed that their reach was not extensive, at least not among the “working-class families most needing advice.”345


344 Ibid.

345 Ibid.
However, considering the thinly veiled population control framework of the FPA and BCC, making contraceptive access an NHS program it is likely that migrants would have remained skeptical of contraceptive access regardless of its source. The Birth Control Campaign was not the only proponent of contraceptive access and population control as related to the relationship between the citizen and the State. Controversial American scholars Paul and Anne Ehrlich published an article in the *Times* entitled “Population: control essential but no panacea.” They admit that even with unfettered access to contraceptives and abortion, “virtually all other human problems - poverty, racial tensions urban blight, environmental decay, warfare - would remain,” However, they assert that overpopulation was not caused because families have more children than they want (because of lack of access to contraceptive measures) but because they want more children that the world can handle. “The slogan ‘every child a wanted child’ represents a socially desirable goal in itself, but unfortunately the primary cause of the world’s population problem is that people want too many children.” Ultimately they posit that contraceptive access, and reducing the size of families, must make individuals “consider both their children’s needs and the needs of society.”[^346] Understood thusly, it is not entirely surprising that there was a good measure of support for making contraceptive access part of the NHS.

In a number of letters to the editor, English citizens contributed to the debate over NHS-prescribed contraceptive methods. Sir Dennis Hill, professor of Psychiatry at London University, wrote that the government should implement population control

measures because “We may be able to feed the people [who are born], but we are unable to make life tolerable for them, and if we cannot we are likely to destroy the quality of human life, as we know it.” A. K. Clarke, a doctor at the London Hospital put the issue in environmental terms: “where do they go - just how much of the green belt will need to be eaten up for housing, etc. How many more motorways, airports, etc?” Dr. Clarke also wondered how Britain could not implement population control measures when there were plans to do so globally: “how can we expect the developing nations to undertake any form of population control if they see countries like this making no effort even to consider the problems officially or to cut the demand for their resources?” And, in a national opinion poll, a majority of the British population believed “that the Government should provide a free birth control service for all men and women who want it.”

But if it seemed liked the general public was in favor of contraceptive access, there might have been less enthusiasm from certain sections of the medical community. In a national conference of general practitioners on the subject of birth control, attendees made a distinction that helps to make clear the different social meanings embedded in the contraceptive debate. In drafting their letter to Sir Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Social Services, doctors wanted to “distinguish between family planning and contraception.” While some doctors could be persuaded to make contraception available “to a responsible married couple [they] might refuse in the case of a 16-year-old girl.”

348 Dr. A. K. Clarke, “letter to the editor” ibid.
Here it is clear that many people, for and against contraceptive access, were concerned with exactly who was allowed to reproduce. Family planning involved a married couple making conscious decisions about the size of their homes, while contraception connoted young, poor, unmarried, promiscuous sex. But if this latter should not have access to contraception, how were they supposed to prevent “unwanted pregnancies.” In the center of the matrix surrounding family planning, contraceptive access, and migrant status one can understand the experiences of Black British women.

*Birth Control: Black Women and “Reproductive Choice”*

The Parliamentary debate regarding making contraceptives available encompassed numerous actors: the medical community, legal experts, social services, advocates of population control as well as women’s right’s groups. Women’s health workers seem to have been marginalized in the debate developing on the pages of the *Times*, even though they did directly support, and benefit from, the 1967 legislation. However, this group was not homogenous. As the *Outwrite* article at the beginning of this chapter demonstrated access to abortion was not the gateway to reproductive freedom and contraceptive choices were not prescribed in a political vacuum.

On January 2, 1975, the National Abortion Campaign [NAC] was organized, in conjunction with the beginning of the International Women’s Year and United Nation’s Decade for Women. The Campaign was originally formed as a partnership between the Abortion Law Reform Association [the advocacy group partially responsible for the 1967 legislation] and National Council for Civil Liberties, under the banner “A Woman’s Right to Choose” to advocate for abortion on demand. Their first effort was to introduce a draft
bill to Parliament “which would effectively give women rather than doctors the right to
decide on an abortion,” clearly attacking the requirement in the Abortion Act that, to
receive an abortion, a woman’s doctor must decide that her mental or physical health was
endangered.

However, Bryan, Dadzie and Scafe asserted, that the push for “abortion on
demand” created tension within women’s rights groups: “when the Women’s Liberation
Movement took up the issue of ‘Abortion on Demand’ in the early seventies, Black
women had to point out that we have always been given abortions more readily than
white women and are indeed often encouraged to have terminations we didn’t ask for.”351
Black women’s critiques of the NAC’s work was based on two important realities of what
later emerged in articulations of Black British feminism. First, they connected the push
for population control with the government’s concurrent immigration control measures.
Second, they asserted that immigration control did not only mean limits to the numbers of
immigrants entering the county, and deporting those made economically or legally
vulnerable; immigration control also meant limiting the reproduction of the Black people
settled there. Thus, for groups like OWAAD and the Outwrite Collective every newly
available contraceptive or “family planning” method was necessarily viewed through the
lens of governmental immigration and population control programs.

Part of the reason Black women were generally skeptical of situating access to
abortion, and later certain kinds of contraception, was their distrust of the British health
system. This sentiment can be understood in this way: “Since we were never identified as

potential consumers of the service [as women and as Black people], our health needs did not enter the debate about the kind of health provision the country would establish.”\textsuperscript{352} But there are indications that this sentiment was mutual as well.

Because the National Health Service is free and accessible to permanent residents and citizens of the United Kingdom, there has been a consistent fear in the public and political sphere that it will be abused. Many of these charges seem to be aimed at the poor and immigrants. The fear of abuse is similar to the rhetorical phenomena of “anchor babies” wherein people (usually of color) immigrate to the United States to give birth to a child who can claim American citizenship; there was an accusation that migrants and immigrants traveled to the UK for free health care. Amidst such anxieties, apparently legal migrants and Commonwealth citizens were being harassed, demonstrating once again that race was considered synonymous with (illegal) “immigrant.”

In June 1981 the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants formally informed the government that they would “encourage individuals to take legal action against hospitals and family doctors if proposals to charge overseas visitors [for NHS] treatment lead to discrimination.” At issue were policies whereby “blacks who have long been settled in the United kingdom have been asked to produce passports,” before receiving medical attention and the concern that new restrictions aimed at temporary visitors would lead to the further harassment of British citizens.\textsuperscript{353} For Black Britons, the process of being made to produce their passports or otherwise prove their citizenship before

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid, 89.

\textsuperscript{353} “Race fear over NHS fees” \textit{London Times} June 8, 1981, 2. Bryan et al mention similar instances such as this in \textit{Heart of the Race}, PAGE NUMBER
receiving health services made clear that policing the borders of British society was more important that Black people’s health.

The widespread distrust of virtually all areas of White power structures like the police (chapter five) and the schools (chapter three) can on the surface read like paranoia. This can be especially true when one considers that the instinctual reaction was to be wary of White officials. For instance throughout 1979, Black community activists in Haringey, North London waged a heavy campaign in their communities to persuade people to protest the test census that year and official 1981 census. In their first issue, OWAAD published a half page report entitled “Have You Heard About the Headcount?” Taking issue with questions about the national origins of one’s parents, racial and ethnic identity and formal naturalization, the article argued that such information would not be used, as the Labour Government suggested, to design new “positive discrimination” (read: affirmative action) schemes for multicultural communities. Instead OWAAD reminded their readers that

little has been done to improve the poor living conditions of most Black people, despite the fact that many of us filled in the housing question ten years ago on the 1971 Census, in the misguided belief that the Government would actually DO SOMETHING [to] improve the slums. We are still living in damp, decaying homes, with no bath rooms, no inside toilets, no running hot water and no effective heating.\(^{354}\)

As they put it, “Black people in this country have for many years now been experiencing the negative discrimination of the British State” and volunteering personal details might place them in a legal limbo or further deteriorate their social conditions, would only add to their vulnerability.\(^{355}\)

\(^{354}\) OWAAD, “Have You Heard About the Headcount?” FOWAAD!, July 1979, 5.

\(^{355}\) Ibid.
However, the foundation for this level of fear was a belief that the British state, and White Britons, viewed Afro-Caribbeans and Asians (migrant or British-born) as interlopers. Being viewed as illegitimate consumers of the NHS was a symptom of their exclusion from the British polity and had sometimes grave consequences on their health. Specifically in terms of reproductive health care, OWAAD believed that “black women’s ability to reproduce has come to be viewed as a moral flaw to be frowned upon and controlled - so much so that doctors frequently take is upon themselves to exercise control over our fertility in the interests of (white) society.”356 In such a construction Black women understood birth control and abortion as a form of population and immigration control, not as methods to improve Black women’s lives. As previously mentioned, the Birth Control Campaign’s push for free contraceptive services as a part of the NHS might have been welcome on an individual basis, but was suspicious at the community level. If the BCC’s goal was to increase access to birth control services, Black women wanted a conscientious examination of how and why Black women were prescribed certain contraceptive methods.

One woman’s troubling experience to find a birth control pill that fit her needs is illustrative of the kinds of problematic care of which Black women were afraid. This unnamed woman turned to her local Family Planing Association after giving birth. She was prescribed birth control pills four times, each time becoming sick. After the last prescription, she returned to the clinic with a swelling stomach and in excruciating pain. Her doctor sent her to the hospital in an ambulance “But they weren’t too concerned

about me in casualty [the emergency room] even though I was crying I was in so much pain. They left me on a trolley in the corridor for hours, and when I couldn’t take it any longer I got up and discharged myself.” Returning to the clinic, she was prescribed an IUD “but it kept slipping... It got stuck in the neck of my womb, and they spent half an hour at the clinic trying to get it out.” She then told her doctor that she had enough. It was not until a friend told her about a low estrogen birth control pill that she found a contraceptive method that would work, but getting a prescription was not an easy process: “I really had to put up a fight to get them to prescribe it for me. You know why? Because it was a low dosage pill and they didn’t think I was responsible enough to take it regularly at the same time every day.”

Access to new contraceptive methods could potentially give women substantive reproductive freedom, but not if certain classes of women had their choices constricted for the benefit of the public rather than the individual. Commenting in the 1980s on the ways in which the British health care system had failed Black women, a member of OWAAD had this to say:

There are a lot of doctors who don’t even bother to make a secret of the fact that they go along with the idea that we are sapping this country’s resources, and see it as their professional duty to keep our numbers down. They say thing’s like, ‘Well, you’ve already got two children, so why do you need to have any more? You might as well get your tubes tied when you come in for that D & C.’ It’s only when you hear Black women talking and realise how many of us this is happening to that you see things in perspective. And you begin to realise that it’s not just about bad resources or neglect. It’s about racism. They don’t want us here anymore

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357 Ibid, 101-102.
and they don’t need our kids to work for them, so it’s easier just to quietly kill us off.\(^{358}\)

For exactly this reason, Black women advocated contraceptive options that placed the onus of control in their hands, rather than their doctors. And they would organize their largest objection to the use of Depo-Provera.

*Banning the Jab: The International Case Against Depo-Provera*

On March 18, 1979 the Organization for Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD) organized the first national Black Wont’s conference. Held at the Abeng Centre in Brixton, South London “nearly 300 Black women got together from places as far afield as Birmingham, Brighton, Leeds, Coventry, Manchester, Sheffield, Bristol and London to discuss some of the many issues which concern us because we are Black, female, working-class or all three,” ranging in age from fifteen to sixty-five. The first issue of *FOWAAD!*, envisioned as the “mouthpiece” of Black women in Britain, reported the range of issues discussed at the conference. From their beginning, OWAAD joined a handful of groups engaging in a critique of Depo-Provera, who situated their vulnerability as perpetual outsiders in the British polity alongside discussions of reproductive options.\(^{359}\)

The American pharmaceuticals firm, Upjohn, developed Depot medroxyprogesterone, more commonly known under its trade name, Depo-Provera (or Depo), in 1958 as a treatment for endometrial cancer, endometriosis and to prevent miscarriages.\(^{360}\) In the UK, the pharmaceuticals company operated as Upjohn

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\(^{358}\) Ibid, 104-105.


\(^{360}\) Medroxyprogesterone was also available in pill form, marketed as Provera.
International and manufactured the drug from their labs in Crawley, Sussex in Southeast England. In the early 1960s doctors discovered that women taking Depo were infertile while on the drug and soon after funded human trials in Jamaica and the U.S. (Atlanta and Los Angeles).361

Depo Provera has a particularly checkered past as a contraceptive. The drug has been plagued by accusations that it causes various forms of cancer, permanent infertility, may be passed to breastfeeding infants through milk and can cause heavy, prolonged menstrual bleeding; all denied by Upjohn at the time. The most controversial and sustained accusation against Depo has centered on whether or not its use as a contraceptive, i.e. prolonged use, caused cancer. Claims that the drug may cause breast cancer stemmed from a seven-year beagle study of medroxyprogesterone acetate in pill from, known as Provera, “which had resulted in breast tumors, some of them malignant.”362 In a later study, on beagles as well, all of those on the highest dose (sixteen times the regular human dose) died. And in 1967, a ten year study of Depo-Provera on rhesus monkeys “suggested an association between Depo-Provera and cancer of the endometrium.”363 At roughly the same time, Upjohn removed a form of Depo-Provera used in veterinary medicine, Promone, amid fears that it caused uterine infection and hyperplasia.364 In pulling the drug from the market, the company sent veterinarians and pet owners a letter stating: “The evidence linking Promone to its side-effects in dogs is

362 Ibid, 8.
363 Ibid, 9.
not conclusive, but until our studies are complete, its sale is discontinued.”365 The medical community and potential consumers wondered if Depo-Provera would have similar effects on women, however, Upjohn repeatedly denied that the drug would react the same in humans, but could not support this positions with evidence from their human trials. The mystery surrounding the drug’s longterm effects on women were curious, mad even more suspicious when Upjohn repeatedly petitioned the British Committee for the Safety of Medicines and the American Food and Drug Administration to approve the drug.

Depo was first introduced to the English market as a contraceptive at least as early as 1975, but with serious restrictions on its use. In 1976, the Family Planning Association applied to the CSM “to make [Depo] as freely available as the pill.”366 At roughly the same time the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was facing similar appeals from Upjohn to license Depo domestically as well. The CSM and FDA both denied the company’s applications amid growing fears that the drug was unsafe. In 1978, the CSM turned down the Family Planning Association’s request and designated Depo-Provera a drug of last resort “for women whose partners are undergoing vasectomy... And are waiting for it to become effective, and for women who have been immunized against rubella... After which it is very important not to get pregnant for 8-12 weeks.”367 Upjohn continued to petition the CSM to give Depo a full license (approval for longterm use) but by the late 1970s British women’s health activists began to argue that Upjohn sought the

365 Quoted in Laura Fraser, “The Deadly Riddle of Depo-Provera” San Francisco Bay Guardian, October 9-16, 1985 11.


367 Campaign Against Depo-Provera, Depo-Provera, 21.
drug’s approval, and doctor’s continued to prescribe it (often against governmental mandates), because Depo was a useful means of population control.

OWAAD’s first coverage on Depo was a review of an episode of the London Programme, a regional television news show, about Depo-Provera’s use. During the course of the show, the story of an unnamed fourteen-year-old West Indian girl was presented. When she visited the hospital to have a tonsillectomy doctor’s discovered that she was pregnant. She wanted to have an abortion and requested to have a uterine coil fit after that procedure. Some days after that surgery she learned that she had also been given a dose of Depo. Intrauterine devices and hormone injectables are similar in that they are classified as “provider dependent” contraceptive methods, meaning that a woman must rely on her physician to administer them and, in the case of IUDs, a medical professional is also necessary for its removal. They are also both considered long-lasting contraceptives: some IUDs can last for roughly ten years while Depo remains in the woman’s system for three months. Thus, the onus of control with these methods lies with the medical practitioner rather than the woman. That this young girl was given a form of birth control for which she did not ask and without her knowledge stripped her of the little agency she attempted to exert over her life. But what made this case so offensive to OWAAD was that, as discussed above, the medical community was still unsure of Depo’s potential side effects.

Throughout the article, OWAAD makes clear that they believe Depo was being used in Britain as a means of population control for Black women. They argued that the drug had been “given mainly to Black and working-class white women by doctors who
are ignoring the recommendations of the Committee for the Safety of Medicine.” In other words, they alleged that the drug was prescribed for longer than the six months (2 injections) that the CSM approved because doctors believed that poor and Black women were blights on the English social welfare system, exhibiting an institutional xenophobia within the medical profession. Thus it is important to note that the doctor on the London Programme who injected the fourteen-year-old with Depo called her educationally subnormal (ESN), situating her as socially marginal and unfit to reproduce, a label often and incorrectly given to migrant and British-born Black children since the late 1960s. The physician disregarded his patient’s wishes because he believed that it was his “moral duty... to make the decision for her.”

Young Asian women were also perceived as another group vulnerable to reproductive abuse through the prescription of Depo-Provera. In the review of the London Programme, OWAAD took issue with the fact that the journalists made “No real attempt... to investigate more thoroughly the allegation that DP [Depo] is being given to large numbers of Black women, particularly to Asian sisters in the East End of London, although they did broadcast the alarming figures.” The crux of this issue was that doctors, private physicians and family planning centers, were taking advantage of Asian women who spoke little or no English to inject them with Depo-Provera without their informed consent. In a lengthy letter to the editors of **FOWAAD!**, one OWAAD supporter/member recounted a story such as this.

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368 OWAAD, “D.P. On TV” **FOWAAD!**, July 1979, 8.

369 Ibid
In her letter this woman, who did not sign her name, shared her own troubled history with birth control, which resulted in deep vein thrombosis and two instances of pelvic inflammatory disease, which made her unwilling to subject her body “any further to the disposal of various pharmaceutical companies.” However she was not eager to have another child and visited her local Family Planning Center. In the waiting room she noticed a number of flyers advertising various kinds of contraceptives, including Depo, but she noted that there was “no warning to the user of side effects.” She was instantly alarmed “for there in the waiting room were ‘consumers’, most of whom had two or three babies, Asian sisters who couldn’t read English, Saudies [sic], Arabs, who couldn’t speak it at all, except for ‘Yes Miss’.” She wondered then:

how many other sisters have been led blindly down what seems a safe path to disaster. How long I ask myself is this going to go on... We have to educate ourselves and know how to go about doing it, and support and inform the sisters who do not understand. It scares me to think how easy it is for them to give DP to sisters, who are not in the know.

In the end, the letter demonstrates her growing distrust of the medical community and family planning advocates. She wondered about the ease of coercion for women who did not speak English and were inclined to believe that their doctors had their best interests in mind; women “who would not refuse anything in that caring, helpful atmosphere [of the FPC].” Her encounter led her to question what she had initially believed to be the “outgoing, efficient” atmosphere of the FPC. She wondered if the FPC “was a touch too caring” and signed her letter with the questioning challenge that “After all, the ‘Doctors’ know best. Or do they?”

Women’s health advocates offered a critique of Depo-Provera, which suggested that doctors prescribed the drug without any care for their patients’ health. For instance, a Black mother profiled on the London Programme was prescribed Depo by the Domiciliary Family Planing Service after giving birth to her first child. The woman “was not told what the drug was, nor was she warned of the possible side effects.” She eventually gained a considerable amount of weight and began to suffer from depression, but it was “Only when the same doctor decided (once again without consulting her) to take her off the drug a year later, did she realise that the drug was responsible for all the unpleasant side effects she had been experiencing.”

And even though the CSM only approved one or two injections “Doctors can, and often do, exert their ‘clinical judgement’ and give... Depo-Provera for longer periods - for years, rather than months.” These physicians put women at risk of possible side effects without any concrete understanding of its potential side effects. Organizations like OWAAD and the Campaign Against Depo Provera argued that these circumstances only made sense if one understood that the use of Depo was part of initiatives to limit the reproduction of Afro-Caribbean and Asian women in the interest of the public, rather than individual woman’s desires.

The greatest buttress for such a construction lay in the fact that Depo-Provera was being used throughout the developing world as part of population control measures. The International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF), World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Fund for Population Activities and United States Agency for International Development...


Development (USAID) were all providing Depo-Provera to developing countries such as India, Zimbabwe and South Africa as part of population control measures. In fact in 1978, when the CSM restricted Depo’s use and the FDA refused to license it in the United States, the IPPF and WHO reaffirmed their support for Depo’s use abroad. The Black British health activists saw this coincidence of events as related to their social marginality, which made them akin to their “Third World sisters,” situating themselves almost as a domestic “third world.”

By the early 1980s the syringe had become the popular symbol for Depo-Provera amongst women’s health activists. In the Campaign Against Depo Provera’s 1983 report on its use in the United Kingdom, the cover featured a provocative drawing calling attention to its use in population control programs: a plane dropping several syringes from the sky. And in another undated informational flyer the Campaign placed a large menacing sketch of a syringe under the words “Ban the Jab.” The CSM continued to allow Depo to be prescribed as the last resort of women for whom other contraceptives did not work. By 1984, however, advocates of Depo’s use and their opponents faced a final English confrontation.

In the second issue of Outwrite, the newspaper published a two-page spread on Depo written by the Campaign for Depo Provera. The articles gave information on the use of Depo domestically and globally, including Bangladesh, Kenya and Papua New

375 Campaign Against Depo-Provera, Depo-Provera, 16; Olive Morris Collection, Minet Library, Lambeth Archives, IV/279/1/14, 27
Guinea. In it they argue that Depo was “being given by doctors on social grounds, to women who they consider inadequate in some way” which they clearly believed fueled its use globally as well.376 They advocated for a “world-wide ban” on Depo and accused “the International family planning agencies of racist double standards in encouraging the use of this hazardous injection.”377 They followed this article the subsequent year with a comprehensive report on the international history of Depo Provera wherein they accused British health professionals of racism. Most shockingly they quote Dr. Elphis Christopher, also featured in the London Programme, who had this to say about informed consent and the prescription of Depo:

I think they (women) need to be involved in this decision making. But I think that the amount you tell a woman has to be graded with what you feel her level of understanding might be, I mean you can worry people very much by going into all the list of side-effects and that puts them off completely and they can’t evaluate the risks... if you’re faced with women as I am, for example, a girl of 22 who say has already had four children and had two abortions and hasn’t got on with other methods, then Depo would seem to be the answer for that sort of woman. But she is poor, and she also happens to be black... so it looks as if you’re singling out the poor, the black.”378

Even though this doctor gives a superficial nod to the importance for women to be involved in their choice of contraception, he clearly believed that doctor’s knew a woman needs better than she might herself. This quote sums up the Campaign’s general assertion that Depo ultimately deprived women of contraceptive choice.

In 1982 the CSM reversed its previous decision and approved Depo for long-term, but in May of the same year Health Minister Kenneth Clarke refused its license amidst

376 “Depo-Provera... Ban It!” Outwrite, Issue 2, 1982, 9.
377 Ibid.
378 Campaign Against Depo-Provera, Depo-Provera, 35.
“fears that it would be given to poorly-educated women or ethnic minorities, without their informed consent.” 379 Minister Clarke argued that “the risk... appears to outweigh the benefit from such use.”  Minster Clarke took issue with restricting the drug’s use to “women many of whom would have difficulty in giving informed consent to their treatment.” 380 Upjohn appealed the Minister’s decision and in April of 1983 the government held a public hearing to settle the situation once and for all.

The five-day hearing, which began on the morning of April 25, featured testimony from physicians, and scholars of law and ethics. The panel was also presented written evidence, including a 400-page report from the Coordinating Group on Depo-Provera, which featured information from 100 women “who felt they were not fully informed of the possible side effects of Depo-Provera. Many were women with a poor understanding of English for whom no provision had been made for information to be given in their own language.” 381 At the trial, scientists once again pointed to the paucity of information about Depo. Professor William Asscher, professor of medicine at the Welsh National School of Medicine, “pointed out that the drug had been in use for 15 years, it was approved in 85 countries and had been used by 10 million women. Yet he had seen no reports of mortality or morbidity rates. That must mean that either it was the most superb drug or that it had not been very well studied.” 382 Another witness, Diane Josephine Barnes, however, suggested “that the problems of giving Depo-Provera to women who


cannot understand its risks and benefits are no different from those of any drug,” while the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists and the Family Planning Association supported the use of Depo as “just another alternative in the choice of contraceptives.” In 1984, England’s Department of Health and Social Security officially approved Depo’s full license domestically.

In the same year, the FDA held their own public inquiry on Depo. At both hearings women’s health groups were barred from giving testimony and like the Coordinating Group on Depo-Provera, the American National Women’s Health Network submitted a lengthy report culling information from testimonies of American women who had been prescribed Depo Provera. While the U.S. did not approve Depo until 1992, both trials hinged on the claim that population control measures were the true motivator for Upjohn’s seven year battle. The domestic market for a drug like Depo-Provera was actually quite small “but a positive decision from the British authorities would help Upjohn to sell the drug in other areas - such as developing countries - where the market is much larger.” In the same way, Upjohn and its supporters were concerned that a rejection by the FDA would limit their ability to sell the drug abroad. Aware of this fact, when the FDA rejected the drug in 1978, they included this caveat in their statement to Upjohn:

We recognize that the risk/benefit considerations may be different in other nations, where the alternative methods of contraception may be less


384 For an in depth discussion of this trial see Wendy Kline, Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women’s Health in the Second Wave (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

available and less acceptable and where the physician/patient ratio is lower. Our evaluation of your supplement (i.e. application for a licence) was based on benefit/risk considerations in the United States.\textsuperscript{386} That physicians and scientists believed that Depo-Provera could be “just another” contraceptive method demonstrates that they completely misunderstood the critique women’s health activists were making.

Discriminatory prescriptions of Depo divested women of the ability to make informed decisions about their reproductive capabilities. Prescribing Depo to women without making clear all of its potential side effects assumed that weight gain, decreased libido, and prolonged bleeding did not have a dramatic impact on a woman’s life; ignoring her need to take care of other children or maintain a job or even have a fulfilling sexual life. At the same time it assumed that women were willing to potentially gamble their reproductive futures to prevent present pregnancies. And most importantly, governmental and majority White birth control agencies, like the Family Planning Centers and Birth Control Campaign, automatically categorized unplanned pregnancies as unwanted babies, which was not necessarily true for Black women.\textsuperscript{387} Even though they were ultimately unable to block Depo-Provera’s use in Britain, Black women’s work towards reproductive freedom coincided with larger initiatives for women’s health and Black community health in ways that were politically expedient, while also connecting their specific analyses based on sex, gender, migration and class marginalization.

\textit{A New Kind of Care-Work: Sites and Strategies for a Politics of Care}


\textsuperscript{387} Bryan et al, \textit{The Heart of the Race}, 103.
The distrust aimed at the National Health Service (NHS) was not universal, or at least it manifested in various ways. At least one group of women intimately understood problems within the NHS. Migrant Caribbean nurses resident in England offered a critique of the English racism, which was grounded in an important iteration of a politics of care. Migrant Caribbean nurses displaced their caring efforts from their work to their families and communities, asserting that nursing was a job like any other.

In the August 1974 issue of *Race Today*, the Collective ran a special expose written by the Brixton Black Women’s Group on Black women in the nursing profession. In the editorial introducing the issue Lorrine Burt and Leila Hassan situated the politics of the Collective as well as the importance of Black women’s contributions to Black community politics. They assert that “the editorial policy of *Race Today* has registered a complete break with those who seek to negate the particularity of the black women’s position for some ‘larger struggle’ whether those who advance it are black men or women, white men or women.” Burt and Hassan’s editorial asserted that Black nurses were organizing for increased pay as part of a “general struggle” in which all Black people benefitted: “Whatever methods women find to struggle - in their own way - they are raising issues that face us all.” Social understandings of Black British migration had been overwhelmingly based in the Black male experience and men’s experiences in the world of work. But throughout the 1960s and 1970s many more Black women moved to the Mother Country specifically to train as nurses for the NHS. Whatever their expectations, many found the experience both dehumanizing and frustrating. Faced with constraints placed on their training and job prospects many Black nurses came to
consider their work as just that, work; making their homes, families (especially children) and communities the onus of their care-work.  

The Brixton Black Women’s Group (BWG) was a Black feminist organization formed in 1973 “to organize around the specific issues affecting us.... issues [that] were never discussed much less taken up, by the already existing organizations in the area.”

Possibly owing to the founders’ involvement in other social movements, they worked with anti-racist, anti-imperialist organizations like Black People Against State Harassment (BASH); Black People Against State Brutality, “an initiative largely taken by Black women as a reaction to police brutality in Southall”; and the Indian Worker’s Association. They also formed coalitions with other women’s groups like Awaz (Asian Women’s Movement) on issues of immigration law reform and White women, to mobilize against Depo-Provera as well as community groups like the West Indian Parents’ Action Group, specifically in the area of education activism.

Since their inception, the organization was focused on bringing to the fore of activist circles the particularities of Black women migrants’ experiences. The Black Women’s Group’s newsletter, *Speak Out*, originated because “too little is known about the history of Black women.” They assert that “It is not widely appreciated that Black women started to come form the West Indies to Britain in the 50’s and 60’s either because we were duped by an invitation from the British government to help staff the National

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Health Service or London Transport.” Upon arrival, they were confronted, not with a warm, or even civil, welcome. Rather they posit that in England, Black women became the new underdogs. We faced racist and exploitative landlords and the least desirable and lowest paid jobs, many of which were non-unionized. Where unions did exist, they were not interested in defending our rights. The British government, meanwhile, was complacent since it was interested in the labour power of Black people, not in their social welfare.

While the BWG believed that there were many communities of Black women who faced serious deprivation, such as single mothers and young Black girls in English schools, for instance, they felt that migrant Black nurses faced a unique form of exploitation. At the intersection of discrimination against Black people, women, migrants, and the feminization of nursing, the BWG asserted that nursing was “a job like any other” to critique the social and political exploitation of nurses, while offering new priorities for the care-work Black nurses were assumed to center on their patients.390

In “Black Women and Nursing: A Job Like Any Other”, the BWG covered ongoing strikes among the nation’s nurses, Black and White, to illustrate “that the presence of black women in the health industry has been crucial in bringing the struggle to its present stage.” Extremely critical of the NHS, the article presents the group’s interviews with Black nurses to assert that “What used to be a vocation for women of the middle class is now a job for women of the working class... Particularly for black and other immigrant women.” They situate nurses as trapped by social expectations that they

work because of a desire to care for people, thereby making their jobs extensions of society’s expectations of women.391

Much of the analysis offered in this article centered on the differences in training, pay, and respect given to State Enrolled Nurses (SEN) and State Registered Nurses (SRN). When the government nationalized the NHS there was an urgent need to find enough nurses to care for the growing numbers of patients. Like the industrial and transportation services, the NHS recruited workers from abroad, mostly from former colonies and Commonwealth countries: “In 1959, approximately 6,000 came in; in 1970, just under 19,000... mainly from the Caribbean, Hong Kong, Mauritius, Malaysia... and Ireland.” State Enrolled Nurses completed a two-year training course while SRNs complete a three-year training period. Throughout the training, SRNs and SENs received the same stipends, but when they entered the workforce the disparities between the two positions became clear. Senior SENs earned roughly £30 more than the most junior SRNs, who at their highest pay could make almost three times as the former. Also, without the extra training, SENs had virtually no possibility for promotion, while the BWG said that the SEN classification was “of no use to them outside Britain, but...guarantees a trained, low paid workforce on the ward floor [in England].” Thus the picture of NHS hospitals presented in this article was one of rigid hierarchy meant to keep Black women underpaid and overworked, as a means to care for the population at large.

Labour in the hospital is devised according to sex, race, and age. Different jobs are done by people in different uniforms, getting different wages, and

have different degrees of power. Those who work the hardest have the least status and the least wages. These wages further reinforced the division between those who are ‘professionals’ and those who are not. For many Asian, West Indian and Irish nurses, a large proportion of SENs according to the BWG, nursing was yet another site for discrimination and exploitation. Thus they did not view their work as necessarily reflecting some intrinsic desire to care for those in need; they viewed it as a job, from which they could leave and strike and collectively bargain to best suit their familial and financial needs.\(^{392}\)

On the other hand, the BWG presents the work of Agency nurses, a more flexible and sometimes higher paid position. Agency nursing, similar to home nursing aids, received relatively short-term assignments to help the elderly or physically disabled. The BWG asserts that agency work was often the only outlet for Black nurses who left the NHS to give birth to children thereby losing their accrued seniority and equivalent wages. In fact, at various levels of their career family concerns, specifically child rearing and child care, directed Black nurses’ career choices. As one interviewee, only identified as Mrs. D a Jamaican migrant SEN and agency nurse, offered:

> I’m working now in Battersea. Most of the night staff are black. Night nurses are black because they have children and it’s more convenient for them to be at home in the days to see after the children. If you work days you’re not there to send them off to school, you’re not there to receive them when they come back, and you have to get somebody to look after them. With nights, you can actually put them off to bed before going to work.

Thus, the BWG situated agency nurses as “the first refusal to be tied to the hospital hierarchy, thereby confronting the blackmail that faces all nurses, that they are caring ‘professionals’ and not workers.” Many of the BWG’s earliest members, including one of

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\(^{392}\) Ibid, 227.
its co-founders Olive Morris, were also members of Britain’s Black Panther Party and Marxist or socialist organizations. Thus the critiques they offered of the nursing profession was based squarely within their critique of capitalist exploitation.\(^{393}\)

This critique of the NHS and nursing also engaged a politics of care. By refusing to accept their nursing work as a form of caring they owed their patients, who represented society at large, they sought to disassociate the profession from its underpinnings as an extension of “women’s work.” They asserted that women did not become nurses because they had a desire to care for other people, their decisions to work in the health care field were rational career choices, equivalent to factory work or training for higher education. As Trinidadian-migrant SEN, Grace Jenkins, said: “I didn’t really want to nurse but I wanted to leave Trinidad” and “I’m doing Agency work now - during my holiday period. I need the money.” Thus Black women’s career choices were made with self-interest, not a desire for womanly sacrifice.\(^{394}\)

If nursing was not the outlet for their caring work, families emerged as their preferred site to expend such energy. Mrs. Andrews, nursing assistant, explained that she did not feel any desire to continue her nursing training “because I have fulfilled my goal by bringing up my two children on my own... Just where I am is where I want to stay and I will be just on the outside looking in at them [senior nurses] fighting. They don’t have time for their husbands; it’s just position, position.”\(^{395}\) Even though such a construction could, on the service, be classified as Black nurses privileging their maternal “duties”

\(^{393}\) Ibid, 230.
\(^{394}\) Ibid, 227.
\(^{395}\) Ibid, 228.
over professional development, this was not actually the case. Black nurses did not experience their work without particular abuse from their employers, superiors and patients. In a short article, “Black Nurse in White Hospital”, the unnamed author illustrates how her position as a nurse exposed her to verbal abuse in the course of performing her duties.

In three years I have only nursed three of my people [Black people]. Most black girls go into nursing with good intentions, however half way through their training their attitude begins to change. The change is brought about by the treatment they receive at the hands of their colleagues, senior staff and patients. It is a regular habit of most white people in hospitals to make things as difficult as possible for the Black Nurse by making dirty remarks. She in turn is expected to take these remarks as unmeaning[ful]. But how can I take phrases such as - “Black whore”, “Black bitch” and the like, as meaningless... We realise that in every place where black men work, insults are levelled [sic] at them. These insults are meant to make black men ashamed of their blackness. However with nurses, the situation is even worse. We meet these people when they can no longer hide their true feelings. When these people insult us they do so from the heart.396

By refusing to center their care-work in nursing activities, Black women resisted the dehumanizing experiences recounted here. At the same time, they separated themselves emotionally from the process of caring for sick patients, preserving as best they could, their full emotional selves and energies for their children. And most importantly, in a society that situated Black mothers, especially single mothers, as absentee parents these nurses’ conscious decisions proved such assertions false, exposing “the real nature of nursing in the health service... Undermining the hierarchy which depends on them wanting to be a part of it.”397

396 “Black Nurse in White Hospital” Black Parents Movement, 3/1/4/1, George Padmore Institute, London.

Conclusion

For Black women in Britain, achieving reproductive freedom could not be separated from their position as migrants, the racism they experienced while in England, and the inequality they encountered as women. In many ways their experiences were distinct from White society and from men of color, even as the experiences of Asian women were different from West Indian women. The ability to have, or not have, a child was tied to issues of bodily control, racism, and economic exploitation, which all speak to the matrix through which Black women understood contraceptives like Depo-Provera, abortion access and the idea of reproductive rights. While ultimately unsuccessful in stopping Depo’s full release onto the British market, one could argue that their secondary goal, to expose Black women to potential sites for abuse by “well-meaning” doctors and family planning centers, was achieved at least in some measure. However, reproductive health was also intimately connected with the overall health of their larger communities. Organizations like OWAAD and the BWG worked on issues of immigration, education reform, police brutality, resources for single mothers, and also in the health care arena: sickle cell anemia testing as part of a larger struggle to give Black people the right to total health and well-being.

For many of these activists their health work emerged out of their own experiences of ill health or reproductive abuse. And for members of the Brixton Black Women’s Group and Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent, their organizational history was forever affected by their triumphs as well as one loss in particular. The last page of the first issue of *FOWAAD!* paid tribute to Olive Morris,
foundering member of OWAAD and the BWG, member of the British Black Panther Party, Manchester Black Women’s Co-operative, Black Women’s Mutual Aid Group, and Brixton Legal Centre. Olive was born in Jamaica and moved to England with her family at the age of nine. By her teenage years, she had become a politically and socially conscious activist who demonstrated her commitment to social change through her involvement in a variety of progressive organizations. She died of cancer on July 12, 1979 leaving behind an extensive legacy of social activism, if not a gaping hole in the many organizations she helped build and the many people’s lives she touched. Today, she is remembered warmly, especially within the community that she called home, both personally and politically. In 1986, Lambeth Council memorialized Olive’s contributions to the area by renaming a local building in her honor and in 2010 her image graced the £5 note on the Brixton Pound (a currency developed to be used locally to encourage patronage of community shops). But OWAAD’s tribute to Olive is possibly the most fitting that could be offered at the time: “Everyone who came into contact with Olive was touched by her honesty, her humour and her passionate love of her people, we will remember her until long after the struggles to which she committed her life have become tomorrows victories.” 398

**Not Suffering In Silence: Black Women’s Health and Black Feminist Politics**

I have a right to life, to a house, education, job, food, a good, high quality standard of living, and a right to control my reproduction.\(^{399}\)

In their late 1980s mission statement, “We Remember,” African American Women are for Reproductive Justice offered a complex description of the goals of Black women’s health work. The statement, compiled and published by such Black women’s activists like Byllye Avery, Shirley Chisholm and Dorothy Height argues that the effect of race, sex, and class on Black women’s experience of ill health could not be divorced form the Black community’s health or that of other women’s communities. Throughout their statement they critique the vast inequalities in American society as shaping the realities of popular understandings of health. Specifically they argue that a “pro-life” position (too often situated as the antithesis of “pro-choice”) must be understood within the historical and contemporary attacks on the lives of Black people: “So when somebody denouncing abortion claims that they’re ‘pro-life,’ remind them of an old saying that our grandmothers often used: ‘It’s not important what people say, it’s what they do.’” Thus, attempting to save the “life” of a fetus could not, and should not, be understood as a stance to preserve life if it was not also accompanied by efforts to make healthy foods affordable and available in poor communities, diagnose and change the health disparities between White and Black Americans, provide affordable housing to poor communities, or

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make infant and maternal health a priority in urban hospitals (which disproportionately serve poor communities of color), for instance. Therefore the single issue of abortion was not the litmus test for a person’s “pro-life” stance, it was but one aspect.400

At the same time, African American Women are for Reproductive Justice situated the contemporary problems with a “pro-life” stance in historical terms. They close their document thusly: “And remember who we are, remember our history, our continuing struggle for freedom. Remember to tell them that We Remember!”401 In this way, they place their position on health within the context of long-term activism on the behalf of Black women, and the Black community, and most likely in the terms of contemporary Black freedom struggles. If, the larger civil rights framework was concerned with giving African Americans the same socio-political and economic opportunities as their White counterparts, providing Black women with the right to control their own reproduction, without coercion or abuse, and the possibility to bear however many children they desired was a fight for the freedoms offered to middle-class White women.

Most importantly, this mission statement argued for the right of self-determination, such an integral part of the American psyche.

You may believe abortion is wrong. We respect your belief and we will do all in our power to protect that choice for you. You may decide that abortion is not an option you would choose. Reproductive freedom guarantees your right not to. All that we ask is that no one deny another human being the right to make her own choice. That no one condemn her to exercising her choices in ways that endanger her health, her life. And

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401 Ibid.
that no one prevent others from creating safe, affordable, legal conditions to accommodate women, whatever the choices they make.\footnote{402}

The history of Black women’s health activism of the 1970s and 1980s involved a specific understanding of health, which addressed the affects of racism, poverty and sexism on the mental and physical lives of Black people.

This chapter traces Black women’s articulation of the reproductive health movement through their activism and writings. Since much of Black women’s health work took place in local communities, often outside the public gaze (White or Black), the larger picture of that work is still being uncovered. However, these women inserted the largely hidden history of ill health among Black women as the foundation for their activist politics. Throughout their work Black women situated reproduction as vital to Black women’s health because of the ways in which reproduction engaged individual woman’s right to control her own body; affected the maintenance of the African American community; and contributed to the process of placing the health of and care for Black people as part of their rights as American citizens.

*Empty Wells: Sterilization and the Women’s Health Movement*

“Looking back on the whole experience, I realize I made mistakes. Maybe I didn’t ask enough questions, maybe I should have sought another professional opinion, maybe...” is the way Valerie Jo Bradley ends an account of her hysterectomy in 1969. At twenty-three she entered the hospital for abdominal pains that her doctors were unable to diagnose.

“Hospitals scare me,” she writes, and that fear colored her experience there. Over a week later and still in the hospital, her doctor scheduled an exploratory surgery to determine the

\footnote{402 Ibid.}
nature of a mass in her abdomen. Valerie experienced the preparation for her surgery again through her fear of hospitals feeling, “defenseless, [because] nobody I loved was there to protect me.” During the operation, the ovarian cyst her surgeons were exploring burst: “I heard them rip my skin but I couldn’t feel anything. I screamed, ‘What the fuck is going on?’ I wanted to jump off the table, I tried but I couldn’t move.” Shortly thereafter the doctor told her, “I might have to give you a hysterectomy,” and he did.⁴⁰³

Valerie’s account of her experiences, entitled “It Happened on My Birthday” was delivered in March 1974, in Washington D.C. at a conference convened to examine the mental and physical health problems facing Black women. The conference was co-sponsored by the Black Women’s Community Development Foundation, Black Women Organized for Action, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the League of Black Women, and the Solomon Fuller Institute. At the proceedings, the sixty attendees (including health care professionals, activists, and educators) considered the effect and importance of hypertension, fibroid tumors, sterilization, suicide and depression on the lives of Black women. In examining each health risk, papers were presented discussing current data and future research needs.

Valerie’s account of her sterilization sums up the undercurrent of the problems Black women faced when encountering the health care system. She makes mention continuously of the lack of information given to her by her doctors and nurses. In fact, upon waking up from her surgery she recounts her physical struggle to reach her medical chart to find out exactly which procedures had been performed, even though she

“couldn’t make heads nor tails of what was on it.” But her nurse grabbed the chart from her hands and told her, “You’re not supposed to read that.”

At the same time, Valerie remembers being taken aback by what she perceived as uncaring and misunderstanding medical professionals. For instance, when temporarily released from the hospital to spend the night with her mother, Valerie’s doctor said “Now promise me you won’t have sexual intercourse if I let you go home.” As the conference participants recounted the myriad social pressures bearing on Black women’s health, they discussed perceptions of Black women as “domineering, matriarchal” and hyper-fertile figures who did not adequately care for their children. Thus, Valerie’s physician’s worry that she would engage in intercourse during her one night away from the hospital is telling. And for Valerie, in hindsight, this statement should have let her know “then what he thought of me and my well-being.”

Valerie’s account of her sterilization is an important introduction to the reasons why sterilization had come to monopolize Black women’s involvement with reproductive health activism. The account of her sterilization and its affect on her life read like a wound that had yet to heal. She speaks morosely about previous plans to start a family and the fear she faced when telling a partner of her infertility. In their official report, the sessions on sterilization resulted in “dramatic” and “disquieting” accounts of violations similar to Valerie’s. At the end of this section in the report they offer a list of practical recommendations for Black women when discussing a reproductive matter with their

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405 Ibid, 104.
doctor. The most important recommendation being that women ask questions and make sure received answers in clear language they understand.

What, specifically, and in understandable layman’s terms, is the nature of my condition? Is surgery the only approach to my problem? What, specifically, will be the effects of the proposed procedure? Will I suffer hormonal changes? Will my menstrual cycle be affected? Will my capacity to bear children be affected in any way? Does my condition require immediate medical attention? These common sense questions, they believed, could prevent a woman from permanently losing the ability to bear children without her consent. The simple, thorough nature of these questions is based in a history of experiential reproductive abuse. The entire section, in fact, is clearly influenced by the fact that for African American women reproductive freedoms still did not exist in the shadow of Roe v. Wade.

Black women’s health activists in the 1970s and 1980s understood the normalization of the abuse of Black women in the American health care system as exemplified in the prevalence of sterilization of Black women. Valerie agrees in hindsight: “Thinking back on that morning I don’t think they intended to explore a damn thing,” thereby situating the loss of her reproductive capabilities as an inevitability rather than an unfortunate consequence.

In the Southern Poverty Law Center’s (SPLC) 1973 case against the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW) and Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), they argued that motherhood, and the protection of motherhood, was a constitutional right. Initiated on the behalf of Katie, Minnie, Mary Alice and their father Lonnie Relf, the history of the reproductive abuses against this poor African American family from

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406 Black Women’s Community Development Foundation, Miniconsultation on the Mental and Physical Health Problems of Black Women, 21.

Montgomery, Alabama was a painful exploration of the depths of continuing Black marginalization.\textsuperscript{408} And for many members of the Black community this case overshadowed the legalization of abortion the same year, and placed in stark relief the problem of reducing reproductive rights to increased access to birth control measures.

When the Relf family moved to Montgomery, Alabama, the former sharecroppers turned to local welfare agencies for financial assistance. In their case against HEW and the OEO, the Relfs claimed that the local family planning clinic, part of the federally funded Montgomery Community Action Committee, “began the unsolicited administration of experimental birth control injections to [eldest sister] Katie” and eventually younger sisters Minnie Lee and Mary Alice, in each case possibly absent any parental permission. The SPLC and Relf family believed that “the agency sought out the Relf children as good experimental subjects for their family planning program” by nature of their race and poverty.\textsuperscript{409} Initially the Community Action Committee gave all three girls injections of Depo-Provera, developed in 1958 by the American pharmaceuticals firm Upjohn. Medroxyprogesterone, (or Depo), was originally used in treatments for endometrial cancer, endometriosis and to prevent miscarriages, until, in the early 1960s, doctors discovered that women were infertile while on the drug.\textsuperscript{410}

However, Depo-Provera was not approved for use as a contraceptive by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) at the time. The FDA classified Depo as an “investigational drug” which allowed clinics to study its effects in controlled

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{408} It is not clear why the mother, Minnie, was not included in the lawsuit.
\item\textsuperscript{409} \textit{Relf v. Weinberger}
\item\textsuperscript{410} \textit{Campaign Against Depo-Provera, Depo-Provera: A Report by the Campaign Against Depo-Provera}, 1.
\end{itemize}
circumstances. However, the FDA required that patients be informed of the drug’s status and give consent, all of these protocols were apparently bypassed since Lonnie and Minnie, the girls’ mother, had not given permission for the girls to use birth control; the family seems to have believed that the drug was tied in some way to their welfare benefits.

In 1973 the birth control arrangement the Relfs and Community Action Committee maintained changed abruptly. In March 1973 the clinic fit Katie for an intrauterine device (IUD). “Once again, her parents were not asked if they had any objection. Katie, who was under the age of consent, submitted to the directions of the clinic staff that she accept implantation of the device.”411 And on June 13 Minnie Lee, aged fourteen, and Mary Alice, aged twelve, along with their mother were taken to the Montgomery Community Action Committee’s Family Planning Clinic by a nurse employed there. Minnie Relf was told that her two younger daughters were to be given another injection of Depo: “She thought the shots were the same as those all three had been receiving for some time.” They were subsequently taken to the hospital where the girls were admitted. At this point, nurses presented Mrs. Relf with an authorization form for surgical sterilization. Unfortunately, Mrs. Relf was illiterate and placed her “X” on the signature line while still under the impression that her daughters would be receiving a temporary, hormonal form of birth control. Her daughters, the intended patients were not consulted about the procedure. After “signing” for her daughters’ sterilizations Mrs. Relf was “escorted home” leaving Minnie Lee and Mary Alice alone in a hospital ward. When

411 Relf v. Weinberger
the Family Planning Clinic’s nurse returned to the Relf house later that day, attempting to collect eldest daughter Katie and bring her to the hospital to be sterilized as well, “Katie locked herself in her room and refused to go.” On June 14, 1973 Minnie Lee and Mary Alice were surgically sterilized, losing the right to become biological mothers before they had an opportunity to truly consider the possibility.\footnote{Ibid.}

Angela Davis describes what happened to the Relf sisters as “casual sterilization”, that what was known as a “Mississippi appendectomy” was not an aberration. It is not clear exactly how Minnie Lee and Mary Alice found out that they had been permanently sterilized, although the story might have been similar to the way in which Fannie Lou Hamer was informed about her own hysterectomy: through word of mouth. In 1961, Hamer and her husband were sharecroppers in Mississippi. Hamer entered the hospital because of “a knot in my stomach” as she called it. Later, the plantation owner, Vera Alice Marlow, also the cousin of the doctor who performed Hamer’s surgery, “told her cook and the cook told Mrs. Hamer’s cousin who told her: Fannie Lou had been given a hysterectomy.”\footnote{Perry Deane Young, “A Surfeit of Surgery” \textit{Washington Post}, May 30, 1976, B1} Hamer’s reaction: “For along time, I was very angry about what had been done to me. If he was going to give that sort of operation, then he should have told me. I would have loved to have children.”\footnote{Alexandra Minna Stern, “Sterilized in the Name of Public Health: Race, Immigration, and Reproductive Control in Modern California,” \textit{American Journal of Public Health} 95:7 (July 2005), 1128}

The case of the Relf sisters was extreme, but not completely outside the realm of possibility. Social welfare programs combined with eugenic ideas in the early years of the twentieth-century to create legislation sanctioning sterilization in several states. The first
such law, passed in Indiana in 1907, allowed for compulsory sterilization as a deterrent to passing on genetic traits for criminality and mental deficiency, and was followed quickly by similar laws in Washington and California. All of these statues usually focused on poor populations and those believed to be mentally disabled. And in the 1927 decision in *Buck v. Bell* “wherein Justice Oliver Wendell Homeless ordered the sterilization of the allegedly imbecilic poor white girl Carrie Buck, intoning, ‘Three generations of imbeciles are enough’” compulsory sterilizations received an increased legal and social sanctioning. At their core, the sterilization mandates placed the right to procreate as the purview of the medical community, rather than an individual or family, as a means to achieve an abstract social good. In her examination of the history of compulsory sterilization in California, Alexandra Minna Stern asserts that the state performed more 20,000 “nonconsensual” sterilization in the twentieth-century, in other words sterilizations without the informed consent of the patient, “or one third of the more than 60,000 such procedures in the United States in the 20th century.”

It is difficult to be certain as to how many sterilizations were consensual versus nonconsensual, but in California alone, HEW performed between 100,000 and 200,000 sterilizations in 1974 “most of which were done on poor women, minority and non-English speaking women through public welfare agencies and county hospitals.” In 1975 during a public hearing organized by HEW on the sterilization of women through Medi-Cal, women’s health advocates testified that there might not be an effective difference between “nonconsensual” and “consensual”: “The underlying message of the

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415 Ibid.

witnesses was that hysterectomies are being performed on women who give their consent unknowingly. In some cases the hysterectomy may be proposed while the woman is in labor and under an anesthetic, some are performed on women whose uterus is perfectly normal, and often there is a language barrier and the woman is unable to understand what the physician is talking about.” One witness, Sharon Flynn, a senior at the University of California School of Nursing, testified that in 1972 she witnessed a “totally unnecessary” partial hysterectomy. “During the operation, she recalled, the physician commented that the woman was in her mid-40’s and ‘already had a few children.’ To justify the removal of the seemingly normal appearing uterus he asked the pathologist to ‘take it to the lab and find some microscopic cysts.’ The pathologist agreed that he would.” The patient was a native Spanish-speaker who spoke little or no English, while the English-speaking doctor did not use an interpreter. Like the experiences of the Relf sisters this testimony demonstrates that the ease for abuse in sterilization cases cast a shadow over the entire procedure, especially where poor women of color were concerned.

In its investigation, the SPLC discovered that somewhere between 100,000 and 150,000 poor women had been sterilized using federal funds. And “by 1983, when blacks constituted only 12 percent of the population, 43 percent of the women sterilized in federally funded family planning programs were African Americans.”\(^{417}\) In fact it was often commonplace, especially in the rural South, for Black women’s reproductive rights to be trampled upon and disregarded altogether. For socially marginal women (women of color, the poor and the mentally disabled) sterilization represented the loss of their most

basic right to their bodies. Viewed through the frame of sterilization, African American women demonstrated various stances on the importance of abortion and contraception in their lives. Their reproductive health priorities might be generically understood thusly: the right to bodily autonomy, the right to motherhood, and the right to limit their reproduction.

*A Complex Politics: Black Women’s Views on Contraception and Abortion*

In 1968, the Black Unity Party (BUP) of Peekskill, New York published a statement entitled “Birth Control Pills and Black Children.” In it, they implored Black women not to use the recently available birth control pills because they represent “the system’s method of exterminating Black people here and abroad. To take the pill means that we are contributing to our own GENOCIDE.” In what would become a popular argument against the drug’s use, the BUP argued that by limiting their fertility Black women deprived the Black community of necessary soldiers to fight their oppression in the United States: “When we produce children, we are aiding the REVOLUTION in the form of NATION building.” Clearly based on a Black nationalist ideology, the BUP ended their plea with the important assertion that family planning was a community matter, not one solely for the individual.418

In a direct response to the above statement, a collection of Black women from Mt. Vernon, New York responded to the BUP stating that while birth control was a community issue, a woman’s reproductive capabilities were her own prerogative. “Poor black sisters decide for themselves whether to have a baby or not to have a baby,” their

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forceful letter begins. They take issue throughout with perceived abuses by Black men who eventually abandoned their families, arguing that if Black men wanted to have children they should be required to take care of them. But considering the circumstances where, they argued, Black women took primary responsibility for raising Black children, only they should make the final decision on the use of available birth control methods. But most importantly their letter takes on the question of genocide, which did not originate with the BUP and had been fueled by earlier histories of medical abuse, including sterilization.

Black women are being asked by militant black brothers not to practise [sic] birth control because it is a form of whitey committing genocide on black people. Well, true enough, but it takes two to practice genocide and black women are able to decide for themselves... whether they will submit to genocide. For us, birth control is freedom to fight genocide of black women and children.419

Toni Cade Bambara echoes similar themes in her essay “The Pill: Genocide or Liberation?”: “It is a noble thing, the rearing of warriors for the revolution... You don’t prepare yourself for the raising of super-people by making yourself vulnerable - chance fertilization, chance support, chance tomorrow - nor by being celibate until you stumble across the right stock to breed with.”420 Framing ideas about genocide this way demonstrate a complex positioning of Black women’s ideas regarding birth control. On the one hand they illustrate the pervasive fear of genocide, while concurrently undercutting its importance in their decision making. But most importantly, the women of


Mt. Vernon and Bambara make clear that their decision to use birth control was an informed one, rather than a sign of their ignorance.

“The Sisters Reply” also exhibits an early Black feminist assertion of the unique position of Black women in American society. Connecting their abuse by Black men with their abuses from White society, they suggest that they have been treated as if “we were the real niggers in this society - - oppressed by whites, male and female, and the black man, too.” They prove to be wary of a racial politics, as represented in this instance by the BUP, which made decisions about women’s bodies without centering Black women’s experiences.

But we don’t think you are going to understand us because you are a bunch of little middle class people and we are poor black women. The middle class never understands the poor because they always need to use them as you want to use poor black women’s children to gain power for yourself. You’ll run the black community with your kind of black power -- you on top!

This statement, more than any other, demonstrates their belief in the importance of reproductive freedom as part of the process of revolutionary change. In this assertion, Black women’s self-improvement was more important to the improvement of Black people than additional children. Whether or not they used specific contraceptive methods, Black women desired to make sure that they, individually, had the right to decide their reproductive futures.421

While these women dismiss the fear of genocide in their decision-making processes, it is important to consider the historical fears about birth control being used as a means of genocide in the Black community. Any serious discussion of reproductive

access must necessarily begin with Margaret Sanger, the “mother of birth control.” Sanger was famously prosecuted in 1914 for violating the Comstock laws by mailing copies of her pamphlet, *Family Limitation*, through the United States Postal Service. While a number of historians have considered her contribution to the birth control movement and the founding of the American Birth Control League in 1921, throughout her life and since her death, she has remained a divisive figure. For the Black community, it is difficult to make an impartial understanding of her legacy. In her groundbreaking book, *Medical Apartheid*, Harriet A. Washington asserts that, in Sanger’s quest to make contraceptives available to an ever wider population, she “exploited black stereotypes in order to reduce the fertility of African Americans.” Through the Birth Control League of America, Sanger opened some of the country’s first family planning centers in 1939, which aimed at providing Black people, especially Black women, with access to health services they were denied at segregated health clinics. Washington suggests that these efforts “sought to find the best way of reducing black populations by promoting eugenic principles.”

Because Sanger’s work did not initially feature eugenic messages feminist scholars have often been unsure of how to deal with her alliance with the eugenicist movement by the early 1920s. But African American scholars have been generally less ambivalent about Sanger’s specter. In *Women, Race and Class* Angela Davis asserts that the alliance between Sanger’s birth control movement and eugenics “confirmed the ideological victory of the racism associated with eugenic ideas. It [birth control] had ben

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robbed of its progressive potential, advocating for people of color not the individual right to birth control, but rather the racist strategy of population control.”\textsuperscript{423} In the same vein, Dorothy E. Roberts argues in \textit{Killing the Black Body} that this partnership “defined the purpose of birth control, shaping the meaning of reproductive freedom. Birth control became the means of controlling a population rather than a means of increasing women’s reproductive autonomy.”\textsuperscript{424}

Integral to these discussions of birth control and racism were ideas about acceptable motherhood. Davis, Roberts and Washington all assert that racist birth control programs were used to strip African American women of the ability to have as many children as they desired, marking efforts to limit their reproduction as a group wholly different from the experiences of most White women. Roberts posits that America has always viewed unregulated Black reproduction as dangerous. For three centuries, Black mothers have been thought to pass down to their offspring the traits that marked them as inferior to any white person. Along with this biological impairment, it is believed that Black mothers transfer a deviant lifestyle to their children that dooms each succeeding generation to a life of poverty, delinquency, and despair. A persistent objective of American social policy has been to monitor and restrain this corrupting tendency in Black motherhood.\textsuperscript{425}

In much the same way, Davis’ critique of White women abortion advocates lay in their tendency to ignore the historical foundation for Black women’s concerns. By making access to abortion, and later new contraceptive methods, the totality of their agenda, White women privileged limiting motherhood in their reproductive frames. But for Black


\textsuperscript{425} Ibid.
women, and other women of color and poor women, protecting motherhood was just as, if not more so, important. This is evident in “The Sisters Reply” as well.

To make this distinction, Davis asserts that Black women’s support for the right to abortion did not signify their support of abortion itself. Rather their position was “about the miserable social conditions which dissuade[d] them from bringing new lives into the world.” The biggest ideological difference, then, lay in the function of birth control in poor communities of color versus more affluent White communities. “While women of color are urged, at every turn, to become permanently infertile, white women enjoying prosperous economic conditions are urged, by the same forces, to reproduce themselves.” Birth control was used to limit the reproduction of only those White women who deviated from a norm (such as those deemed “mentally inferior,” immigrants, and the poor), while for women of color, birth control was used widely as their race made them automatically deviant, no mental disability or actual presentation of degeneracy was necessary. This allows us to understand the casual sterilization of two young, healthy girls: Minnie Lee and Mary Alice Relf.

However, this is not to say that Black women were uniformly opposed to abortion. Rather, the reticence to abortion which Davis displays is centered in an understanding of the intersection of poverty, racism, and misogyny as forces to constrain what few reproductive options Black women could exercise. The same framework could also underpin a more enthusiastic pro-abortion stance. This was, in fact, the basis for Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm’s 1970 support for the liberalization of abortion laws.

\[426\] Davis, *Women Race and Class*, 204.

\[427\] Ibid, 221.
in “Facing the Abortion Question.” Shirley Chisholm is remembered in history as a “first”: the first Black women to serve in the United States Congress, but in her 1970 autobiography, Chisholm asserts her “hope [that] if I am to be remembered it will finally be for what I have done, not for what I happen to be.” Shirley Chisholm advocated legislative support for the liberalization of abortion access, while also decrying much of the same social and economic restraints placed on poor women of color as Davis.428

Chisholm’s essay, “Facing the Abortion Question” is a reflection on the personal and political stakes in advocating abortion access and the role of thoughtful political support in making abortion services available to those women in most need. In August 1969 Congresswoman Chisholm was approached by newly-formed National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) to serve as the organization’s president. She declined, because of a busy schedule, but asked to be made an honorary president as a sign of her support for their efforts. When first offered the position, Chisholm says that she seriously considered the issue, ruminating on what it would mean for a Black woman legislator to support, or denounce, the work of an abortion advocacy group.

For me to take the lead in abortion repeal would be an even more serious step than for a white politician to do so, because there is a deep and angry suspicion among many blacks that even birth control clinics are a plot by the white power structure to keep down the numbers of blacks, and this opinion is even more strongly held by some in regard to legalizing abortions.429 Given Black people’s suspicion of the medical community, Chisholm realized that the decision was not about her own beliefs, it had to be about what was most needed for her diverse constituents, and women nationally. Chisholm’s conclusion was simple, “that

429 Ibid, 128.
pregnant women who feel they have compelling reasons for not having a baby, or another baby, will break the law, and even worse, risk injury and death if they must to get one. Abortions will not be stopped.” 430 If they could not be stopped, Chisholm wanted women to receive the best (reproductive) health care possible.

Chisholm argues that abortion must “remain a last resort, never a primary method of limiting families,” but for this to be so, there must be increased measures to make birth control devices and methods available to those, poor women and women of color, who too often went without them. Chisholm tells her reader that “The poor are more anxious about family planning than any other group,” because they understood clearly how too many children, with too little resources to care for them, could decimate a family. 431

Women know, and so do many men, that two or three children who are wanted, prepared for, reared amid love and stability, and educated to the limit of their ability will mean more for the future of the black and brown races from which they come than any number of neglected, hungry, ill-housed and ill-clothed youngsters. Pride in one’s race, as well as simple humanity supports this view. Poor women of every race feel as I do, I believe. 432

This, then, is the actual crux of Chisholm’s argument. She supported abortion and contraceptive access because not to would consign ever larger numbers of American families to poverty, from which they were unlikely to recover and placed those children for whom families were unable to care at peril of the health and social detriments common to poor people writ large.

430 Ibid.
431 Ibid, 129.
432 Ibid, 128.
Thus, Shirley Chisholm’s contribution to the discussion of abortion was not all that different from Davis’. Chisholm and Davis both construct a picture of women in need of abortion and contraceptive services because they literally could not afford to take care of more children on limited resources. The need for abortion services was part of a larger web of inequality:

At present, the full gamut of services, from expert medical advice to, as a last resort, safe ‘legal’ abortions, is available for the rich. Any woman who has the money and the sophistication about how things are done in our society can get an abortion within the law. If she is from a social stratum where such advice is available, she will be sent to a sympathetic psychiatrist and he will be well paid to believe her when she says she is ready to kill herself if she doesn’t get rid of her pregnancy. But unless a woman has the $700 to $1000 minimum it takes to travel this route, her only safe course in most states is to have the child.\textsuperscript{433}

Davis and Chisholm’s focus on poverty would become even more important in 1976 with the passage of the Hyde Amendment. Congress passed a rider to the annual Labor/Health Services/Education appropriations preventing Medicaid and other programs under federal purview, from providing abortions. Later amendments allowed exceptions for rape, incest and to protect the health of the mother, but the Supreme Court upheld the Amendment’s constitutionality in 1980. Thus, for poor women who relied on the federal government for health care and other social services, the Hyde Amendment was a significant barrier in their access to abortion services. Poor women of color were constrained by their gender, but most immediately by their race and class status.\textsuperscript{434}

\textsuperscript{433} Ibid, 134.

\textsuperscript{434} While these writers situate the needs of Black and White women as separated by a chasm of economic privilege, Anne Valk discusses how coalitional politics could, at least for a time, close this gap and allow for an advocacy of abortion access to privileged and marginalized women, White and Black. See Anne Valk, “Fighting for Abortion as a ‘Health Right’ in Washington, D.C.” in Stephanie Gilmore, ed. Feminist Coalitions: Historical Perspectives on Second-Wave Feminism in the United States (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 135-162.
And, like Bambara, Chisholm takes on those members of the Black community wont to believe that any form of family planning was really just thinly veiled genocidal measures, like the Black Unity Party. Chisholm posits such a position as one more common to men of color than women: “I do not know any black or Puerto Rican women who feel that way. To label family planning and legal abortion programs ‘genocide’ is male rhetoric, for male ears. It falls flat to female listeners, and to thoughtful male ones.” Chisholm posits that it is more important that families have children because they want to and are able to care for them, than they be saddled with more children and grinding poverty as well. And for all of these reasons Chisholm “was compelled to face it [the abortion question] and deal with it” and remained, throughout her career, in favor of abortion access.

Throughout the discussion of abortion, the women of Mt. Vernon, Davis, Bambara and Chisholm each focus attention, in various ways, on the social and economic inequalities Black women faced in the arena of reproductive rights. They situate Black women as socially and economically marginalized and thus in need of abortion family planning services to stop further deterioration of these positions. At the same time, they acknowledge the ways in which Black women’s current position affected their ability and desire to access those services was fraught. The battle over Depo-Provera is an interesting case study to understand the complexity of these positions.

*Depo-Provera in the United States*

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436 Ibid, 130.
In 1983, the Upjohn pharmaceutical company submitted Depo-Provera to the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for approval as a contraceptive, for the third time. Women’s health advocates, especially members of the National Women’s Health Network (NWHN), had long been opposed to the drug’s use. Citing the lack of scientific studies to document its long-term side effects and its use in global population control programs the NWHN made the argument that women’s experiences of drugs should be heavily weighed in deciding the risk-benefit ratio of a drug. In other words, they took on the Upjohn Company’s inference that a lack of evidence of side effects was more important than individual women’s experiences while taking the drug. While race did not explicitly enter into the FDA’s public inquiry of Depo-Provera, women of color, domestically and globally, were integral in defining its parameters. By focusing on the ways in which Depo had been used overwhelmingly on Black women domestically, one can see that the popular feminist paradigm of choice was based in certain White women’s experiences. Perceptions of abuse by the medical profession, as has been discussed, is a more apt framework for understanding the opposition to Depo-Provera and similar contraceptives.

Initially, all three Relf daughters were given Depo-Provera injections before Katie was fitted for an IUD and her younger sisters were sterilized. The Relf sisters were given the drug before it was legally available to the general population and in their case against HEW, they assert that no one in the family was adequately aware of that fact. As an “investigational drug” HEW allowed Depo to be prescribed so long as the clinic and physician “is notified that he will secure the ‘informed consent’ of the drug recipient.”\footnote{Relf v. Weinberger}
Given that all of the Relf girls were minors (and thus incapable of giving informed consent) and in light of the way in which the Montgomery Community Action Program received Minnie Relf’s “consent” for her daughters’ sterilizations, it seems unlikely that any of the FDA’s standards were followed. But the Relfs were not the first, nor the last, Black women or girls to be given Depo-Provera through questionable means.

Before submitting Depo-Provera for federal approval, Upjohn organized medical trials in Atlanta’s Grady Memorial Hospital Family Planning Clinic, between 1967 and 1978. The pool of women injected with the drug, roughly 9,000, was predominantly African American (91.2 per cent in 1974 and 92.1 in 1978). Records are unclear but it seems as if few of the women were informed that they were involved in a medical experiment nor were they all informed of the drug’s potential side effects. One former Grady patient wrote that her welfare case agent forced her to take Depo: “She said that if I didn’t take it my check would be cut off.” While another said that she came to believe “in retrospect that she had been too young and naive in her willingness to be injected with Depo-Provera.”

Exposed at the FDA trials in 1983, when scientists were forced to admit that the nine year study had not yielded any useful scientific data, the Grady trial exemplified the ways in which contraceptive innovation could be used to constrict reproductive choices for poor women of color.

As part of their effort to understand the problems of Depo-Provera, the NWHN created a national registry for women to recount their experiences with the drug. By the time the FDA hearings began the registry had collected “529 registrants and hundreds of

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additional letters, the majority of which attested to the suffering of users who were not prepared for the crippling side effects of the drug.\(^{439}\) The NWHN used these testimonials and other evidence to present a scientific objection to Depo. They focused their critiques, in this instance, not on what they knew about the drug from the testimonials directly, but on what little anyone knew about its side effects. There were early fears that Depo could potentially cause cancer, permanent sterilization, or be transmitted to infants through breast milk. Thus, before the drug entered the domestic market, there should have been long-term studies to refute, or support, these claims. However, this had not been the case.\(^{440}\)

Immediately after the drug was discovered to be a potentially effective method of birth control, Upjohn organized medical trials in Jamaica, Atlanta and Los Angeles. These trials did not, however, produce any scientifically sound information about its long-term use.\(^{441}\) For instance, the Atlanta Grady trial was plagued by such poor record keeping that doctors were forced to admit that they had not even kept clear records of consent (which would have meant explaining the drug’s investigational status) or documented the experiences of those women who decided to discontinue using the drug. There were similar problems plaguing the few animal tests begun in the 1970s, but despite the confusing lapses in scientific studies, Depo-Provera continued to be lauded for global

\(^{439}\) Ibid., 103.


\(^{441}\) See Family Planning Unit, Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, University of the West Indies, \textit{An Evaluation of the Jamaican Family Planning Programme} 1979.
population control efforts, because it was particularly desirable for rural and poor populations.

In terms of global population control measures, Depo could be given to large numbers of women easily and quickly without malfunction. “One Namibian physician noted that during the 1980s, injections were ‘simply banged into black and colored women, without discussion, explanation or even permission.’”442 These were much the same reasons that it was marketed to poor women domestically. In fact, many of its supporters spoke of the drug’s ability to overcome the “feeblemindedness” of women, evident in one American medical professional’s description of the usefulness of Depo-Provera domestically: “I guess if you think about the culture of poverty… one of the problems poor people have is that they do have trouble planning their lives, keeping things in order.” The basis for such support of the drug was not to make the it useful to the women to which it was prescribed, at least not entirely. Rather, the drug’s most important function was to control the reproduction of “problem” populations.443

In “Facing the Abortion Question,” Shirley Chisholm generally advocates contraception access, however she makes a clear distinction between contraceptive devices and drugs. “Contraceptive devices,” she says, “are the first choice... because of

442 Ibid, 98.
443 The Ultimate Test Animal (1985)

Interestingly enough, in 1966 Upjohn pulled the veterinary form of Depo-Provera, Promone, from use amidst fears of its side effects. In a letter sent “The company sent a letter to veterinarians and veterinarians and pet owners the company noted that while “The evidence linking Promone to its side-effects in dogs is not conclusive... until our studies are complete, its sale is discontinued.” Quoted in Laura Fraser, “If the FDA won’t approve the use of Depo-Provera as a contraceptive, why are so many Bay Area gynecologists prescribing it?” San Francisco Bay Guardian, October 9-16, 1985, 11.
their established safety compared to the controversial oral contraceptives.” While talking specifically about the birth control pill, she argues that the safety of hormonal birth control methods had yet to be proven and thus urged the medical community to continue research into their effectiveness. And, amidst early fears about the pills safety (many of them corroborated), scientists continued to research the drug and eventually produced a relatively safe contraceptive option. For Depo-Provera this had not been the case. Upjohn repeatedly submitted the drug for approval by the FDA throughout the 1970s and 1980s without any more significant research than previously conducted; all of it deeply flawed. And by 1985, it was estimated that around 200,000 women had taken Depo-Provera, in effect taking considerable risk with their health, most often without clearly understanding the potential dangers.

In a reproductive “choice” frame, access is situated as the overarching goal, wherein any and all new methods for controlling and limiting fertility is understood as a positive development. However, those choices were limited by any number of things, socioeconomic class being the easiest to discern. For poor women, deciding on contraception could entail these questions as a start: Does she have health insurance? Can she afford the “best” contraception for her situation? Does she have transportation to get to her doctor in case something goes wrong? The idea of “choice” implies a marketplace

444 Chisholm, Unbought and Unbossed, 134.

445 Laura Fraser, “If the FDA won’t approve the use of Depo-Provera as a contraceptive, why are so many Bay Area gynecologists prescribing it?” San Francisco Bay Guardian, October 9-16, 1985, 11.

The FDA eventually approved Depo-Provera on October 29, 1992, by which time it had been concluded that the drug did not cause cancer, which was the medical community’s largest fear. Women however reported side-effects that were much more detrimental to the lives immediately, like depression and weight gain, claims which were not disproved by the FDA’s acceptance date.
of options in which women’s rights to determine what happens to their bodies is legally protected, ignoring the fact that for women of color, economic and institutional constraints often restrict their ‘choices.’” Depo’s questionable history showed that even before that choice could be presented to a patient, physicians made certain assumptions about a woman’s ability to be responsible for her own reproductive health.

Black women’s health activist, Loretta Ross asserts that women of color often found it difficult to work with mainstream women’s health organizations, “largely directed by middle-class white women” whom she says were “oblivious to the role of white supremacy in restricting reproductive options for all women.”

We were also skeptical about leaders in the pro-choice movement who seemed more interested in population restrictions than women’s empowerment. Some promoted dangerous contraceptives and coercive sterilizations, and were mostly silent about economic inequalities and power imbalances between the developed and developing worlds.

Echoing Ross’s account of the origins for Black women’s health work, Dorothy Roberts asserts that the debate over birth control in the U.S. “was defined from the movement’s inception in terms of race and could never be properly understood apart from race again.”

Black women’s reproductive health activism of the 1970s and 1980s emerged out of their search “for a conceptual framework that would convey our twinned values - the right to have and not to have a child- as well as the myriad ways our rights to be mothers

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448 Ibid, 63

and parent our children are constantly threatened.” The salience of these “twinned values” can be used to explain why Black women’s health activists very often desired to organize separately. While many White women situated their support for reproductive choice as concerned with forestalling pregnancy, or stopping it altogether, Black women situated reproductive freedom as concerned with protecting their right to be mothers. Thus, ignoring the ways in which contraceptive innovation could be used to strip reproductive agency from women of color and poor White women, domestically and internationally, to espouse a framework of choice is based solidly in the privilege afforded to wealthy, educated White women in Western countries.

A Multitude of Hurts: The National Black Women’s Health Project and the Politics of Care

Fannie Lou Hamer once described her political consciousness thusly: “All my life I’ve been sick and tired. Now I’m sick and tired of being sick and tired.” Inspired by Hamer’s centering of her own health as a political motivator, the National Black Women’s Health Project (NBWHP) took “sick and tired of being sick and tired” as their slogan. The work of the NBWHP asserted that for Black women “health is not merely the absence of illness, but the active promotion of the physical, spiritual, mental and emotional wellness of this and future generations.” As exemplars of Black women’s health activism, the Black Women’s Health Project demonstrates the fundamental reality that for African American women the individual’s health was part of the collective.


451 Jerry DeMuth, “Tired of Being Sick and Tired” The Nation, June 1, 1964, 549.

Members of the NBWHP expressed their engagement with a politics of care by centering their work in local and national Black women’s communities as the basis for social and political change for present and future generations of Black people.

The history of the NBWHP must begin with Byllye Avery. In the mid-1970s Avery became active in the Gainesville (Florida) Women’s Health Center. In November 1978, Avery helped found Birth Place, which sought to provide supportive and affirming birthing experiences for women outside of the hospital setting. By the early 1980s, she was a board member of the NWHN. In 1981 she realized that she had “been coming to all their [NWHN] meetings and nothing had been put down on black women’s health.” After doing considerable research, she realized that Black women’s health issues were not only physical but mental, and that “black women ages 18 to 25 rated themselves as living in psychological distress.” Understanding and changing the nature of that distress became Avery’s mission and that of the Black Women’s Health Project.453

The next monumental achievement for the fledgling initiative was the first Black women’s health conference held June 24-26, 1983, at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. While Avery says that she only expected “one or two hundred women... we had close to two thousand. We didn’t know where they came from... It was incredible. It was just incredible.”454 There were more than sixty workshops presented at the conference “on everything from patient’s rights and birthing alternatives to self-esteem and


454 Ibid, 27.
alternative lifestyles.”455 Medical professionals, women’s health workers and ordinary women were all in attendance. Avery remembers the significance of that event:

It was magnificent, because we transformed Spelman College campus and made it so that it can be what it is today. We absolutely changed the lives, the administration, and everything changed after that meeting. And it was just incredible... So many black women came from all over who had never been South before. Many women from California had never been South before. Many women sent their daughters who didn’t even know it existed... But that was truly a magnificent weekend in the lives of everybody who attended that meeting.456

While the event itself was monumental, for the purposes of this study, what happened after was just as important. When the conference proceedings ended, and faced with the question “Oh, my God, now what do we do?” the Project urged attendees to form their own self-help groups. At the time there were just about twenty such groups affiliated with the Project, “With an emphasis on reaching lower income Black women and increasing their access to and knowledge of health care services and principles.”457 These groups became important contributions to the development of Black women’s health activism nationally.

Self-help groups were truly local endeavors that decided their topics of interest and initiatives based on their members’ needs.

One group in Florida aims at reducing the group’s high blood pressure through diet and exercise. Another in Georgia, hosted a Women’s Health Weekend in a rural area which included demonstrations on breast self-exams and gynecological self-help. A Chicago group focuses on

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gynecological self-help skills while other groups work on battered
women’s issues, family planning, cancer, and teen health issues.\footnote{458} In this way, the NBWHP served as a clearing house for information, guidance, limited funding, and help if local groups needed, while also working to fundraise and, later, effecting policy change where possible.

One other important factor in the history of the NBWHP had considerable bearing on the larger frame of Black women’s health activism. The Black Women’s Health Project originated as an initiative of the NWHN. Members like Byllye Avery helped compile reports for the FDA trial on Depo-Provera while completing preparations for their first conference. But subsequent to that conference, the formation of self-help groups and emergence of national chapters, the Black Women’s Health Project decided to separate themselves from the National Women’s Health Network. Loretta Ross remembers that the initiative for the break came from rank-and-file members: “they said to you [Avery], ‘What’re you going to do for us, Byllye, because we don’t want to be with these white women’... So you were responding to pressure coming from the ground up.” This reticence to work with White women was an important distinction which should not have been surprised considering the content of this chapter.\footnote{459}

Black women understood that their health concerns were a direct reflection of the racism with which they contended. Thus, regardless of similarities in some experiences among women of all races and classes, Black women experienced a form of discrimination in health unique from White women. In some ways, these experiences were marked by neglect. Either in terms of general neglect of Black communities, by

\footnote{458} Ibid.

\footnote{459} Avery, interview with Loretta Ross, 31.
local governments or medical professionals, which had persisted since the end of Reconstruction; various forms of abuse, neglect, and disinterest in hospitals and clinics; and even the assault on the psyches of all Black people developed in a racist and unequal society.\textsuperscript{460}

Advocating for improved Black women’s health affected the health of Black children, and Black men, immediately and in the future. In their mission statement, African American Women are for Reproductive Freedom, make a sharp attack on those who would limit women’s access to abortion. They frame their argument within the terms of Black women’s need for abortion access as well as health crises within the entire Black community.

Black America is under siege. Drugs, the scourge of our community, are wiping out one, two, three generations. We are killing ourselves and each other. Rape and other unspeakable acts of violence are becoming sickeningly commonplace. Babies linger on death’s door; at risk at birth: born addicted to crack and cocaine; born underweight ad undernourished; born AIDS-infected. An ever-growing number of our children are being abandoned, being mentally, physically, spiritually abused. Homelessness, hunger, unemployment run rife. Poverty grows. Our people cry out in desperation, anger, and need.\textsuperscript{461}

They situate the “pro-life” argument as based in the desire to control women’s bodies, not actually preserve life. As they say “those somebodies who claim they’re ‘pro-life’ aren’t moved to help the living. They’re not out there fighting to break the stranglehold of drugs and violence in our communities, trying to save our children, or moving to provide infant and maternal nutrition and health programs.” In this way they constructed a “correct”

\textsuperscript{460} For a detailed discussion of Black women’s health work prior to the period of study see, Susan L. Smith, \textit{Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: Black Women's Health Activism in America, 1890-1950} (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1995).

\textsuperscript{461} African American Women Are for Reproductive Freedom, “We Remember” in Springer, 40.
pro-life perspective on preserving and protecting life as based in changing the economic, social and political realities of those children and adults already living. Like other Black women they situated ill health as connected to the socio-political and economic deprivation, which could not simply be changed through abortion access or contraceptive options.462

Thus, the entire basis of the Black women’s health movement was focused on changing the realities of the Black communities from which they came; in other words a politics of care. The politics of care is based in the belief that Black activists situated their work within their own communities, however they defined them. Black women’s health work was at once concerned with exposing the ways in which Black women faced serious health deprivation in all areas of their life and a refusal to separate their own ill health from the problems facing other women or Black men. At the same time, the politics of care is based in the belief that activists’ work identified community needs or problems, the State’s refusal to address those needs (or involvement in creating them), while also organizing to meet them. The work of the NBWHP functioned in both of these ways. In her essay on the Black women’s health movement, Deborah R. Grayson, asserts that the belief that Black women experienced ill health through the discrimination based on their sex, race, and class,

led to a form of organizing among Black women on health issues that worked (1) to address the racial and sexual politics of, and government indifference to, Black women’ health and health care needs and (2) to

462 Ibid.
educate Black women not only to confront this indifference but also to help them address their own health needs.”

Loretta Ross asserted that “the [National Black Women’s Health] Project in my mind not only seeded a movement, but it seeded a whole way of thinking about the relationship between empowerment and health.” In this light, groups like the NBWHP, local self-help groups, helped create a base from which later organizations like the National Latina Health Project and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective could function to improve the social and political realities of women of color, whose health and communities had long been neglected.

**Conclusion**

The development of Black women’s health activism was in many ways based in a long history of abuse. Black women worked to make the nature of that history, specifically sterilization, known. They also offered understandings of reproductive abuse which cast suspicion on the paradigm of “reproductive choice” as the most common framework for women’s health advocacy. If women could be forcefully sterilized, and prescribed experimental or potentially dangerous drugs because they were poor and Black, then increased contraceptive options would not necessarily lead to reproductive freedom.

Loretta Ross asserts that for women of color in the United States, “a link between poverty and the denial of women’s human rights” found in global women’s health movements, spoke to their needs more effectively than White women’s activism domestically. This link situated American women of color outside the frame of the

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464 Avery, interview with Loretta Ross, 34.
American social fabric. Because of those distinctions, or what Kimberle Crenshaw termed “intersectionality”, women of color chose to organize separately from these other communities to which they belonged. Out of this work, African American women offered a framework for understanding their lives, as yet missing in larger Civil Rights and women’s activism in the U.S.

Evelyn C. White asserted in her introduction to the historic *Black Women’s Health Book*, that discovering the health needs for Black women was critical to saving and protecting their lives. This task, she argued, was long overdue. “For generations, we have taken care of everything and everyone but ourselves. Now is the time for us to put our well-being at the top of the program.” The basis of the Black women’s health work discussed here was central to the continuation of African American communities. Controlling her own reproduction, providing for herself and her children, addressing vast inequalities in health care to poor communities of color made safer the lives of the children born into Black communities and improved the futures of those already living. Black women’s health work then was not solely concerned with the present; it necessarily took into account painful histories, devastating current realities and an intense desire for a drastically better future.

We have to address and change the dismal predictions about our lives because we’ve got glorious contributions to make to society. We’ve got songs to sing, pictures to paint, poems to recite, children to teach, books to write, pies to bake, hair to braid, flowers to grow, business to run and people to love. 

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466 Ibid, xv.
Conclusion

There is much to be learned from the issues that captivated Black community activists in this period of study. The thematic organization of these chapters helps to demonstrate that the politics of care can be expressed in a variety of ways and for vastly different reasons. At the most basic level this is because Black community activists could, and did, identify a multitude of threats to their communities. By focusing on the relationships that spawned the activism recounted here one can see how community activism was about the very specific and the very general all at once.

At its most basic level, a politics of care entailed the process of identifying gross and institutional inequities facing Black people and organizing to expose them. Next, Black activists offered critiques of the ways in which racism (and sexism, classism and xenophobia) shaped their lives in a public manner. By publicizing these critiques they forced (White) authority figures to contend with Black understandings of the world, which almost always called into question the running of societies in which they lived. And, when necessary, Black activists also fought to create separate and community affirming spaces in which they could escape, however briefly, the mental, physical and emotional oppression of racism in their lives. And lastly, through their work, activists engaged in a politics of care by attempting, however minutely, to change the ways in which Black people were able to live their lives in the future.
In some ways, the chapter pairs illuminate various definitions of community and different relationships therein. Activism around educational inequalities has been based on local/neighborhood ideas about community, mostly, and the importance of familial relationships. In these two chapters, locating the concerns of and work by Black parents’ work is most clear. Parents’ critiques of their children’s experience in English and American schools emerged out of their parental responsibilities and familial forms of caring. It seems clear that at least some parents believed that it was their job to counter the dehumanizing nature of some school curricula and expose the failures of these institutions for training their children for more than just menial subsistence.

This caring, however, did not stop at critiques. At least in the English context, expressions of parental care involved actively creating alternative spaces for educational achievement and intellectual development. Supplementary schools and Black bookstores offered culturally affirming portraits of Black people and supportive educational experiences and, in some ways, blurred the line between the public and private. They argued that schools should not force Black pupils to reject their home cultures and accept second class positions English society. Rather, Black activists argued that their cultures and histories could be placed within the classroom setting as tools to improve Black children’s educational development while remaking the dominant culture as well.

This necessary separatist strand of English educational activism can be compared to desires to work within existing power structures for similar goals. Black activists in Oakland seem to have been struggling along this route. Their presence at school board meetings, on the city’s educational committees on a voluntary basis, and even their
formal presence in positions of power seem to suggest a desire to exert control over the local government. At the very least this was related to their statistical dominance within the city’s population, however it is also likely that they saw control of these institutions as the only way to change the educational system. Specifically, the push for “tripartite bargaining” by Blacks for Education, potentially suggests that, by the 1970s, African American activists in Oakland had become convinced that they needed formalized positions of power to affect change within their local communities.

At the same time, these education activists offered, at varying levels, critiques of social and political citizenship. They argued that ideas of equality could never be achieved if very real inequalities were institutionalized within the cultural and societal norms transmitted in the schoolroom setting. Connecting these socio-political critiques with expressions of parental love and caring open up a possibilities for understanding the importance of families, specifically Black families, in creating oppositional definitions of citizenship and national cultural identity.

In another vein, activism around police harassment, while often emerging out of local neighborhoods, also concerned a concern for larger communities of Black people (city-wide or even nationally). A long history of harassment by the OPD, and the distrust that it bred within local communities of color, made individual instances of police harassment a Black community problem. Interestingly, in the case of the 1975 City Council probe, “community” stretched within police ranks to include Black officers facing harassment from their White counterparts. Throughout their testimony, the OBOA connected the racism encountered by Black officers and civilians to call into question
perceptions of justice in (White) police behavior. Thus, exposing and critiquing OPD behavior and demanding accountability, effected sought justice for previous victims, while hoping to forestall the creation of future victims.

In England, the use of sus to harass Black youth was almost never framed in terms of individual victims. Rather, from the minute the law entered into Black activist consciousness, it was understood as a community problem, affecting entire families, neighborhoods and potentially all Black British people. But most importantly, connected as it was to the presence of large Black settlement in English centers, sus was also never just about police-community relations. It was also about a recent migration (and English imperialism), revisions in immigration policy and housing restrictions. The use of sus was intimately connected to the framing of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans and perpetual foreigners. In this way, the critiques of sus and institutional racism inherent in police behavior, and expression of frustration through riots emerged out of those connections between members of a larger Black British community.

That Black community members did not feel comfortable turning to the police for help and automatically questioned police procedure, was not a function of their “inherent” criminality, which some officials claimed. Rather they did so from (personal and communal) experiences of police misconduct. At the same time, the lack of accountability, within the OPD or Met, for police behavior also implicated police administrators and local and national governments in the maintenance of institutional racism within police departments. Bound up in oppositional ideas of justice, Black community activists in both England and the United States cast police officers as
criminals. They understood expressions of police power as connected to larger (local and
national) realities of anti-Black racism, making an important distinction between
idealized understandings of police behavior and reality. Thus, systemic police harassment
illustrated the depths of Black marginalization and activism to expose and counter these
realities sought to make space for Black people as members of the societies in which they
lived.

Similarly, Black women’s health activism operated within various definitions of
community. Women’s health advocates understood themselves within a larger national,
sometimes international, Black community, women’s communities, local neighborhoods,
as well as a larger Black women’s community. Thus, in many ways, their advocation for
Black women’s reproductive health involved understanding themselves as members of
various oppressed groups. Situating themselves against Black men’s experiences of
racism and White women’s experiences of sexism, Black women offered a critique of
health disparities, which placed them squarely at “the bottom” of the social ladder.

For African American women, nonconsensual sterilization was understood as the
ultimate form of bodily violation, which colored their encounters with the medical
profession, and health services. While Black British women viewed their encounters with
the NHS through restrictions on their ability to enter and settle in the country. As
migrants, many of whom were from the developing world, understood reproductive
access through the frame of population control. African American women, as well,
understood reproductive abuses as population control, making an important comment on
their historical positioning with American society. Thus, the writings about reproductive
rights and women’s health activism, operated as critiques of popular social activist paradigms to offer their unique perspectives on racism and medical disparities. By situating themselves as perpetually overlooked and in need of protection, they argued that liberation from oppressive forces would never be complete without their input.

It is often difficult to see the threads connecting all of the stories contained within this study. The nature of community activism is often intensely local, which means that the similarities can be overshadowed by the differences. In the development of this project, what has emerged as a salient reality between all of the many communities in this study is a deep-seated distrust of the State. This distrust has undergirded every instance of Black activism recounted here. While working on this project I have been surprised by how many of these issues persist. Easiest to discern, and most shocking to watch, were renewed complaints over police harassment and brutality in Oakland after the death of Oscar Grant in 2009, and anger at “stop and search” legislation, which replaced sus in 1981, in the aftermath of the 2011 English riots. In the U.S. Black women’s health activists later offered critiques of Norplant, which were almost identical to their opposition to Depo-Provera. That both country’s gave the drug full license to Depo, even though there remained some important questions about its side effects, was almost certainly disheartening at the time. And, unfortunately, the specter of educational inequalities and the low achievement of Black pupils on standardized testing has never fully disappeared in either country. The persistence of some of these themes drives home the reality that there are, unfortunately, very few happy endings or entirely complete stories here. However, virtually none of the activists in this study seem particularly
broken or pessimistic about the future. Rather, it is the optimism displayed here that is most striking. Even if they were wary of changes initiated by State authorities there was a belief that eventually things might be different for future generations. Thus, this project functions, then, as a necessary contribution to the burgeoning historiography of Black activism in each country, in relation to one another and potentially to other sites within the African Diaspora.

The politics of care helps us to understand some of the impetus for Black community activism, but, unfortunately, it does not offer us a way of understanding what might be understood as their failures. In a real sense, all of these debates continue today and, in many forms preceded this period of study. Understanding the ways in which these particular Black people connected political struggles to their everyday lives is salient. Rather than placing care-work and love outside of the political arena, these activists made clear that to care for a disenfranchised and marginalized population was a profoundly revolutionary act.
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