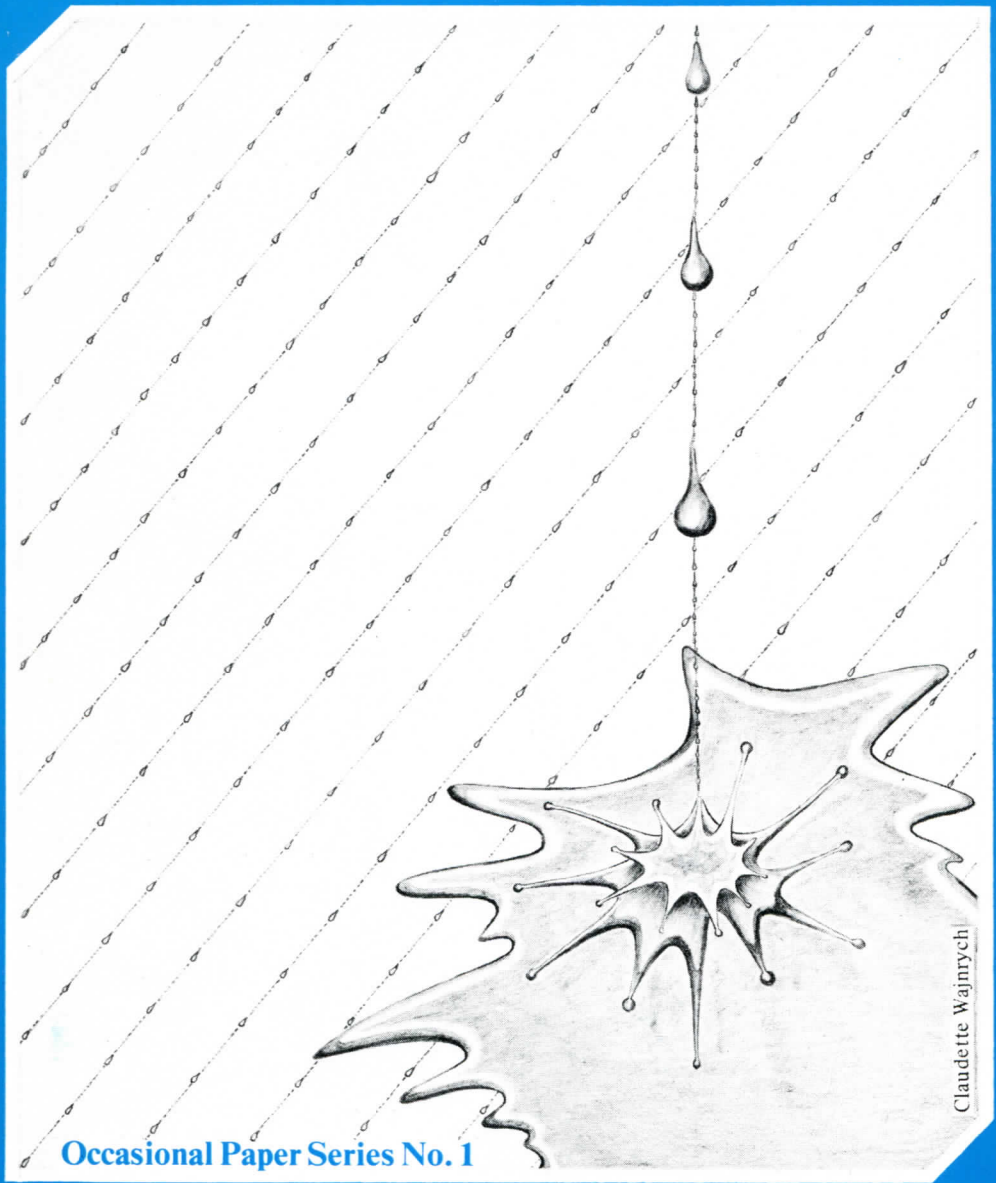
RACE AND THE MEDIA:
Thirty Years' Misunderstanding

Clement Jones

COMMISSION FOR RACIAL EQUALITY



Claudette Wajnrych

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The Commission for Racial Equality was set up by the Race Relations Act, 1976 with the duties of:

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(b) promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between persons of different racial groups generally; and

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Introduction

During 1981 there were a number of inner city disturbances which had racial undertones. Following these disturbances, there were official reports[1] and considerable unofficial comment. Most of these reports and comments made references to what was described as the contributory role of the mass media. But none of the reports, research papers or general comments attempted to set the present-day scene against the events which led up to it.

This paper was originally written as an Aide Memoire to UNESCO in 1980. It looks at the background to the relationship between the news media on one hand and the ethnic minorities and those working for racial harmony on the other, and was an attempt to supplement two more detailed UNESCO studies, first published in 1974, *Race as News;* and the second published in 1977, *Ethnicity and the Media.* That background is still relevant today as the events of 1981 clearly showed and goes a long way to explain the antagonism that is still felt between these two groups.

It is hoped that this paper will make a useful contribution to the ongoing debate about the responsibility of the press and television on such sensitive issues as race: a responsibility that was underlined by Lord Scarman in his report on *The Brixton Disorders.* He urged, amongst other things, "*Editors and producers to accept that they have a responsibility to assess the likely impact on events of their own reporting to them [and] to ensure balance in the covering of disorder*".

Clement Jones

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[1] *The Brixton Disorders* 10-12 April 1981, Report of an Inquiry by The Rt Hon The Lord Scarman OBE
Racial Attacks, Report of a Home Office Study, November 1981

Racist attitudes in Britain are not of themselves new, but are part of the national characteristic of insularity and a continuation of attitudes from our long period of colonial rule when we believed that we were superior to the people we colonised.

The issues of race which cause conflict and argument over news media treatment would probably never have become so acute as they have been in the last twenty years but for the predominant factor of immigration and the scale upon which it has happened. It is not unreasonable that many ordinary insular-minded people in certain areas saw the continued arrival of many immigrants, strangers with strange habits, as a threat to their insularity and to the security which that insularity brought them.

And because immigration at that time was particularly strongly identified with colour, strong ethnic, cultural and religious differences, a fear-based stereotype was created identifying immigrants from the West Indies, Asia and Africa. At this stage, more than any other, the general ignorance of news media people and of the public about the ethnic origins of immigrants and their religious and cultural customs was very apparent.

Again, in the public mind, there is no clear differentiation between integration and assimilation. The attitude of 'if they come here then they must accept our customs completely' is a prevalent one and one which the media has done nothing to dispel.

Past events

It has been claimed by several social researchers that the news media in general went seriously astray in their coverage of race as long ago as 1958 when the first race riots occurred at Notting Hill, London. It has been said that Notting Hill is a classic scenario for the spontaneous growth of indigenous racism. It was one of the traditional decaying urban districts where, for the first time, the incipient colony life of blacks who had come to Britain began to flourish and expand. But if the presence of blacks within the area touched sources of public anxiety over competition for scarce resources and jobs, according to Stuart Hall, former Director of the Centre for Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham, the spectacle of black and white youth locked in confrontation around the underground station and back streets of North Kensington was linked by the news media directly with the problems of youth which had already become a social metaphor. Stuart Hall also writes in *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain*,[2] 'in its famous editorial "Hooliganism", *The*

[2] *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain*, published by the Commission for Racial Equality by special arrangement with the British Broadcasting Corporation Television Further Education Unit, 1978, ISBN 0 902355 79 price £1.50. Contributors: 'Race in the Inner City', Professor John Rex; 'Racism and Reaction', Dr Stuart Hall; 'Asians in Britain: Problem or Opportunity?', Dr Bhikhu Parekh; 'Schools and Race', Professor Alan Little; 'Third World Perspective', Bishop Trevor Huddleston.

Times mapped the Notting Hill event directly, into the problem of hooliganism, teenage violence, lawlessness, anarchy, together with the football spectator – an ancient ring that term has – and the railway carriage breaker – an even more ancient phrase. "All", said *The Times* "are manifestations of a strand in our social behaviour that an adult society can do without". As the economic downturn begins and youth culture surges forward, Britain introduces in 1962 the first Commonwealth Immigration Act which imposes controls on the "flow of black people into society."'

News media coverage at that time does, without question, focus on youth violence and therefore the identification of racial problems with youth took over. Many of the earlier social problems related to immigration which had featured in the news media, namely housing and welfare services, particularly the strain on maternity services and primary education (all of which were social problems worthy of exposure and discussion) were quickly and conveniently forgotten. Violence has always been major news, and when it had added dimension of colour it was not surprising that a pattern and stereotype was created. This did immense damage to harmonious race relations. It led to a mutual deterioration of relationships between young blacks and the police and, on many occasions, incidents and magistrates' court cases which would not have been considered newsworthy but merely routine had they involved only indigenous whites, were given considerable prominence, with headlines and other references clearly informing the reader that blacks were involved. In the last two or three years, however, the news media have for the most part been more sensitive in this respect and there are far fewer errors of taste of this sort.

But, at that time, throughout the 1960s particularly, social and community workers could see the damage that was being done. It was a two-fold damage. The self-respect of ethnic minorities was being attacked and increasingly they felt adversely discriminated against by the news media. The rest of the populace found daily confirmation of their fears and prejudices within the news media. Many social and community relations workers protested to local and national newspapers and in some instances to the Press Council. The news media in turn reacted by accusing the social and community workers of trying to influence them unduly, and retreated even more solidly behind the 'gatekeeper' role. (See definition of the "gate-keeper" role page 9.)

In 1965, there had been published a Government White Paper on Immigration from the Commonwealth which, as Robert Moore has observed, 'laid the ideological basis for subsequent policy in this area and as a result the argument that the numbers of immigrants was the essence of the problem'.

This found a ready echo in the news media which already in their turn

were 'mirroring' the views of those people in areas where high concentrations of immigrants were building up. When first single streets and then whole areas started 'going black' the headline writers did not have to search far for useful evocative and brief headline words such as 'Ghetto' to aggravate the situation.

It is against this sort of background that we must see a further destructive force, Powellism, emerge in 1968-69. Enoch Powell, then MP for Wolverhampton South-West, struck the match which lit the fuse which caused the explosion which made racism acceptable to many people; crystalised the unspoken fears of many, and structured racism into British society.

The news media could hardly have ignored Powell's speeches nor the dramatic events in his political career which followed his Birmingham speech. This is a point made by Lord Devlin, the then Chairman of the Press Council. But should the media have foreseen the outcome, and were the news media sufficiently alert to social problems to have done so? These are questions which it is difficult to answer even today. And it must also be recognised that Powell was an astute self-publicist and manipulator of the media. He made his speeches at times when they would get Saturday, Sunday and Monday reaction coverage in the news media. He went to considerable lengths to achieve sensitive distribution of advance copies. Most of those speeches had a few well-chosen phrases and headline words which journalists could easily abstract and which would provide them with a good story without too much work. Powell's speeches and the very wide national and international coverage which they received once again led those most concerned with the race relations industry to openly and strongly criticise the news media for the prominence given, and in their own minds they saw the unrest those speeches subsequently created as capable of being laid at the door of the news media.

Indeed, at that time, there was hardly a week without some story with strong race overtones on the press, on radio or on television when it lent itself to coverage by that medium – and anticipated violence did so. It was noticeable that, in such circumstances, violence was nearly always delayed until the arrival of the television cameras, and the television crews seldom gave shots of peaceful or constructive aspects of demonstrations. There was endless warfare between unemployed, uncommitted black youths and the police with a great deal of arresting on suspicion. The news media in general in its 'gatekeeper' or 'mirror' approach, tended to be far more supportive of law-and-order and of those in society who want a tough line taken with young offenders. When the Ugandan and then the Malawi Asians arrived, the news media found no lack of 'instant spokesmen' to proclaim doom and disaster and to say that what had been so long prophesied had now arrived.

In Britain we are still at the stage of having what twenty years ago in the United States was known as the 'statutory black'. And few people are more conscious of the need for the 'statutory black' than certain sections of the news media when performing certain tasks. But they turn their backs on it in other ways. In television entertainment, feature article illustrations, fashion and commercial television advertisements, we see the statutory blacks. But they are not expected themselves to take part in news gathering or news dissemination processes. It is still quite common to hear the excuse made by people manning a news desk that they could not risk sending a black to cover a race relations story, because the end result would show bias from the black!

As far back as February 1967 at a Conference on Racial Equality in Employment in London organised by the National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants, one of the speakers was Mr Norman Nicholson, vice-president of Kaiser Industries, California. He said of the American black that he was the 'invisible man'. His argument was that until recently (in America in the mid-sixties) the black child growing up could not see himself in a television advertisement, a newspaper advertisement or a magazine advertisement. He was never there. 'How could a young negro boy dream of becoming an airline pilot or a business executive when pictures of people getting out of airlines never included a negro?' he asked.

Mr Nicholson said that this had been changed by purposeful design. 'A two-pronged approach (a) to make the negro visible: not to make negroes the majority for the purposes of an advertisement but if there were fifteen people lined up at a bank teller's window two or three would have to be minority people or it just wouldn't be realistic, and (b) to run a campaign addressed to negro youth that "things are changing"'.

In Britain things are changing too, but in terms of news media performance the change is slow, patchy and irregular. It is also often irrational and there are times when one pace forward seems to be followed soon afterwards by two paces backward. In respect of the news media industry and the race relations industry, it would be better if the race relations industry were to be more ready to give praise and credit for the positive things which the news media do, even though they may be woefully inadequate.

News media attitudes

Many news media have not shown sufficient understanding of problems arising from the immigration of a large number of people from different countries. Even countries of origin were blurred in the public mind and any black West Indian or African was classed as a Jamaican, a fact which understandably annoyed the Jamaicans and Jamaican authorities in this country. In the same way, almost any Asian was

designated as a Pakistani, because a larger number of the first wave of Asian immigrants did in fact come from Pakistan. Little or no attempt was made to understand the strict religious principles which some newcomers brought with them to Britain and which sometimes led them into conflict with those in authority; the wearing of turbans as part of a religious principle was one. Even today the desire on the part of one parent, that his son attend school wearing a turban and the headmaster's reaction of sending the boy home, can become front page news for several days. Such an even becomes stereotyped in the public mind as a further demonstration of Sikh unreasonableness and refusal to accept assimilation.

News media often laid stress, even in editorials, on the disinclination of immigrant communities to conform, confusing religious sentiment and pride in ethnic identity with obstinacy.[3] It has also been strongly argued that in such television programmes as 'Till death us do part', though there may have been no intention of using its attitudes as anything other than for creating a situation-comedy, the effect has been to emphasize such differences and again to perpetuate stereotypes of turban-wearing, polygamous, curry-eating, social security scroungers.[4]

In making its decision (possibly not in the first place consciously or maliciously entered upon) to treat race and particularly colour differences as news, the mass media have been one of the more important factors in fixing the stereotypes. In doing so the news media were not of themselves corporately, consciously nor intentionally racist. But this is nevertheless what has happened.[5] It is a generally accepted principle that neutrality in a biased situation feeds bias – the bias was heavily

[3] *Report of Conference of Black Journalists, Birmingham, November 1981,* published by Commission for Racial Equality, 1982.

[4] Referring to a dispute at Wolverhampton over one Sikh wishing to wear a turban while working on the local bus service, David Beetham writes in *Transport and Turbans: a comparative study in local politics* (published by the Institute for Race Relations and Oxford University Press, 1970). 'It would not be far-fetched to see the dispute as having contributed to the climate of opinion in which Enoch Powell's April 20 speech, and the reaction to it, became possible. Obviously there were more considerable problems facing Wolverhampton in the field of race relations than whether a minor Transport Department rule (no turbans) should be modified. But the fact that the issue had been in the news continuously for the preceding eight months, and the way it had developed, helped to encourage the kind of fears which Powell was able to exploit so skilfully – in particular the fear that people might come to be dominated in their own town by strangers who were determined to pursue an alien way of life'.

[5] About the responsibility of journalists, Lionel Morrison, Chairman of the NUJ's Race Relations Working Party, writes in an introduction to a booklet *Black and Front – Journalists and race reporting',* written by Dennis MacShane while he was president of the NUJ and published by the NUJ 1978: 'Racialism and journalists are bound together with the stickiest of verbal glue. Who brought the public news of Enoch Powell's notorious series of race speeches beginning with the pophesy of "rivers foaming with blood" in 1968, down to his call in February 1978 for compulsory repatriation? We did. Who gives the public partial accounts and sometimes colourful interpretations of complex immigra-

loaded against the new arrivals from other countries, and the neutrality inherent in the 'gatekeeper' approach fed that bias.

In treating race itself as news, the mass media appointed itself to what is often called the 'gatekeeper' or 'mirror' role, as opposed to 'advocacy' role.

In news media terms one of the advantages of the 'gatekeeper' or 'mirror' role is that it admits no opposition, argument or qualification. The gatekeeper is not answerable to anyone but himself and his own sense of responsibility, whether it be well-developed or stunted. In the dark the gatekeeper often sees all cats as grey. He is not required to reason, enquire nor to consider the consequences which may result from letting them pass!

Many news media people now realise that they have been caught in a trap of their own making. At first they over-reacted and proclaimed their innocence in such a manner as to provoke the Shakesperian retort . . . 'The lady doth protest too much, methinks'.[6]

The news media have also insisted that they were independent and impartial with such vigour and for so long that there have been times when they have felt it necessary to go to excessive lengths to prove these qualities in their reporting of race and thereby give what can only be regarded as undue prominence to those who are racist and anti-immigrant. Unless they do so, they feel that they have laid themselves open to those critics, usually racist themseleves, who welcome any opportunity to attack the media and who themselves stereotype the news media as soft and pro-black because they do not always advance those hard-line policies which they themselves consider desirable.

This has, in its turn, often led the news media to reject outright well-meaning overtures from those working for racial harmony and to turn down out-of-hand any suggestion that they should substitute the 'advocacy' role for the 'gatekeeper' role and thereby practice some form of positive editing. Positive editing is regarded by most editors in the United Kingdom as a denial of press freedom and a negation of the free flow of news.

All this has not helped relationships between the mass media and those concerned with promoting racial harmony.

Because social scientists were aware from early days of Britain's movement towards a multi-racial society or at least a pluralist one, from time to time they have subjected the news media or selected sections of it

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tion and birth-rate statistics? We do. Who splashes the front pages with National Front-provoked violence and relegates peacefull mass protest against racism to a few down-column paragraphs? We do. Who lumps together people from widely different countries, continents, cultures languages and religions and describes them simply as Asians? We do'.

[6] Hamlet, Act 3, Scene 2.

to studies of their coverage of race using their own methodology.[7] This has been something which the news media have found more embarrassing and more distasteful than overtures from the race relations industry.[8]

The latter could be dismissed by invocation of the 'gatekeeper' argument. The findings of the social scientists could not be so easily answered, and so were for the most part conveniently ignored in the news media and indeed many of them have never yet been properly answered. A researcher looking for evidence that the news media have given careful thought to their attitudes about race or about the charges laid against them by the social scientists would be baffled by the sparseness of material. There have been little more than a few pamphlets, occasional newspaper and magazine articles and broadcasts. A set of guidelines[9] has been published by the working journalists' trade union, the National Union of Journalists, but it has not been adopted officially by the editors' professional organisation, the Guild of British Newspaper Editors, who see in it the abrogation of the authority of the editor in certain respects. The British Press Council has adjudicated on formal complaints of bias or inaccuracy in reported race matters, but these complaints have not been very numerous nor enough to build up any great volume of case law on the subject such as that which already

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[7] It may be of interest here to quote from the work of Charles Husband, *White Media and Black Britain – a critical look at the role of the media in race relations today (1975):* 'To be a black resident of this country is to be subject to a continuous assault on your identity and integrity. Your presence in this country is signalled to you as being unreal since the news media refuse to see you as a citizen, but as an immigrant . . . The possible arrival of more people with a similar background to yourself is reported in the press in the language of natural disasters as "a flood" or "a tidal wave". A continuous assumption implicit in much of the news programming is that, in various ways, you and your kind are an unwanted burden, a black parasite on a white society . . . These aspects of news have made it difficult for black citizens of this country to feel accepted and settled here. Indeed, it is more accurate to say that they are tolerated'.

[8] The term 'race relations *industry*' came to be accepted as the comprehensive term for those who were working professionally or voluntarily to improve race relations in Britain.

[9] ● Only mention someone's race or nationality if strictly relevant.
● Resist the temptation to sensationalise issues which could harm race relations.
● Press for equal opportunities for employment of black staff, particularly in areas of extensive minority group settlement.
● Seek to achieve wider and better coverage of black affairs: social, cultural.
● Investigate the treatment of blacks in education, employment and housing and the activities of racialist organisations.

These guidelines relate to Clause 10 of the revised cose of conduct, which was approved at the NUJ's 1975 Annual Delegates Meeting in Cardiff. This Clause enjoins journalists not to "originate material which encourages discrimination on grounds of race, colour, creed, gender or sexual orientation".

The 1977 Annual Delegates Meeting decided to "instruct every branch to set up a watch-dog committee to monitor racial stories and report any instance of a breach of the NUJ Code to the Race Relations Working Party".

exists on cheque-book journalism, invasion of privacy, etc. The Press Council operates through case law and its guidelines therefore are often slow in being established.

One of the most serious effects of news media coverage of race has been the way in which, by their own self-chosen approach, they have aided, abetted and confirmed the already existing desire on the part of many in positions of authority to pull race out from the internal dynamic of British society. The inclination has been to deal with race as if it had nothing intrinsically to do with the present condition of Britain and is an external problem which has been foisted on this country from outside. It is an easy philosophy because it assumes that if race were dealt with in that manner it would ultimately go away. The news media have shown only minimal interest in treating race as an integral part of inner-city decay or the whole problem of youth employment.

Prof Stuart Hall in the already mentioned *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain,* says in this particular context: 'The popular press is fond of saying that we have been subjected "to a tidal wave" and to suggest that if we cut off the flow of immigrants, then racism would subside.'

The treatment that racial issues should get in news media has obviously often been evoked. When he was Chairman of the Press Council in 1971, Lord Devlin, writing a foreword to *Race and the Press*[10] said: 'The classical view of the function of the Press is that it should present all the facts which the public ought to know as fully and impartially as possible and then should offer independent and unfettered comment. The sacredness of facts coupled with the freedom of comment is inscribed on every pressman's heart.[11] In deciding what is to be printed editorial discretion must have the freest rein. The editor must not be told what line to take by the proprietors, advertisers or other interested persons. In the category of interested persons – and perhaps the most pernicious members of it – are the do-gooders. They are the most pernicious because they always have right on their side. They are able to point so persuasively to the immense good that would be done in particular circumstances by suppressing this fact or expanding upon

[10] *Race and the Press:* Four essays by Clement Jones, Peter Harland, Hugo Young and Harold Evans. A Runnymede Trust Publications.

[11] Felicity Grant, in an article in *Broadcast*, weekly magazine of the broadcasting industry, 5 February, 1979, said the following about distortions which may come out even unintentionally: 'Debate about the claim to objectivity in current affairs and news coverage has proliferated in recent years. In its wake, increasing numbers of people outside and within broadcasting are concerned about a communications system which, unintentionally perhaps, constructs social and political message which may be at odds with observable truths. The issue of race is a key example in this process of distortion where immigrant is often equated with "black" and "black" with problems. In these nervous times the gap between our black citizens "having problems" and "being the problem" seems for some unnoticeable. And that represents a gross misunderstanding of our political and economic life'.

that; and it is the editor's distressing duty to point out to them that the price of doing good within a limited field is too high when it is paid for by the diminution of general principle'.

This attitude (reflected in the remarks of Lord Devlin about do-gooders already quoted) led to an increasing polarisation between the news media and those working for racial harmony. The latter were seeing the news media as the enemy, although they themselves did not look for deeper causes. Some of their calls for suppression were quite unrealistic and, if they had succeeded, would have been a serious denial of free speech. In its turn, the news media began to lump many race relations workers together with the problems they were trying to solve.

Stuart Hall has a valuable comment on the early 1970s in *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain* (ibid) when he says: 'It is in this period that the syntax was formed of extremists versus moderates, without which it seemed impossible for the media to comment on politics at all. The legal harrassment of the black colony populations, the overt racist homilies against the whole black population by judges in courts, the imposition of tough policing and arrest on suspicion, the rising hysteria about black crime and the identification of black crime with mugging, must all be seen in the whole society as a form of popular authoritarianism. What we had defined earlier as a set of discrete panics about race can no longer be identified in that way . . .'.

It was at this time, too, that the great mythology about immigrants boomed and its fantastic stories were frequently given credence by the news media,[12] not necessarily as hard news but more often in quotations from speeches or interviews, letters to the editor and radio phone-in programmes. This further widened the breach between the media and the race relations industry because many people involved in race relations work could not see why the news media should not check first

[12] In the already mentioned book Charles Husband says about television programmes: 'Studies of television content indicate the way in which white ownership and control reflects itself in white content. It is not of course merely the absolute number of appearances of black actors in drama and comedy series which is important, but also the fact that so seldom do they have anything other than a minor supporting role or walk-on parts. One consequence of this is that in the world of television entertainment black people tend to be always the subordinates, those who follow but never command . . . in fact television entertainment frequently fails to reflect British multi-racialism where it exists . . . In the past few years when the news media have generated a paranoid concern over the illegal immigration of blacks this spurious problem has emerged in at least three popular drama series: 'The Saint'; 'Softly Softly'; and 'The Strange Report'; all had an episode centering on the illegal entry of blacks into Britain. Thus an issue which resonated perfectly with all the most deeply hidden chauvinist and racial fears of the white audience was given further credence by dramatic elaboration: elaboration which in the case of one of these programmes resulted in the illegal immigrant being portrayed as the cause of a smallpox scare, with resulting scenes of old people and children trudging to the mobile clinic to receive their immunization'.

and publish afterwards, nor why they should apparently appear to take such a delight in printing obvious falsehoods.[13] Often the media were remiss in failing to publish corrections or balancing stories put forward by people in the race relations industry, but this was not due to any particularly racial prejudice on the part of the news media, but is one of those things about which many people inside and outside the media industry regard the British news media as being most at fault. Since its formation the British Press Council has achieved some improvement, but the overall position, particularly the prominence given to corrections and denials in relation to the original story, still leaves much to be desired. In the case of race relations this fault on the part of the news media has had a noticeably harmful effect. It does not take very long for a myth, lie or insinuation if repeated often enough and never adequately corrected to become accepted as fact.

During 1977 several conferences were held in order to bring editors, journalists and the communicators together with race relations workers and leaders of ethnic minority groups. The results were positive but the scale of the operation was inadequate. These conferences highlighted the fact that one area in which the news media generally would certainly seem to have failed the British public is on the provision of information. Because the news media claim that their prime purpose is maintaining

[13] The Report by Community Relations Commission *Reporting Race* deals with the role and responsibility of the press in reporting race relations during 1976, and explicitly says: 'The vast majority of the British reading public gain their newspaper information from the *Daily Mirror, The Sun, Daily Express, Daily Mail* and *Daily Telegraph* in that order. Apart from notable exceptions in the *Daily Mirror* those newspapers were most likely to sensationalise some or all of the issues during the period covered . . . Although the *Daily Telegraph, Daily Express, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror,* and *The Sun* were responsible for the most sensational headlines during this period *The Times, Guardian* and *Financial Times* did not resist the temptation either. For two weeks readers were subjected to an almost constant news coverage on Asian immigration from all the newspapers – and these two weeks turned out to be only the precursor of a long summer in which immigration, race relations and black people provided a major portion of news coverage . . . A clear example of sensational reporting of race relations has been the way in which the majority of the press has treated Enoch Powell's speeches over the past years. The reasons for this are clear: one overriding principle for newspaper editors is to keep circulation figures high and this is usually met by printing what will keep the readers interested. Mr Powell's speeches are sensational. The majority of papers, particularly the popular press, have therefore correlated readers' interest with Mr Powell's speeches and have placed them accordingly: with front page headlines. In addition to giving these speeches priority, and in some cases as a consequence of this priority, the general impression given by many newspapers has been one of tacit approval of his views. The argument is to some extent a circular one – do readers give a high priority to Mr Powell's speeches because the newspapers do? It is also a question of responsible reporting on the hyper-sensitive issue of race relations. If editors and journalists are to carry out their responsibilities in interpretative and balanced reporting of this issue, speeches from Enoch Powell should be considered carefully in terms of their position and treatment in the newspaper and should be accompanied by accounts of the alternative points of view'.

the free flow of information this is the more reprehensible. In the report of a Conference held in January 1969 at Westhill College of Education, Selly Oak, Birmingham.[14] Dr Fred Milson writes: 'What is written here does not pretend to be a sustained scientific or statistical piece of research. We agree that this is necessary. The dearth of reliable information about our coloured population is one of the difficulties in coping with the problems which arise. And as shown in recent controversies particularly those in the mass media, prejudice feeds on ignorance . . . few people in Britain can think of the immigrant situation in a completely detached way'.

In July 1978 the British Broadcasting Corporation broadcast on TV extracts from five talks on race relations. Later the full text was published as *Five views of Multi-Racial Britain* (ibid). In the foreword David Lane, Chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality, reiterated that too often the media confused race relations with immigration and he wrote: 'To those working for good race relations in Britain it seems that many journalists are preoccupied with immigration and forget that it has already declined to a low level and that the fulfilment of our remaining obligations is more likely to assist integration in this country than damage it. The repercussions of this distortion by the media are disturbing to those who recognise that Britain is now a multi-racial society and that its future development and well-being require the dispelling of fears and anxieties that arise from ignorance and prejudice'.

In the introduction to the same pamphlet, John Twitchen, the BBC producer concerned with the television programme, explained that in broadcasting extracts from the talks the BBC aimed at making a contribution to a more rational and more informed debate on questions of race relations in our society. He admitted, however, that the talks 'can be seen as part of an overdue attempt to provide some of the facts and theory needed for a better informed public discussion of race relations issues'.

Discussing reasons why the BBC should, even at this late date, have felt this necessary, Mr Twitchen commented on the fact that each year the public was presented with what he described as 'a continual spate of news coverage of events which are plainly symptomatic of the general state of race relations in Britain. In the first six months of 1978 alone, for example, we have already seen recurrent political argument about possible further changes in immigration policy; there's been the all-party Select Committee Report on Immigration; there was a major demonstration by Asian youth in protest against the killing of an Asian Bangalee in London's East End; there was the Greater London Council

[14] Westhill is an interprofessional training establishment for teachers, full-time youth workers, community centre wardens and Christian educationists for home and overseas.

row over whether Asians would be safe from racist assaults if they were housed in what the press called 'ghettoes'; and there were the constantly reported street-level activities of the National Front, now so often countered by demonstrations and rock carnivals involving the Anti-Nazi League'.

Though he referred specifically to 'press' coverage of these matters, Mr Twitchen found it convenient not to refer to the fact that often television coverage, especially of major demonstrations where some violence occurred, added a further dimension of fear and of racial prejudice by its selective coverage of the event, taking it dramatically and with all its violence shown in isolation, into people's homes and firesides.

What comes through in reading particularly the talks by John Rex, Stuart Hall and Alan Little is that the questions and problems cannot be treated by abstract argument alone. Real understanding of race relations requires a degree of imagination and sensitivity to the experiences of ethnic minorities living in a society which still appears hostile to them in so many ways. The sensitivity which is required is much more than merely paternalistic interest in minority group culture nor indeed journalistic satisfying of public curiosity. What is required is positive action of a kind which so far all but a very few news media exponents have resisted.

Positive action

In this same pamphlet *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain,* John Rex, Professor of Sociology at the University of Warwick, dealing with 'Race in the Inner-City', gives valuable clarification to the need for a programme of multi-cultural education, both of adults through the news media and of children through the schools. He points out that this is not a programme for educating immigrants or a programme for those who live in immigrant areas. 'What is most important in Britain today is that all people and particularly people in all-white areas and those who occupy prestigious and powerful positions, should achieve a better and more sympathetic understanding of the minorities who live among us'.

Regrettably, it is not possible to turn to any section of the news media, written word, nor broadcasting and to say they have made any significant contribution in this context.

This is a point which is rarely understood. When multi-cultural education is mentioned, most people, if they think about it at all, think in terms of teaching in schools young immigrants about British ways and attitudes as part of a process of assimilation with possibly a somewhat patronising interest in the quainter or more colourful immigrant customs. There is certainly no attempt to really understand the depth at which Islamic teaching enters the lives of the people who follow that

religion; nor Hinduism, Buddhism etc. Very few people for instance know more about the dominant movement among West Indian youth, Rastafarianism, except through certain stereotyping on the part of the news media which pick on Rastafarians (or more often than not fringe ones rather than genuine followers) as unkempt troublemakers. What the general public does not realise, because it has never been explained adequately in the media, is what John Rex calls 'the self-assertive cultures of resistance' which can be found in ethnic minorities. These are ways in which people attain dignity and self-respect in the face of degrading discrimination, even though at the same time by being alien and apparently aggressive they may serve to escalate racial tension. John Rex adds that the closer he gets as an amateur anthropologist to studying the ethnicity of immigrants and their cultures of resistance and affirmation '... the more impressed I am by their seriousness, by the way in which they help to give people dignity. There are serious cultures amongst people who are our neighbours and who have every reason to deserve our respect'. But in general terms not only do we not give such people cultural recognition, we do not even give them access to the news media nor to any other form of self-expression. Apart from the BBC broadcast and apart from an equally valuable television series 'Our People' put out in January 1979 by Thames Television (a commercial TV network) and apart from some ethnic minority programmes broadcast on local radio stations usually at non-peak listening hours (early morning and late at night) and apart from some ethnic minority music broadcasts, the air waves too are barren of cultural recognition of the ethnic minorities in Britain.

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