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# “Dark Strangers” in Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947–1963

Chris Waters

It has been more than a decade since Benedict Anderson urged us to consider the nation a particular kind of cultural artefact and to study national communities in terms of the style in which they are imagined.<sup>1</sup> Anticipating Anderson’s seminal work, Enoch Powell, the Biblical scholar, Ulster Unionist M.P., and 1960s advocate of the voluntary repatriation of people of color in Britain likewise suggested that the “life of nations . . . is lived largely in the imagination.” He also noted that the myths on which Britain’s “corporate imagination” rested had, since 1945, become severely impoverished.<sup>2</sup> Amidst the rubble produced by the collapse of many of those myths scholars have begun to problematize the various components of national identity that, customarily, have been taken for granted as “real” rather than invented. They have also begun to trace the manner by which the national community has constantly been imagined and reimagined in the past. Some of their more insightful work has considered the articulation of Englishness against other nationalities in the United Kingdom, particularly the Irish. This had led Linda Colley to suggest that national identity is always contingent and relational, the product of boundaries drawn up to distinguish between the collective self and the other.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Enoch Powell, *Freedom and Reality* (Kingswood, Surrey, 1969), pp. 324–25. For Powell and national identity, see Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, 2d ed. (London, 1981), pp. 256–90.

<sup>3</sup> Linda Colley, “Britishness and Otherness: An Argument,” *Journal of British Studies* 31, no. 4 (1992): 311. See also Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, eds., *Englishness: Politics and Culture, 1880–1920* (London, 1986); Bernard Crick, “The English and the

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In this essay, I want to suggest that Britain's wartime sense of national unity, generated through the struggle against fascist Germany, began to crumble after 1945. This gradual erosion of national cohesion, coupled with Britain's failure to generate new narratives of national purpose through the rhetoric of the Cold War, led to a veritable crisis of national self-representation in the 1950s, a crisis compounded by domestic social dislocation and the rapid emergence of the political, military, and economic hegemony of the United States. Moreover, against the backdrop of postwar imperial decline and attempts to reconfigure the meaning of citizenship in a new, multiethnic Commonwealth, questions of race became central to questions of national belonging. Especially in the 1950s, discussions about the rapid increase of "new Commonwealth" migration to Britain could not wholly be separated from discussions of what it now meant to be British. In that decade, the characteristics of Black migrants in Britain were mapped against those of white natives, serving in part to shore up definitions of essential Britishness. As Harry Goulbourne has argued, the "most powerful and influential attempts to redefine the post-imperial British national community" have depended on a conception of the nation which "excludes non-white minorities who have settled on these shores since the Second World War."<sup>4</sup>

Robert Miles has commented on the racialization of national belonging in Britain, suggesting that "the process of representing the Other entails a dialectic of representational inclusion and exclusion. By attributing a population with certain characteristics in order to categorise and differentiate it as an Other, those who do so also establish criteria by which they themselves are represented."<sup>5</sup> Taking my cue from both Goulbourne and Miles, I will argue that one of the many attempts to reimagine the national community in the 1950s depended on reworking established tropes of little Englandism against the migrant other, an other perceived as a "stranger" to those customs and conventions taken to be at the heart of Britishness itself. I will also argue that the representation of Black migrants to Britain as un-British helped to reconfigure and secure the imagined community of the nation during a period of rapid change and great uncertainty.

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British," in *National Identities: The Constitution of the United Kingdom*, ed. Bernard Crick (Oxford, 1991), pp. 90–104.

<sup>4</sup> Harry Goulbourne, *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 1; see also pp. 80–83.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Miles, *Racism* (London, 1989), pp. 38–39. For related ideas that have influenced my argument, see John Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain*, 2d ed. (London, 1993), chaps. 8 and 10; Etienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, ed. Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (London, 1991), pp. 37–67; Robert Miles, *Racism after Race Relations* (London, 1993), chap. 2.

It is difficult to estimate the Black population in Britain in the late 1940s and 1950s, although the most reliable estimates suggest that fewer than 1,000 persons of color came to Britain each year in the 1940s and that this rose to some 20,000 per year by the mid-1950s. Toward the end of the decade the numbers declined somewhat, a response to worsening job prospects. Nevertheless, the fear of impending immigration controls led to a surge in the number of migrants to some 100,000 in 1961, the year before controls were implemented.<sup>6</sup> Whereas the Black population of Britain was estimated to be 74,500 in 1951, it had risen to 336,000 by the end of 1959 and close to 500,000 by the time the Commonwealth Immigrants Act took effect in 1962.<sup>7</sup>

The rapid increase in the number of Black migrants in Britain gave rise to many anxieties. It also resulted in the emergence of a new “science,” that of “race relations,” pioneered by anthropologists and sociologists such as Kenneth Little, Anthony Richmond, Michael Banton, and Sheila Patterson, all of whom set out to study migrant communities and the response to them in Britain. One consequence of their work was the consolidation of the discursive framework through which race and nation came to be widely understood in academic and nonacademic liberal circles between the late 1940s and the early 1960s. It was the knowledge of race, nation, and difference articulated by these writers that built upon and helped to define apparently commonsense notions of race and, as a consequence, the postwar boundaries of national belonging. These race relations experts consistently narrated the migrant other as a “stranger” to assumed norms of what it meant to be British, or at least English.<sup>8</sup> In numerous books and articles, with titles such as *Dark Strangers*, “The Archetypal Stranger,” and “Strangers in Our Midst,”<sup>9</sup> they constructed

<sup>6</sup> James Wickenden, *Colour in Britain* (London, 1958), pp. 2–4; Sheila Patterson, *Dark Strangers: A Sociological Study of the Absorption of a Recent West Indian Migrant Group in Brixton, South London* (1963; abridged ed., London, 1965), p. 359—all subsequent references are to this 1965 Pelican edition; Ceri Peach, *West Indian Migration to Britain: A Social Geography* (Oxford, 1968).

<sup>7</sup> Paul B. Rich, *Race and Empire in British Politics*, 2d ed. (Cambridge, 1990), p. 188. I am using the term “Black” here as a construct (hence the capitalization), one that is commonly used in Britain to refer to all people of color, including those of South Asian ancestry.

<sup>8</sup> The writers on whom this essay focuses slip back and forth between discussing the English and the British. This is not the place to examine the ways in which notions of Englishness have become hegemonic in discussions of the British (but see Crick’s [n. 3] astute observations on this). Given the extent to which these writers attempted to map the essential cultural difference between Black migrants and the white residents of Britain in general, I have seen fit to use the term Britishness in discussing their project, except when the authors discussed refer explicitly to Englishness in the passages cited.

<sup>9</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers*; Michael Banton, *White and Coloured: The Behaviour of British People towards Coloured Immigrants* (London, 1959), chap. 5 (title: “The

a framework through which migrant experience could be rendered meaningful in terms that also bolstered particular understandings of the national community itself.

Since the late 1960s, the work of postwar race relations scholars has been subject to a number of critiques. Some have attacked it for ignoring issues of class or gender and others for downplaying the degree of racism in British society.<sup>10</sup> Despite these attacks, however, such work has been valuable to social historians who have pillaged it in their own attempt to write the history of Black experience in Britain.<sup>11</sup> It is not my purpose to continue the attack on the 1950s race relations discourse. Nor, however, do I simply want to use this work to reconstruct the lives of postwar migrants in Britain. Instead, I wish to re-read the texts produced by race relations experts between the late 1940s and early 1960s, *within* their historical context, *as* texts, especially for the ways in which they constituted the “experience” they claimed, transparently and unproblematically, to document.<sup>12</sup> In so doing, I hope to shed some light on the process by which the articulation of racial difference played a crucial role in reworking the dominant narratives of nation and national belonging in early postwar Britain.

## National Fictions

Before turning to the writings of race relations experts in the 1950s, I want to explore briefly the shifting narratives of nationhood in Britain during the 1930s and 1940s, a period in which the nation was increasingly reimagined on the site of the ordinary and everyday. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, the nation is often to be found “in the disclosures of its everyday life”; the “scraps, patches and rags of daily life,” he suggests, “must be repeatedly turned into the signs of a national culture, while the very act of the narrative performance interpellates a growing circle of national subjects.”<sup>13</sup> Nowhere, perhaps, is this more true than in interwar Britain. There, as Alison Light suggests, the formerly heroic

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Archetypal Stranger”); John Plamenatz, “Strangers in Our Midst,” *Race* 7 (1965): 1–16.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Robert Miles, *Racism and Migrant Labour* (London, 1982), esp. chap. 2.

<sup>11</sup> See Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: Black People in Britain since 1504* (London, 1984), chaps. 10–11; Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), chap. 7.

<sup>12</sup> I am borrowing here from Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (1991): 773–97.

<sup>13</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in his *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), pp. 294, 297.

and officially masculine rhetoric of national identity was superseded by a new emphasis on modes of belonging that were less explicitly imperial and more inward-looking, that emphasized the domestic and private characteristics of national life.<sup>14</sup> Certainly the patriotic myth of little England as an antidote to imperial zeal can be traced back to Edwardian times, especially to liberals like C. F. G. Masterman who attempted to refashion national identity in terms other than those of the nation's imperial heritage and destiny.<sup>15</sup> But it was largely in the 1930s and 1940s that Britons were reinvented as members of an essentially unassuming nation, a quiet, private, and ordinary people, defined by their modesty, kindness to others, loyalty, truthfulness, straightforwardness, and simplicity.

With Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany, these characteristics of the imagined community were given greater salience, contrasted with those of the Nazi other. As one writer argued in 1938, the “Englishman . . . cannot be explained without the German.”<sup>16</sup> In their attempts to “explain” the English to themselves during World War II, a number of writers extended the metaphors of “ordinariness” that had first been codified in the 1930s. In his 1941 essay, “England Your England,” for example, George Orwell narrated the nation in terms of its commonsense ordinariness: “All the culture that is most truly native,” he wrote, “centres around things which even when they are communal are not official—the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the ‘nice cup of tea.’”<sup>17</sup> In his radio chats, J. B. Priestley contributed further to this particular myth of the English, as did the documentary filmmaker Humphrey Jennings, whose films depicted men and women from diverse walks of life, all bound together in an unspoken spiritual unity. Institutions like the British Broadcasting Corporation and the Ministry of Information also played a crucial role in glorifying “ordinary people” as the heroes and heroines of the national drama.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism between the Wars* (London, 1991), pp. 8, 154. See also Raphael Samuel, “Introduction,” in *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, vol. 1, *History and Politics*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London, 1989), p. xxiv.

<sup>15</sup> See Tim Cloke, “‘Old England’ and Other Perspectives (Historical Traditions and Teaching),” *New Community* 12 (1985): 255.

<sup>16</sup> William Gerhardt, “Climate and Character,” in *The English Genius: A Survey of the English Achievement and Character*, ed. Hugh Kingsmill (London, 1938), p. 62. For an elaboration of this theme, see Malcolm Chase, “This Is No Claptrap: This Is Our Heritage,” in *The Imagined Past: History and Nostalgia*, ed. Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (Manchester, 1989), p. 131.

<sup>17</sup> George Orwell, “England Your England,” in his *A Collection of Essays* (New York, 1946), p. 254.

<sup>18</sup> For Priestley, see Chris Waters, “J. B. Priestley, (1894–1984): Englishness and the Politics of Nostalgia,” in *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, ed. Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler (London, 1994), pp. 209–

In terms of my argument about national identity and the construction of the racial other in the 1950s, three points need to be made about the national fictions of the 1930s and 1940s. First, the imagined national community articulated in these years was gendered in specific ways, more feminine than it had been, privileging the private and domestic over the public—hearth and home, rather than scepter and sword, became the symbols of national existence.<sup>19</sup> This domestication of national identity influenced thinking about interracial relationships, for if the nation was increasingly “feminine,” then fears of unlicensed Black male sexuality could generate anxieties not only about the safety of women, hearth, and home but about the very safety of the nation itself. Such concerns had surfaced in the 1920s and 1930s when opposition to interracial marriages in British seaports became widespread.<sup>20</sup> They would surface again in the 1950s, as we will see, in part fuelled by the domesticated idioms of Britishness that had been generated between the wars.

Second, representations of working-class communities, with heroic images of their stalwart and stoic residents grimly “carrying on” in the face of adversity, became central to the national fictions of the 1930s and 1940s. Formerly “a race apart,” workers were rapidly transformed into “the British common people,” taking up their new, and now apparently rightful, place in the national community.<sup>21</sup> Once the national culture had been fixed as *socially* cohesive, it became easier to position the Black migrant against a national imaginary that now embodied the experience of white Britons from all classes. It also became much easier to cement social cohesion through the exclusion of the racial other, as was the case in the 1950s when Britishness and whiteness became increasingly synonymous.

The reshaping of national identity in the 1930s and 1940s had a third consequence for the ways in which race and nation would be articu-

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26; for Jennings, see Robert Colls and Philip Dodd, “Representing the Nation: British Documentary Film, 1930–45,” *Screen* 26 (1985): 21–33; for the BBC, see David Cardiff and Paddy Scannell, “Broadcasting and National Unity,” in *Impacts and Influences: Essays on Media Power in the Twentieth Century*, ed. James Curran, Anthony Smith, and Pauline Wingate (London, 1987), pp. 157–73. See also Geoff Hurd, ed., *National Fictions: World War Two in British Films and Television* (London, 1984); Miles Taylor, “Patriotism, History and the Left in Twentieth-Century Britain,” *Historical Journal* 33 (1990): esp. 979–83; Paul Rich, “A Question of Life and Death to England: Patriotism and the British Intellectuals, c. 1886–1945,” *New Community* 15 (1989): 491–508.

<sup>19</sup> Samuel, p. xiv.

<sup>20</sup> Laura Tabili, “*We Ask for British Justice*”: *Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain* (Ithaca, N.Y.: 1994), chap. 7, esp. pp. 156–7.

<sup>21</sup> See Chris Waters, “The Americanisation of the Masses: Cultural Criticism, the National Heritage and Working-Class Culture in the 1930s,” *Social History Curators Group Journal* 17 (1989–90): 22–27.

lated in the 1950s. Earlier, what it meant to be British had often been described in quasi-mystical terms, the nation assuming spiritual qualities that were deeply felt but often difficult to express rationally. As Hilaire Belloc wrote in 1938, echoing a common, if somewhat archaic, sentiment, to “define a national temperament . . . is not possible. The thing depends upon an inward spirit.”<sup>22</sup> Despite Belloc’s claim, the war gave rise to a number of attempts not only to cultivate the nation’s mystical “spirit” but to capture and represent its very essence as well. Scholars, fuelled by the war effort and often employed by government agencies aware of the need to manufacture wartime consent, attempted to do what Belloc said was impossible: to name and define specific aspects of the national character. They argued that even the illusions members of a nation shared about themselves were “mental facts” capable of “scientific” understanding.<sup>23</sup> In an inaugural address that he delivered in 1941 to the social psychology section of the British Psychological Society, for example, Morris Ginsberg claimed that nations “behave in distinctive ways,” that such behavior was due to definable sociocultural conditions, and that national character could thus be mapped with precision.<sup>24</sup> In the work of Ginsberg and others in the 1940s, we see, for the first time, questions of national identity now being addressed by professionals, in part removing them from the realm of the fictional, the journalistic, and the impressionistic. This, too, would have ramifications in the 1950s, for the Black migrant could be mapped *against* a national culture, now understood “scientifically,” and, at the same time, excluded from that culture because he or she could never understand its unspoken “inward spirit.”

To enter the later 1940s and 1950s is to enter a new world in which the components of national identity that had been manufactured in the 1930s and early 1940s seemed to come unstuck. The Dutch historian Johan Huizinga argued that the British, with their “we stood alone” rhetoric from the war, had attempted to convince the rest of the world that they did indeed possess a unique national culture. On closer inspection, however, it seemed no more than a delusion: the only distinctive national character the British possessed, Huizinga argued, “was their susceptibility to the illusion that they had one, and a very remarkable one at that.”<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Hilaire Belloc, “English Verse,” in Kingsmill, ed., p. 19.

<sup>23</sup> Frederick Hertz, *Nationality in History and Politics: A Study of the Psychology and Sociology of National Sentiment and Character* (New York, 1944), pp. 41–42.

<sup>24</sup> M. Ginsberg, “National Character,” *British Journal of Psychology* 32 (1942): 188, 195–96. For the role played by the wartime state in soliciting scientific studies of national character, see Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London, 1990), esp. pp. 15–38.

<sup>25</sup> J. H. Huizinga, *Confessions of a European in England* (London, 1958), p. 83.



Remarkable as it might have seemed during the war, a pervasive sense of loss seemed to ensue at the war's end. One character in Priestley's 1945 "demobilization novel," *Three Men in New Suits*, lamented that "when the feeling of danger that brought them together had gone, they began to separate themselves again."<sup>26</sup> Two years later, the M.P. Richard Law echoed these sentiments, worried about whether or not those qualities of the nation that were "discovered" in the war could still prosper: "these days," he wrote, "when the conditions which created . . . harmony no longer exist . . . , it is impossible to avoid asking oneself whether the essential characteristics of English society can survive."<sup>27</sup> Commenting on the nation's endemic postwar economic crises, Paul Addison has perceptively suggested that victory "removed the imperative of national unity and no one could seriously pretend that a 'financial' Dunkirk was the moral equivalent of the real thing."<sup>28</sup>

Wartime myths of national cohesion and the essential ordinariness of British life were highly sought after symbolic artefacts in the late 1940s. In *Passport to Pimlico*, for example, the popular Ealing Studios comedy of 1949, the return to wartime solidarity was offered as the only solution to the endemic postwar crisis: only in the imagined past of wartime pressures and privations could the residents of Pimlico submerge their differences and restore the cohesion for which they so longed.<sup>29</sup> Referring to this desire to reclaim wartime unity, one writer argued that the British were experiencing a "protective psychological retreat," and that the possibility of developing a new identity within a multiracial Commonwealth was being rejected in favor of more traditional modes of belonging, rooted in the myths of little England.<sup>30</sup>

These comments remain impressionistic, largely because the imagined postwar national community has yet to be mapped with the same precision as its wartime counterpart. Nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that the shifting contours of the nation's imperial mission, the uncertainty of Britain's role in postwar Europe, the demise of the nation as a world power (graphically illustrated by the Suez crisis in 1956), concern about the effects of American forms of mass culture on social stability, and, finally, anxieties generated by the advent of the "affluent society" in

<sup>26</sup> J. B. Priestley, *Three Men in New Suits* (1945, new ed., London, 1984), pp. 139–40; see also p. 150.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Law, "The Individual and the Community," in *The Character of England*, ed. Ernest Barker (Oxford, 1947), p. 51.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Addison, *Now the War Is Over: A Social History of Britain, 1945–51* (London, 1985), p. 28.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion, see Charles Barr, *Ealing Studios* (London, 1987), pp. 80–107.

<sup>30</sup> A colonial correspondent, "African Attitudes," *Twentieth Century* 151 (1952): 19–25.

the later 1950s led to intense questioning about what it now meant to be British. This uncertainty, in turn, reactivated the cozy myth of the war as a powerful frame for feelings of national pride. Amidst the social and political dislocations of this period, certainty was sought—although rarely found—through retreats into, and a revitalization of, wartime myths of national unity. One perceptive observer of this process is Bill Williamson, according to whom, “The notion of what it meant, in a world-political sense, to be British had to readjust and in that painful readjustment there developed a much more exclusive concept of citizenship and a narrower vision of the kind of society Britain could become. That narrowing of vision took many forms and it is hardly surprising in a society with a long colonial history that a redrawing of the emotional boundaries and images of nationhood would for many people take distinctly racist forms.”<sup>31</sup>

Williamson is correct to assume the need to redraw the “emotional boundaries” of nationhood after the war, inaugurating a kind of closure in discourses of national identity that might approximate those achieved during the war. He is also correct to assume that the postwar “narrowing of vision took many forms,” for alongside the discourses of race and nation with which this essay is concerned, other discourses—particularly those around the fears generated by the assumed “Americanization” of British culture—were also central in the attempts to reconfigure and stabilize the meanings of the nation. Finally, Williamson makes an important point when he suggests that a more exclusive concept of citizenship developed after the war. In the parliamentary debates that took place around the 1948 British Nationality Bill, for example, the Labour Home Secretary called for an expansive definition of citizenship, linked to an emerging multiethnic Commonwealth. But this was rebuffed by many Conservatives, David Maxwell Fyfe claiming that because citizenship “must always be equated with some homogeneity and some true community of interest and status,” British citizenship could not reasonably be extended to Black colonial subjects.<sup>32</sup> As we shall see, race relations writers in the 1950s, like Maxwell Fyfe, also spoke of races and nations in terms of their homogeneity as communities of interest.

Despite Williamson’s perceptive observations, however, it is too

<sup>31</sup> Bill Williamson, “Memories, Vision and Hope: Themes in an Historical Sociology of Britain since the Second World War,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1 (1988): 170.

<sup>32</sup> Parliamentary Papers (Commons), 1947–48, vol. 453, col. 1027. For a discussion of the 1948 citizenship debates, see Kathleen Paul, “‘British Subjects’ and ‘British Stock’: Labour’s Postwar Imperialism,” *Journal of British Studies* 35, no. 2 (1995): 233–76; Ann Dummett and Andrew Nicol, *Subjects, Citizens, Aliens and Others: Nationality and Immigration Law* (London, 1990).

simple to “explain” postwar racism as a mere legacy of the nation’s “long colonial history.” Britain’s imperial past did indeed provide many of the racial stereotypes that saturated the nation’s “commonsense racism” in the 1950s and beyond. Moreover, at least since the nineteenth century, what it means to be British has often been articulated around the nation’s colonial legacy.<sup>33</sup> Yet after the war the need to recast the representational configurations of nationhood, often by attempting to revive the wartime spirit of national unity, was equally important for an understanding of the postwar meanings ascribed to race. Concerns about maintaining the cultural homogeneity of the nation not only informed the debates that took place in 1948 over the nature of British citizenship but were also central to the 1950s discourse of race relations.

Most race relations writers in the 1950s took note of the ways in which racial stereotypes and other received ideas from the nation’s imperial past informed popular racial attitudes in Britain.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, they distanced themselves from those attitudes and attempted to account for them and explain their persistence. By contrast, they were far less removed from those anxieties about the meanings of national identity that seemed so pervasive in Britain after the war. In fact, while their work repudiated the legacies of imperial thinking, it was inscribed within contemporary discourses of national decline and often referred to the perceived threats to national cohesion. Patterson, for example, argued that “there is considerable confusion and insecurity among all classes . . . as the erosion of imperial power and national prestige continues.”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, in 1961 Ruth Glass suggested that new insecurities had accelerated “the motor of aggression,” and that, consequently, “there are in mid-twentieth century Britain not ‘two nations’ but several, which are estranged from each other.”<sup>36</sup> This is not a language that emanates from

<sup>33</sup> See Stuart Hall, “Racism and Reaction,” in *Five Views of Multi-Racial Britain*, ed. Commission for Racial Equality (London, 1978), p. 25; Miles, *Racism after Race Relations* (n. 5 above), pp. 67–68, 75, 77, 129; Errol Lawrence, “Just Plain Common Sense: The ‘Roots’ of Racism,” in *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, ed. Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (London, 1982), pp. 65–70; Catherine Hall, “Missionary Stories: Gender and Ethnicity in England in the 1830s and 1840s,” in her *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (London, 1992), pp. 205–54; Antoinette Burton, *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1915* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1994), pp. 33–41.

<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Michael Banton, “Beware of Strangers!” *The Listener* 59 (April 3, 1958): 566; Anthony H. Richmond, *The Colour Problem* (Harmondsworth, 1955), p. 243; Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (n. 6 above), p. 210; Judith Henderson, “A Sociological Report,” in *Coloured Immigrants in Britain*, ed. J. A. G. Griffith et al. (London, 1960), pp. 104–16.

<sup>35</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 211.

<sup>36</sup> Ruth Glass, *London’s Newcomers: The West Indian Migrants*, University College, London, Centre for Urban Studies, Report No. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), pp. 146,

the nation’s “long colonial history,” as Williamson put it, but from Disraelian notions of the nation as an organic community. And it was in the 1950s that the perceived disruption to the fabric of that community informed discussions of Black migration to Britain. It also served as an important backdrop for the racialization of national identity and the consolidation of the equation of whiteness and Britishness.

### The Postwar “Race Relations” Paradigm

The large-scale migration of persons of color to Britain in the 1950s led to the emergence of race relations as a “social problem,” now addressed by experts who established the subject as a formal field of academic enquiry. Empowered by science and imbued by a strong sense of moral entrepreneurship, these experts secured their status as an authoritative voice on matters of race in Britain, monopolizing control over a relatively new domain of knowledge. As Little, a founder of the field, argued, “in the absence of ‘anthropological’ or ‘sociological’ attention, subjects peculiarly suitable to study . . . by scientific methods will be taken over by agencies and individuals less adequately equipped to handle them.”<sup>37</sup> Such writers claimed the right to influence government policy in the best of Fabian traditions and can be viewed as heirs of a long history of liberal reformism. In addition, race relations experts in the 1950s also claimed the right to speak *for* the Black migrant in Britain. As Richmond argued, given that Blacks were often unable to plead their case, “amelioration of their position may only come about when disinterested persons can take up their own cause.”<sup>38</sup> Race relations discourse was thus a discourse *about* a largely silenced other, a discourse in which, to borrow from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the subaltern could not speak, except *within* the epistemological framework imposed by academic experts.<sup>39</sup>

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219. Politicians also worried about the postwar erosion of national cohesion: in 1948 eleven Labour M.P.s wrote to the Prime Minister arguing that an “influx of coloured people domiciled here is likely to impair the harmony, strength and cohesion of our public and social life and to cause discord and unhappiness” (quoted in Bob Carter, Clive Harris, and Shirley Joshi, “The 1951–55 Conservative Government and the Racialization of Black Immigration,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 6 [1987]: 335). See also Kathleen Paul, “The Politics of Citizenship in Post-War Britain,” *Contemporary Record* 6 (Winter 1992): 452–73.

<sup>37</sup> K. L. Little, *Negroes in Britain: A Study of Racial Relations in English Society* (London, 1947), p. xii.

<sup>38</sup> Richmond, *Colour Problem*, p. 301.

<sup>39</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, 1994), pp. 66–111.

The most influential work in establishing the field was Little's *Negroes in Britain* (1947). As a physical anthropologist, Little had gone to the docks of Cardiff to measure the heads of Black children; instead, he studied social conditions in the Black community there. In the 1950s, he carved out a reputation for the new department of social anthropology at the University of Edinburgh, and it was there, working under his guidance and within a framework advanced by an earlier generation of British structural functional anthropologists, that several students completed studies of migrant communities in Britain. Between 1950 and 1952 Banton researched the Black community in Stepney for his book, *The Coloured Quarter: Negro Immigrants in an English City* (1955). In 1956 he investigated white Britons' attitudes towards Blacks, publishing his findings in *White and Coloured: The Behaviour of British People towards Coloured Immigrants* (1959). Richmond, also working under Little's supervision, studied immigrants in Liverpool for his book, *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1941–1951* (1954). Finally, in the mid-1950s, Patterson explored the West Indian community in Brixton, subsequently publishing her findings as *Dark Strangers* (1963).<sup>40</sup>

The work of these individuals was widely influential in academic circles on both sides of the Atlantic. In the United States it was published in the important race relations journal, *Phylon*. In Britain it not only appeared in the major sociology and anthropology journals but gave rise in 1959 to a new journal, *Race*, which conformed largely to the approaches to race relations pioneered by these scholars. The journal was published by the Institute of Race Relations, an organization they also helped to establish and in which they played a major role. Despite its academic appeal, however, their work also managed to find a wider readership. Both Richmond's *The Colour Problem* and Patterson's *Dark Strangers* became best-selling Pelican paperbacks; Banton published in respectable magazines such as *The Listener*; and when the mass-circula-

<sup>40</sup> Patterson's preliminary report was published as "A Recent West Indian Immigrant Group in Britain," *Race* 1 (1960): 27–39. For recent discussion of the race relations paradigm, see Jenny Bourne, "Cheerleaders and Ombudsmen: the Sociology of Race Relations in Britain," *Race & Class* 21 (1980): 331–52; Rich, *Race and Empire* (n. 7 above), chap. 8; Michael Banton, "The Influence of Colonial Status upon Black-White Relations in England, 1948–58," *Sociology* 17 (1983): 546–59; Michael Lyon, "Banton's Contribution to Racial Studies," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 8 (1985): 471–83. For surveys written by its advocates, see Kenneth Little, "Research Report No. 2: Department of Social Anthropology, the University of Edinburgh," *Sociological Review* 8 (1960): 255–66; Judith Henderson, pp. 45–121; Anthony H. Richmond, "Britain," *International Social Science Bulletin* 10 (1958): 344–72.

tion *Picture Post* addressed the issue of British race relations it did so primarily within the intellectual framework advanced by these writers.<sup>41</sup>

Between the publication of Little's work in 1947 and Patterson's in 1963 one can refer to a coherent discourse in which the study of race relations in Britain was inscribed. In part it derived from traditions of British social anthropology and in part from the work of sociologists in the United States. Although race relations writers did not always agree with each other, they shared a number of important theoretical propositions and epistemological assumptions. For example, they repudiated earlier discourses of scientific racism and were supporters of Unesco's attempt to demonstrate that racism and anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany were based on scientifically untenable premises.<sup>42</sup> Little argued for the need to instruct the public in the “proper” anthropological use of the term “race” as a group concept in order to distinguish the culturally acquired from the genetic; Banton wrote, “East London's coloured quarter represented for me a cultural rather than a racial enclave”; and Richmond asserted that “the question of racial differences is incidental to the much larger problem of cultural conflict and social change.”<sup>43</sup> While colonial rhetoric depended on biological metaphors of racial difference, postwar academics, like the M.P.s who discussed the meaning of citizenship in the parliamentary debates of 1948, focused instead on cultural difference. Their repudiation of scientific racism led them to speak out vehemently against the work of the Eugenics Society, which still held that racial mixing in Britain was leading to “genetic chaos.”<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, their attempt to separate biological from cultural criteria of racial difference was not easy: as Miles suggests, while they denied the biological reality of “race,” they counter-asserted that “races” still existed as “natural,” socially defined groups, again reproducing notions of essential difference between groups of people based on their skin color.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>41</sup> See Trevor Philpott, “Would You Let Your Daughter Marry a Negro?” *Picture Post* (October 30, 1954), pp. 21–23; Hilda Marchant, “Thirty Thousand Colour Problems,” *Picture Post* (June 9, 1956), pp. 28–29, 38. See also Douglas Warth, “A Herald Investigator into the Hidden Colour Bar,” *Daily Herald* (August 25–27, 1958), p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> See Miles, *Racism* (n. 5 above), pp. 46–49.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Little, “Letter,” *Man* 51 (1951): 17; Michael Banton, *The Coloured Quarter: Negro Immigrants in an English City* (London, 1955), p. 14; Richmond, *Colour Problem*, p. 13.

<sup>44</sup> G. C. L. Bertram, *West Indian Immigration*, Eugenics Society Broadsheet No. 1 (London, 1958), p. 18. For a response, see “West Indian Immigration: Some Criticisms, Comments and a Rejoinder,” *Eugenics Review* 50 (1959): 251–57.

<sup>45</sup> Robert Miles, “The Riots of 1958: Notes on the Ideological Construction of ‘Race Relations’ as a Political Issue in Britain,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 3 (1984): 253, “Racism and Nationalism in Britain,” in “Race” in Britain: *Continuity and Change*,

In their rejection of biological essentialism, race relations writers explored behavioral norms in order to chart cultural difference. This can be seen in Patterson's work, which reflected on the "virtual polarity and incompatibility in behavioural patterns . . . between the uninhibited spontaneity and mettlesome directness of most West Indians and the extreme orderliness and reserve which a number of observers consider characteristic of the public behaviour of the contemporary British."<sup>46</sup> Beliefs such as these gave rise to the attempt to map what was distinctive about British and migrant cultures, furthering the scientific investigation of national culture that had begun during the war. Obviously, we cannot condemn such writers for failing to share more recent concerns about the ideological constructions of race and nation. Moreover, given the existence of racial tension in British society, neither can we claim that their primary purpose was to identify and shore up an increasingly tattered sense of national identity. It was not; it was to study migrant communities, investigate white attitudes towards them, and offer suggestions for public policy makers. Nevertheless, we can suggest that, by exploring the cultural attributes of presumably distinct groups of people, their work removed the question of national identity from the realm of biology, opening up the possibility of renarrating the nation in wholly cultural terms against the culture of the migrant other.

In their emphasis on cultural difference, these writers were indebted to the work of the Chicago School of sociology, particularly to that of Robert Park. Between the wars Park had argued that prejudice was the result of "an instinctive and spontaneous disposition to maintain social distance," which all individuals learned through processes of socialization in the group to which they belonged.<sup>47</sup> By reifying the importance of homogeneous social groups, and by focusing on the problem of communication between them, Park and his colleagues could study group behavior and look for ways to build bridges between groups hostile to each other. This formulation of race relations as an issue of communication between distinct social groups appealed to British writers for three reasons. First, it legitimated their efforts to establish an emergent dis-

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ed. Charles Husband (London: Hutchinson, 1982), esp. pp. 280–82, 285–86, 294, and Miles, *Racism*, p. 72.

<sup>46</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (n. 6 above), p. 201.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Ezra Park, "The Concept of Social Distance" (1924), in his *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), p. 259. For an elaboration, see Barbara Ballis Lal, "The 'Chicago School' of American Sociology, Symbolic Interactionism, and Race Relations Theory," in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, ed. John Rex and David Mason (Cambridge, 1986), chap. 13. For Banton on Park, see Banton, "1960: A Turning Point in the Study of Race Relations," *Daedalus* 103, no. 2 (Spring 1974): 34–35.

course of race relations as a new science which would displace and render illegitimate earlier colonial discourses that derived their status from biological metaphors of race. Second, it offered a paradigm for thinking about racial difference in terms of the homogeneity of cultural groups. This not only paralleled work that grew out of British anthropological traditions, but it also appealed to those who made sense of their own nation, largely through the constructions of it generated in the 1930s and 1940s, as a dense and tightly woven cultural whole. Third, by asserting that racial “problems” emerged from a failure of communication between groups, Park’s work empowered British academics in their attempt to influence public policy by offering solutions to those “problems.”

### Textual Productions of Race, Nation, and Difference

The starting point for much of Britain’s race relations literature in the 1950s and early 1960s was the narration of cultural difference, constituted through a binary opposition between what was termed an “in-group,” usually defined in terms of the *national* community, and an “out-group,” always defined in terms of the migrant and racial other. This logic was widespread in the 1950s. For example, Richard Hoggart began his chapter on “Them and Us” in his study of working-class communities, *The Uses of Literacy*, with the observation, “Presumably most groups gain some of their strength from their exclusiveness, from a sense of people outside who are not ‘Us.’”<sup>48</sup> In similar terms, asserting the universal truth of what was little more than an arbitrarily chosen starting point, Richmond opened his study of West Indians in Liverpool with these words: “There appears to be a universal tendency for individuals to identify themselves with each other in primary and secondary groups to the exclusion of all others who are regarded as members of other, often rival, groups. This tendency has been described as the ‘we/they’ dichotomy or the ‘in-group/out-group’ delineation. Such a division of group membership can normally take place only where members of the different groups are easily distinguished from each other by some cultural trait which may have varying degrees of permanence.”<sup>49</sup> Banton used similar terms as early as 1952, while over a decade later Patterson wrote, “Every group . . . appears to define its own identity in terms of insiders

<sup>48</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (1957, new ed., New Brunswick, N.J., 1992), p. 48.

<sup>49</sup> Anthony H. Richmond, *Colour Prejudice in Britain: A Study of West Indian Workers in Liverpool, 1941–1951* (London, 1954), p. 1.



and outsiders, those who belong and those who are strangers and foreigners.”<sup>50</sup>

The use of this particular “in-group/out-group” dynamic, while masquerading as a “universal tendency”—and hence as a sociological fact—was rooted deeply in popular beliefs about the meaning of the national community. Race relations writers took this dynamic as the starting point for their work, rather than as something which itself needed to be explained. By framing their studies within its terms of reference, they discursively positioned the Black migrant as a member of a cohesive “out-group,” defined against the national “in-group.” Despite the fact that they attempted to subvert their own logic, claiming that migrant communities were as widely differentiated as the native “in-group” population itself,<sup>51</sup> they nevertheless reiterated many popular assumptions about racial and cultural difference, reproducing those categories through which racial understanding was commonly articulated. Moreover, if the assessment of the representational crisis of postwar national identity that I have elaborated above is correct, then the narration of difference through the rhetoric of “in-groups” and “out-groups” could serve to cement the bonds that tied members of the “in-group” together at the moment of their perceived dissolution. As Richmond argued, “[a]ntipathy towards out-groups performs a positively integrative function for individual personalities and for the social systems in which they participate. It bolsters up the individual’s sense of security and self-esteem on the one hand, and promotes in-group solidarity on the other.”<sup>52</sup> In short, if a sense of urgently required communal solidarity could be strengthened by positioning the migrant as a member of an “out-group,” then adoption of the language of “in-groups” and “out-groups” could have the unintended consequence of further encouraging such binary thinking in ways that served to render the national “in-group” more cohesive.

This point can be elaborated further by examining how the “in-group” was actually constituted in race relations discourse. While the writers considered here set out to study migrant communities in Britain, they were forced repeatedly to consider what Patterson termed the “host” community. As Little wrote, “I soon found that my study made it necessary to enter rather deeply into certain aspects of English cul-

<sup>50</sup> Michael Banton, “Negro Workers in Britain,” *Twentieth Century* 151 (1952): 42; Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 207.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g., Kenneth Little, “The Position of Colored People in Britain,” *Phylon* 15 (1954): 58–64.

<sup>52</sup> Anthony H. Richmond, “Theoretical Orientations in Studies of Ethnic Group Relations in Britain,” *Man* 57, no. 146 (1957): 122, see also *Colour Prejudice*, pp. 6–7.

ture.”<sup>53</sup> By the early 1950s it had become easier for such individuals to write about the cultural distinctiveness of the national “in-group” due to the extent to which the study of national character had, as we have seen, come to acquire the status of science. In Britain Geoffrey Gorer did much to legitimate the new field. As an anthropologist interested in national culture, Gorer codified the principles involved in the study of national character and subsequently applied them to his study of the English.<sup>54</sup> In conjunction with one of the Sunday tabloids, Gorer assessed more than 11,000 questionnaires about English values, attitudes, and behavioral patterns. The results appeared as *Exploring English Character* (1955). Despite its claim to scientific status, two points must be noted. First, Gorer was sponsored by a tabloid, with its own assumptions about what its readers wished to know about their nation and themselves. Consequently, and in keeping with contemporary anxieties about the assumed breakdown of the family, much of the book was devoted to an analysis of attitudes towards love, sex, marriage, and children, assuring its readers that the panic generated by the perceived crisis of the English family was unwarranted. Second, Gorer aired his own preconceptions about the nature of English character and used quantifiable evidence to demonstrate what he already assumed to exist, namely, a dense web of unspoken rules that bound people together in an elaborately textured national community.

Gorer’s major “discovery” that was seized upon and made central to the discourse of race relations in the 1950s was the “shyness” of the English. He argued that, due to an innate reserve and a proclivity to keep themselves to themselves, the English feared the “stranger” who would “corrupt or contaminate one, either by undermining one’s moral principles and leading oneself or one’s family into disapproved-of indulgences . . . , or by undermining one’s social position . . . through association with people ‘who don’t know how to behave.’”<sup>55</sup> In Gorer’s work, the “stranger” who did not know “how to behave” was situated beyond the boundaries of the national community (which was itself policed by

<sup>53</sup> Little, *Negroes in Britain* (n. 37 above), p. xi.

<sup>54</sup> See Geoffrey Gorer, “National Character: Theory and Practice,” in *The Study of Culture at a Distance*, ed. Margaret Mead and Rhoda Métraux (Chicago, 1953), pp. 57–82.

<sup>55</sup> Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character: A Study of the Morals and Behaviour of the English People* (New York, 1955), p. 21; see also p. 289. Gorer’s belief in the importance of English “shyness” and “fear of the stranger” emerged from his investigative work in Peckham, a lower-middle-class district of London, which he explored in “Some Notes on British Character,” *Horizon* 20 (December 1949–January 1950): 369–79.

this act of displacement). Moreover, because Gorer assumed that English “shyness” was scientifically verifiable, that quality was used by most race relations writers to explain white attitudes to the racial other as little more than a customary fear of strangers.<sup>56</sup>

Race relations writers often focused on the behavior of the “stranger,” studying the manners of the “dark stranger” and mapping them against those of their white counterparts. Judith Henderson, for example, argued that “Africans and West Indians do manifest an exuberance and lack of restraint which is the very reverse of English reserve and self-control.”<sup>57</sup> Likewise, Patterson, in her account of the social and cultural differences between “hosts” and “strangers,” began with a sentimental and sanitized account of traditional working-class life in Brixton. The “respectable residents,” she wrote, “expect a tolerable and at least superficial conformity to ‘our ways’, a conformity to certain standards of order, cleanliness, quietness, privacy, and propriety. Clean lace curtains are hung at clean windows, dustbins are kept tidy and out of sight, . . . and house fronts are kept neat. Houses do not give the impression of being packed to the brim with temporary and noisy strangers of both sexes. . . . Except for the children, people . . . ‘keep themselves to themselves’ and life is lived quietly. . . . Marriage is the norm for decent girls.”<sup>58</sup> When Blacks in Brixton did not live up to these norms they were chastised, and Patterson quoted one Conservative Party official who stated bluntly, “Most of them have vile habits. If only they behaved like us it would be all right.”<sup>59</sup> While Patterson did not condone such sentiments, the general thrust of her book was to map the norms of the “dark stranger” against those of the white native in ways that implicitly upheld the virtues of the latter. In concluding her remarks, quoted above, she wrote, “No immigrant group has in the mass so signally failed to conform to these expectations and patterns as have the West Indians.”<sup>60</sup>

In statements like these, the racial other was marked by the absence of qualities assumed to be central to the character of white Britons. Henderson noted the “lack of restraint,” while Patterson noted the *failure* to conform: in both cases, as in earlier imperial discourse, whiteness was equated with a number of “civilized” virtues, against which Blacks were

<sup>56</sup> See Anthony H. Richmond, “Applied Social Science and Public Policy Concerning Racial Relations in Britain,” *Race* 1 (1960): 18, “Theoretical Orientations,” p. 122, and “Britain” (n. 40 above), p. 347; Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (n. 6 above), p. 207; Henderson (n. 34 above), pp. 73, 100; and especially Banton, *White and Coloured* (n. 9 above), pp. 82–83.

<sup>57</sup> Henderson, “A Sociological Report” p. 100.

<sup>58</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, pp. 178–79.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 179.

measured and found wanting. In short, throughout race relations discourse, the Black migrant was positioned as the “archetypal stranger,” in Banton’s words, or the “supreme and ultimate stranger,” to borrow from Patterson, against which British norms were consolidated.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, the question of racial/cultural difference was at the heart of questions of national identity. As one writer noted in the 1960s, the British rejection of “newcomers,” suggested by Orwell and demonstrated by Gorer, meant that the “newcomer” has earned “our” attention “as the focus for the Condition of England question for this generation.”<sup>62</sup> Once the old “Condition of England question” had more or less been resolved, once the worker had been fully woven into the fabric of the national imaginary—in part due to the socially inclusivist myths of war-time Britain, in part the result of the presumed “embourgeoisement” of the working class in the later 1950s, and in part the consequence of the social rights of citizenship being conferred on the working class by the postwar welfare state—then race could play the role that class once had in debates about national cohesiveness.

The theme of “strangers” and “strangeness” permeated the discourse of race relations in the 1950s. Like the belief that the “race problem” was a problem of communication between groups, it had surfaced earlier in the work of Robert Park, who suggested that the essence of race relations was that they were always relations between strangers.<sup>63</sup> Park, however, had appropriated the concept of the “stranger” from the turn-of-the-century German sociologist, Georg Simmel, who had developed the term as part of his attempt to develop a framework for the assessment of social interaction in the burgeoning modern metropolis.<sup>64</sup> Despite the long history of the “stranger” as an analytical category in sociological literature, however, it was in Britain that the adjective

<sup>61</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured*, title of chap. 5; Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 209, also p. 250: “The coloured Negroid migrants are the ultimate strangers to the insular British.”

<sup>62</sup> E. J. B. Rose, *Colour and Citizenship: A Report on British Race Relations* (Oxford, 1969), chap. 3, esp. p. 33.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Park, “The Nature of Race Relations” (1939), in his *Race and Culture* (n. 47 above), p. 114. Banton acknowledged his debt to Park: “Sociology and Race Relations,” *Race* 1 (1959): 7–9. Although the notion of “strangeness” found its clearest expression in Banton’s work, it can be traced back to Little, *Negroes in Britain* (n. 37 above), see p. 238. See also Wickenden, *Colour in Britain* (n. 6 above), p. 1; Glass (n. 36 above), pp. 98–105; J. E. T. Eldridge, “Overseas Students at Leicester University: Some Problems of Adjustment and Communication,” *Race* 2 (1960): 50–59; James E. Holton, “The Status of the Colored in Britain,” *Phylon* 22 (1961): 31–40; Anthony H. Richmond, “Immigration as a Social Process: The Case of Coloured Colonials in the United Kingdom,” *Social and Economic Studies* 5 (1956): 185–201.

<sup>64</sup> Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. and trans. Kurt H. Wolff (New York, 1950).

“dark” was firmly attached to that category. Neither in the work of Simmel nor in that of Park was this connection usually made. While, earlier in the century, anxieties about Jewish migration to Britain were often couched in terms similar to those used in the 1950s, and while a series of inclusions and exclusions were mapped around “the Jew” as a way of consolidating the unity of the national community,<sup>65</sup> it was only in the 1950s that the rhetoric of the “stranger” became ubiquitous in the discussion of migration to Britain. In these years, however, “strangers” and “dark strangers” were differentiated from each other: while Poles, who far outnumbered Black migrants between 1945 and 1950, were often referred to as “strangers,” they were neither discussed to the same extent nor elicited the same anxiety as the “dark strangers” who arrived in Britain from the “new Commonwealth.”

Not only did British academics in the 1950s critically rework the category of the “stranger,” but in attempting to map the role of the “dark stranger” in British cities their work paralleled the mapping of the working class as a “race apart” a century earlier. More precisely, the rhetoric of difference in which the working class had once been inscribed was now reserved for the Black migrant. In his study of Stepney, Banton wrote, “I found the coloured quarter a little frightening because of its strangeness.”<sup>66</sup> Likewise, Patterson opened her study of Brixton using metaphors that were common in the work of Victorian slum writers: “As I turned off the main shopping street, I was immediately overcome with a sense of strangeness, almost of shock.”<sup>67</sup> Given the emphasis Gorer and his followers placed on the cohesiveness of the national “in-group,” to step into the “coloured quarter” might indeed have felt “strange.” But this rhetoric owed as much to Victorian representations of the dangers of the city—not to mention a prurient fascination with those “hidden quarters” of urban life—as it did to Simmel, Park, or Gorer. Although Patterson tried to minimize the importance of her own sense of “shock” by claiming that other Britons shared her feelings, thus rendering them commonsensical, her anxiety about, and fascination with, an alien Brixton must be seen as part of an older history. Both Patterson and Banton, while claiming simply to describe what they saw, experienced their experience through the filter of prior textual mappings of urban life. This should draw our attention to the ways postwar race relations writers not only constituted a world of “hosts” and “strangers”

<sup>65</sup> See David Feldman, “The Importance of Being English: Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England,” in *Metropolis. London. Histories and Representations since 1800*, ed. David Feldman and Gareth Stedman Jones (London, 1989), pp. 72–78.

<sup>66</sup> Banton, *Coloured Quarter* (n. 43 above), pp. 116–17.

<sup>67</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (n. 6 above), p. 13.

but were themselves constituted by earlier discourses—especially that of Victorian social investigation. It should also draw our attention to the complex ways in which long-standing discourses of “darkest England” and “darkest Africa” were fused in the investigation of the “coloured quarters” of postwar Britain. Finally, it should alert us to the fact that while the “Condition of England question” now revolved more around issues of race than of class, the language of the latter often provided a rhetorical coding for the former.

By suggesting that British society was governed by a series of unspoken norms (norms that were, ironically, spoken about repeatedly in this literature), and by arguing that the “continuance of social life is dependent upon the members of a society observing these norms,” “strangers” were those “who do not know or will not accept the norms.”<sup>68</sup> Moreover, once this “host/stranger” opposition had become the apparently logical starting point in race relations discourse, several consequences followed. First, it became necessary to maintain the fiction of the migrant as “stranger”—as a specific *type* of person—so that white British attitudes to a clearly definable category of people could be measured. Second, although they suggested that similarities often existed between the character of “hosts” and “strangers,”<sup>69</sup> these writers were compelled to search for the defining characteristics that marked the *difference* of the latter: “Primitiveness, savagery, violence, sexuality, general lack of control, sloth, irresponsibility—all these are part of the image,” wrote Patterson, once again using terms that had been prevalent in nineteenth-century descriptions of the working class.<sup>70</sup> Finally, “strangers” remained imprisoned within the very categories that marginalized them. As Richmond argued, the most well-adjusted migrants were those who conformed to the roles whites regarded as legitimate for them; or, as the West Indian cricketer, Learie Constantine, put it more bluntly, in order to survive each Black migrant needed to learn “Negro-in-England” manners.<sup>71</sup> Reflecting on this process, Banton cited the philosopher George Santayana’s claim that the English are “glad if only natives will remain natives and strangers,” to which he added that if a “stranger” could gain social acceptance as easily as immigration papers, then the currency of Britishness would be devalued—this, recall, in a period of deep anxiety about what it meant to be British. “To retain our pride,” he concluded—and here it is important to note how Banton collapsed his own

<sup>68</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured* (n. 9 above), p. 73.

<sup>69</sup> See, e.g., Joyce Egginton, *They Seek a Living* (London, 1957), p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 212.

<sup>71</sup> Richmond, “Theoretical Orientations” (n. 52 above), p. 122 and “Britain” (n. 40 above), p. 370; Learie Constantine, *Colour Bar* (London, 1954), p. 67.

authorial voice into that of the national community he set out scientifically to study—"we must exclude some people at least, and who is more clearly a stranger than the coloured man?"<sup>72</sup> By naturalizing the desire for distance as a universal desire, Banton was complicit with a popular yearning to maintain distance in order to fix the boundaries of belonging and effect a closure in the rhetoric of the national community.

Bhabha has discussed a similar process at work in the nineteenth century and has termed it "colonial mimicry," or the desire for a reformed, recognizable other as "a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite."<sup>73</sup> The workings of "colonial mimicry" in the 1950s can be seen most of all in attitudes toward the family. On the one hand, race relations writers suggested that "well-adjusted" migrants were those who adopted a western model of the egalitarian family and companionate marriage. As Patterson put it, if "the migrant group develops stable family patterns, this not only furthers satisfactory accommodation . . . , [but] makes the group more acceptable in the eyes of the receiving society."<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, they hoped to see such models adopted *within* the migrant community and only reluctantly endorsed marriages between Blacks and whites. While they deplored popular hostility to such relationships, their own discomfort was often displaced onto the children of mixed marriages. In this respect they shared in part the sentiments of a correspondent to *The Sunday Times*, who wrote in 1957 that intermarriage "would adulterate the national character and culture," producing children bereft of a "coherent tradition" in which to develop.<sup>75</sup> While Richmond argued that there was "no reason why mixed marriages should not be successful,"<sup>76</sup> he and his colleagues were so committed to a model of thinking that established the cultural space of the migrant at a distance from that of the "host" society that it was hard to conceive of a "coherent tradition" in which the emotional well-being of "mixed" children might be secured. In short, the categories in which race relations writers inscribed the British and the migrant other could undermine their commitment to mixed marriages.

If the migrant other was constituted as the "stranger" *par excellence* in the 1950s, race relations discourse also marginalized white Bri-

<sup>72</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured*, pp. 73, 77–78, 113.

<sup>73</sup> Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse," *October* 28 (1984): 126.

<sup>74</sup> Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 295; see also p. 290.

<sup>75</sup> *The Sunday Times*, August 25, 1957, p. 10. On how children became a focus for displaced fears about miscegenation, see Stuart Hall, "Reconstruction Work," *Ten*, 8, no. 16 (1984): 9.

<sup>76</sup> Richmond, *Colour Problem* (n. 34 above), p. 290; see also Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 250.

tons who deviated from the norms of the national imaginary. White women in relationships with Black men had customarily been branded as gender outlaws and disparaged as sociopaths. While race relations writers repudiated the popular stereotypes of Black male sexuality that gave rise to such ideas, they continued to represent white women in interracial marriages as “unstable” deviants from socially sanctioned norms. Banton, for example, viewed such women as having “failed to find a satisfying role in English society” and over whom the “in-group” had lost its power of restraint.<sup>77</sup> By positioning white women who rejected national customs beyond the bounds of acceptable behavior, race relations writers implicitly saw them as threats to all that was necessary for the smooth functioning of society.

Since the 1930s, as we have seen, modes of national identification have revolved increasingly around the domestic and the private. Commenting on such phenomena, the editors of a recent volume on nationalism and sexuality have suggested that the trope of nation-as-woman “depends for its representational efficacy on a particular image of woman as chaste, dutiful, daughterly, or maternal.” They have also argued that national identity is often consolidated by projecting beyond its borders sexual practices deemed abhorrent.<sup>78</sup> Such procedures, I would argue, were central to the mapping of the “dark stranger” in the 1950s. Although they rejected many popular racial stereotypes, race relations writers were committed to a particular vision of the social order that drew its efficacy from established tropes of Britain as a domesticated nation. Fearing the disruption to that order posed not only by “dark strangers” but also by those white women who acted in ways that presumably jeopardized its stability, they were compelled to project the behavior of such women beyond the boundaries of the national imaginary.

Race relations writers also focused their attention on white homosexual men who transgressed those behavioral boundaries that were held to be necessary for the maintenance of national cohesion. In his study of Stepney, for example, Banton noted that a “number of white homo-

<sup>77</sup> Banton, *Coloured Quarter* (n. 43 above), pp. 13, 150. See also Richmond, *Colour Problem*, p. 280, “Immigration as a Social Process” (n. 63 above), p. 195. For similar concerns in government circles, see D. W. Dean, “Coping with Colonial Immigration, the Cold War and Colonial Policy: The Labour Government and Black Communities in Great Britain, 1945–51,” *Immigrants and Minorities* 6 (1987): 309; Bob Carter et al. (n. 36 above), p. 341.

<sup>78</sup> Andrew Parker et al., “Introduction,” in *Nationalisms and Sexuality*, ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York, 1992), pp. 6, 10. For a discussion of how sexualizing metaphors and domesticating procedures defined the “orient” against the “occident” in the nineteenth century, see Nancy Armstrong, “The Occidental Alice,” *differences* 2 (1990): 3–40.



sexuals came around the cafés and the public houses of the coloured quarter looking for coloured ‘friends.’”<sup>79</sup> Colin MacInnes also explored such encounters, albeit positively, particularly in *Mr. Love and Justice* (London, 1960), a fictional study of those white Bohemians who developed intimate relationships with “dark strangers.” Detesting the conventions of postwar Britain, such individuals positioned themselves as “outsiders,” to borrow from the title of Colin Wilson’s best-selling book of 1956, and adopted the mantle of “stranger” as a sign of rebellion against the values Gorer deemed central to the smooth functioning of society. By contrast, Banton implicitly acknowledged the necessity of upholding those values, adding, it “is noticeable that many of the whites who are interested to make contact with coloured people are themselves neurotic or otherwise not representative of the white population.”<sup>80</sup>

Representations of “deviant” white heterosexual women and homosexual men suggest that the policing of sexual boundaries was crucial to the policing of the imaginary boundaries of the nation itself, that the cohesiveness of the national community was not only mapped against racial others but also against those whites who strayed from its conventions. In short, the rhetorical inscription of the “dark stranger” offered a series of terms that could also be applied to those whites who departed from “in-group” customs. This process may be observed in the trials of teddy boys found guilty of racial assault, youths branded as other and discursively positioned as carrying those very same traits that actively demarcated the “dark stranger” from the white Briton. In his sentencing of some of these men, a judge applied to whites terms customarily reserved for Blacks: “Once you translate your dark thoughts and brutal feelings into savage acts such as these, the law will be swift to punish you and protect your victims.”<sup>81</sup> Juvenile delinquency had often been inscribed in similar terms before, and in the nineteenth century the branding of certain whites as “savages” in the colonies served to maintain appropriate racial boundaries.<sup>82</sup> This again suggests the homologous nature of the rhetoric of “darkest England” and “darkest Africa.” It also suggests that in the context of the immigration panics in the 1950s, to be branded with qualities viewed as characteristic of the “dark stranger” implied an exclusion from the normative assumptions of British society. The teddy boy, however, was also the site on which forms of cultural

<sup>79</sup> Banton, *Coloured Quarter*, p. 228.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. On bohemianism, race, and marginality in London in the 1950s, see Daniel Farson, *Soho in the Fifties* (London, 1987).

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in T. R. Fyvel, *Troublemakers: Rebellious Youth in an Affluent Society* (New York, 1961), p. 84.

<sup>82</sup> See Catherine Hall (n. 33 above), p. 212.

essentialism broke down, for if certain members of the white population could possess those character traits often attributed to Blacks, then the stability of the “us/them” binary opposition was itself rendered questionable.

Once the “stranger” had been marginalized as the other of the national imaginary, located in those physical spaces in which the norms of Britishness often failed to penetrate, the job of race relations was to build bridges and develop an understanding between those who had been constituted in opposition to each other. Despite the fact that many white workers in Britain lived in homogeneous communities, such communities no longer gave any cause for alarm by comparison to the “coloured quarters” of the nation, largely because members of the former were inscribed in dominant discourses of national identity. Such was not the case with the migrant other: fearing the social distance they both recognized and in part helped discursively to consolidate, race relations writers suggested the need for programs of cultural contact and education. As Little argued, whites should attempt to understand the lives of Blacks in Britain; if they refused, he warned, Blacks would build their own communities, reinforcing cultural difference and retarding the process of assimilation.<sup>83</sup> Other writers shared Little’s anxiety, with Banton arguing that “harmonious relations between the two groups” could not be obtained “by the creation of English Harlems.”<sup>84</sup>

For some, cultural interaction was necessary so that “the minority group can be gradually incorporated into the social life of the majority.”<sup>85</sup> In this sense, models of cultural contact between Blacks and whites advanced in the 1950s were not unlike those proposed by Victorian philanthropists to bring the classes together. And yet critiques of the discourse of race relations suggesting that Blacks were invariably called upon to adjust and conform to British norms fail to acknowledge the extent to which whites were also called upon to be much more responsive to the concerns of Blacks.<sup>86</sup> Richmond argued that British prejudice resulted from the lack of “correct information” about the colonies, which could be remedied through education; Patterson called for revised textbooks that would familiarize the native with the ways of the “stranger”; and Banton asserted that a barrier to assimilation “is not the unwillingness

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Little, *Colour and Commonsense*, Fabian Tract 315 (London, 1958), p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> Banton, *Coloured Quarter*, p. 250. See also Richmond, *Colour Problem*, p. 254; Patterson, *Dark Strangers* (n. 6 above), pp. 194–96.

<sup>85</sup> Richmond, *Colour Prejudice* (n. 49 above), p. 153.

<sup>86</sup> For critiques of “race relations” that hold this position, see Dilip Hiro, *Black British White British: A History of Race Relations in Britain* (rev. ed., London, 1991), p. 305; Jenny Bourne (n. 40 above), p. 332.

or inability of the immigrants to follow British modes of behaviour,” but “the reluctance of the British public to accept them socially.” This led him to suggest that “the coloured man would appear less of a stranger were British people better informed about the background and aspirations of colonial immigrants.”<sup>87</sup>

Despite these pleas, whites merely had to *learn* about the customs of “strangers” while the “stranger” had to *adapt* to the customs of the “host” society. This was made difficult on three counts. First, many migrants did not possess the cultural capital necessary to negotiate the boundaries of Britishness. Moreover, even if in their colonial education they had read much about the “mother country,” that learning often failed to prepare them for life in Britain: as the Nigerian writer, Buchi Emecheta, lamented, the picture of England she gained from her immersion in the novels of Jane Austen did not help her much as a new resident in London in the 1960s.<sup>88</sup> Second, as we have seen, it was feared that the currency of national belonging would be devalued if it were made widely available, making it “very hard,” as Banton put it, “for a stranger to become British.”<sup>89</sup> Third, central to the elaboration of those norms that bound the national “in-group” together was, as we have also seen, an emphasis on their quasi-mystical qualities. As Banton argued, the national community was tied together by a number of “unstated assumptions,” “wordless understandings,” “unspoken codes,” and “unannounced rights and obligations,” all of which constituted “the unspoken language” of British social life.<sup>90</sup> If this language *could not* be spoken, the education of the “stranger” in the ways of the “host society” was made difficult; if it *could* be spoken, however, then it lost its magical ability to make the nation whole. Either way, the discourse that inscribed the other as “stranger” ensured that its own constructions of difference could not easily be erased.

Arguing that cultures are never fixed, finished, or final, Paul Gilroy has suggested that “an absolute commitment to cultural insiderism is as bad as an absolute commitment to biological insiderism.”<sup>91</sup> And, of

<sup>87</sup> Richmond, *Colour Problem* (n. 34 above), p. 242, *Colour Prejudice*, pp. 162–65, and “Applied Social Science and Public Policy” (n. 56 above), p. 16; Patterson, *Dark Strangers*, p. 405; Banton, *Coloured Quarter* (n. 43 above), p. 235, “The Social Groupings of Some West African Workers in Britain,” *Man* 53, no. 203 (1953), p. 133, and *White and Coloured* (n. 9 above), p. 88. See also Stephen Hatch, “Coloured People in School Textbooks,” *Race* 4 (1962): 63–72.

<sup>88</sup> Buchi Emecheta, *Head above Water: An Autobiography* (London, 1986), pp. 26–29.

<sup>89</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured*, p. 78.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>91</sup> Paul Gilroy, “The End of Anti-Racism,” *New Community* 17 (1990): 80. See also Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (London, 1987), p. 30.

course, cultural insiderism, or perhaps cultural absolutism, was central to the discourse of race relations in the 1950s. While Banton claimed he was merely clarifying “the factors which cause people to regard coloured immigrants as a separate category of persons,”<sup>92</sup> his work, along with that of his colleagues, reinforced thinking in terms of those essential categories. Moreover, once difference had been essentialized through those categories, appeals for education—no matter how well meaning—must be viewed as a problematic attempt to erase the very categories on which the work of these writers depended. Just as *Sapphire* (1959), one of the first films to examine racial prejudice in Britain, confirmed the very prejudices it sought to subvert by ascribing “natural qualities” to Blacks that were little more than a projection of dominant cultural norms onto the category of blackness,<sup>93</sup> so the race relations discourse of the 1950s operated in similar ways. By fixing the position of the national “in-group” and the migrant “out-group” relative to each other, it not only legitimated those ascribed positions but indicated the extent to which it was largely impossible to write about “race” without writing about “nation,” and, in addition, to imagine the nation in terms other than that of a necessarily cohesive cultural whole.

This commitment to the cultural cohesion of the nation can be seen most of all in Banton’s work. Concluding the part of *White and Coloured* in which he developed his notion of the Black migrant as “archetypal stranger,” Banton indicated the strength of his own attachment to the idea of a unitary culture. He noted that many people were forced to support customs of which they disapproved because of the sanctions of the group to which they belonged. This, he lamented, “is one of the brakes upon social change.” Unwilling to part company with those committed to national identity as a “real,” scientifically ascertainable—and necessary—cultural absolute, he then added, however, “it is also one of the forces that holds a society together.”<sup>94</sup>

## Paradigms Lost

In an age in which poststructuralist and postcolonial theory has made its presence widely felt, the 1950s discourse of race relations, complete with its essentialized differences and cultural determinism, can be read—as I have attempted to read it here—from within the spaces

<sup>92</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured*, pp. 179–80.

<sup>93</sup> John Hill, “The British ‘Social Problem’ Film: ‘Violent Playground’ and ‘Sapphire,’” *Screen* 26 (1985): 47. See also Richard Dyer, “White,” in his *The Matter of Images: Essays in Representation* (London, 1993), esp. pp. 146–48.

<sup>94</sup> Banton, *White and Coloured*, p. 113.

opened up by these more recent intellectual developments. Since the interventions of Anderson, Bhabha, Edward Said, and others, scholars have problematized the category of national identity and argued that it should be studied in ways wholly unimaginable within the framework suggested by Gorer's study of "English character." Such thinking is possible today in part because the entire edifice of 1950s race relations has collapsed, the result of a massive paradigm shift in our thinking about the multifaceted relationships among gender, sexuality, race, and nation. I thus want to conclude with some observations about the transformation of race relations discourse, about the relationship between that discourse and the "new racism" that emerged in Britain in the later 1960s, and about the development of other possibilities for imagining the national community.

The metaphor of the "stranger" continued to find favor throughout the 1960s, one writer suggesting that "the man who is at home feels he has the right to be there, and that the stranger can come in only with his permission. The stranger, while he is welcome, is felt to be a guest . . . and his right to be where he is depends on his host's consent."<sup>95</sup> But that consent was slowly withdrawn as popular campaigns for immigration controls led the government to restrict entry into Britain. The percentage of Britons favoring unlimited entry for "new Commonwealth" workers declined from 37 percent in 1956 to 10 percent in 1964, and to 1 percent in 1968.<sup>96</sup> While few writers discussed here had been enthusiastic about such controls, the logic of their call for assimilation was not wasted on those who subsequently argued that if the number of immigrants were to be curtailed then Blacks already in Britain might more easily be assimilated.

No one event served to challenge the assumptions of race relations discourse more than the riots that took place in West London and Nottingham in 1958, riots that began as a white backlash against Black settlement in Britain. As one writer noted not long afterward, they "forced the British to undertake a reexamination of the myth that they are conspicuously kindly to strangers in their midst."<sup>97</sup> The riots also revealed deeper structural antagonisms in British society that had not been addressed by race relations writers, undermining earlier liberal faith in the ultimate assimilation of the "stranger." Finally, they highlighted the inadequacy of the very categories of "in-groups" and "out-groups" through which race relations writers had studied British migrant communities. For example, Glass's *London's Newcomers*, published in 1961,

<sup>95</sup> Plamenatz (n. 9 above), p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Banton, "The Influence of Colonial Status" (n. 40 above), p. 556.

<sup>97</sup> Holton (n. 63 above), pp. 39–40.

was a fragile text that both operated within race relations discourse and challenged its operative assumptions. To say that "colour prejudice" was nothing more than xenophobia, mixed with traditional British distrust of the foreigner, wrote Glass, implicitly criticizing Banton, can "easily lead to the conclusion that there is no special problem; xenophobia, alienation and other similar characteristics are simply taken for granted." This kind of thinking, Glass argued, led to an evasive diagnosis of prejudice, remote from the reality of life as experienced by Blacks.<sup>98</sup>

Other writers shared her frustration and realized that race relations discourse could not adequately encompass the full experience of Blacks in Britain. G. R. Fazakerley, for example, author of the novel, *A Stranger Here* (1959), created a fictional hero, a West Indian migrant who tried to convince himself that the prejudice he encountered was "only English shyness, a gentle English reluctance to intrude on another man's privacy."<sup>99</sup> But the attempt failed, largely because in his daily life he came to understand that English "hosts" were not as hospitable to the "stranger" as he had been led to believe. Likewise, the scholar Krishan Kumar, in an essay, "A Child and a Stranger," reflected on his adolescence in England in the 1950s and wrote that while he thought of himself as English, he was not, and he was not regarded so by others. The foreigner, he claimed, "feels excluded from this intricate, torturous process of communication and communion" that was central to what it meant to be British.<sup>100</sup> Kumar's experience, along with that of many others, escaped the discursive patterning that attempted to render it meaningful, compelling such individuals to attempt to make sense of it in terms other than those of "hosts" and "strangers."

By intensifying the perception of a gap between academic discourse and the lived experience of race in Britain, the 1958 riots fuelled the growth of Black voices. Such individuals no longer allowed themselves to be rendered silent, positioned as the "strangers" of race relations discourse. As one migrant wrote, "All of us ended up being disillusioned with the kind of integration that was on offer."<sup>101</sup> While some rejected

<sup>98</sup> Glass (n. 36 above), pp. 214–15. The best account of the riots written soon thereafter is provided by Glass, pp. 127–211. For recent discussions, see Edward Pilkington, *Beyond the Mother Country: West Indians and the Notting Hill White Riots* (London, 1988); Miles, "The Riots of 1958" (n. 45 above).

<sup>99</sup> G. R. Fazakerley, *A Stranger Here* (London, 1959), p. 192.

<sup>100</sup> Krishan Kumar, "A Child and a Stranger: On Growing Out of English Culture," in *Colour, Culture and Consciousness: Immigrant Intellectuals in Britain*, ed. Bhikhu Parekh (London, 1974), p. 96. For similar views, see E. R. Braithwaite, "The 'Colored Immigrant' in Britain," *Daedalus* 96, no. 4 (Winter 1967): 496–511; Chris Mullard, *Black Britain* (London, 1973), esp. chap. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Trevor Carter with Jean Coussins, *Shattering Illusions: West Indians in British Politics* (London, 1986), p. 42.

liberal thinking entirely, others proudly became the “strangers” they had always been told they were: “Before the riots I was British—I was born under the Union Jack,” wrote one Jamaican migrant, but “the race riots made me realise who I am and what I am. They turned me into a staunch Jamaican.”<sup>102</sup> Banton was thus correct when he noted that the years around 1960 marked a break with the intellectual assumptions of the 1950s.<sup>103</sup> The increasing number of Black residents in Britain, an emergent ethnic politics, new notions of a plural society, and the cultural and technological challenges to the perceived homogeneity of British society gave rise to the possibility of developing new paradigms for thinking about race and nation that differed from that of the 1950s.

This is not to argue that assumptions about a homogeneous national community, consolidated around the “stranger” who threatened its coherence, vanished when the entire discourse that had been framed by such assumptions was rendered problematic. Race relations rhetoric was reworked and rearticulated in much more insidious guises in the “new racism” that emerged in the later 1960s, suggesting, as Etienne Balibar has noted, that anthropological culturalism can be used by the Right in its own battle to uphold particular modes of national identification.<sup>104</sup> In Britain this was the goal of Powell. In 1964, as we have seen, Powell argued that the life of nations is lived in the imagination; in 1981 he returned to this theme and addressed the spectacle of a nation “which has lost, quite suddenly, in the space of less than a generation, all consciousness and conviction of being a nation.”<sup>105</sup> Setting himself the task of restoring national cohesion, Powell developed a vision that operated “to reconcile the different sectional interests of the so-called ‘indigenous population’ by postulating a largely imaginary national community whose members are all endowed with the same characteristics.”<sup>106</sup> Britishness was again recast by excluding the racial other: although Powell

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Pilkington, p. 143.

<sup>103</sup> Banton, “1960: A Turning Point” (n. 47 above), esp. pp. 36–39.

<sup>104</sup> Etienne Balibar, “Is There a ‘Neo-Racism’?” in Balibar and Wallerstein, eds. (n. 5 above), pp. 21–22.

<sup>105</sup> *Guardian*, November 9, 1981, quoted in Solomos, *Race and Racism in Britain* (n. 5 above), p. 183.

<sup>106</sup> Cloke (n. 15 above), p. 256. See also Miles, *Racism* (n. 5 above), pp. 62–63; John Solomos, “Contemporary Forms of Racial Ideology in British Society,” *Race Relations Abstracts* 16 (1991): 2. For the “new racism” of the later 1960s and 1970s, see Martin Barker, *The New Racism* (London, 1981); for the relationship between the “new racism” and national identity, see Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack* (n. 91 above), chap. 2; for the latest, and most astute study of Powellite racial discourse, see Anna Marie Smith, *New Right Discourse on Race and Sexuality: Britain, 1968–1990* (Cambridge, 1994), chap. 4.

did not refer to “in-groups” and “out-groups,” his work continued to focus on who legitimately belonged to the national community.

I am not for one moment suggesting that the invidious racism espoused by Powell, and subsequently articulated in more “polite” forms by respectable Conservatives in the 1980s,<sup>107</sup> is indebted to the race relations discourse I have adumbrated here. But I do want to emphasize that both depend on functionalist models of the social order and assume the existence of an essential Britishness against which the migrant other can be defined. In different ways—and for very different ideological purposes—both the race relations discourse of the 1950s and the subsequent “new racism” demarcated the boundaries of national belonging and legitimated a particular version of the national community by deploying a binary opposition between the “dark stranger” and the white nation. Powell even deployed the 1950s rhetoric of the “stranger,” although now, he lamented, it was the white British “who found themselves made strangers in their own country.”<sup>108</sup> This suggests just how ubiquitous thinking about race and nation in absolute cultural terms had become by the later 1960s. It also suggests that the “new racism” of that decade cannot be divorced from Britain’s early postwar history, indicative of the need to chart the many fundamental continuities in significant areas of post-1945 British thought.<sup>109</sup>

Powell’s equation of whiteness and Britishness has been confronted by a new generation of Black filmmakers who have been forced to deal with a situation in which, as Kobena Mercer has suggested, the terms “Black” and “British” have been positioned as mutually exclusive, making it very difficult to establish the grounds of a new, *Black British* identity.<sup>110</sup> This difficulty is illustrative of the fact that while Powell tried to recuperate once more the tattered remnants of an imagined national past and awaken a sense of threat to the ties that presumably bound the white nation together, many people have been disinherited by his constructs of the nation. As the novelist and screenwriter Hanif Kureishi claimed, when Powell spoke for England he turned away in disgust. In a more optimistic vein, however, he also suggested that Powell’s invective generated new impulses to rework the national imaginary, and he con-

<sup>107</sup> See, e.g., John Casey, “One Nation: The Politics of Race,” *Salisbury Review*, no. 1 (Autumn 1982): 23–28.

<sup>108</sup> Powell (n. 2 above), p. 286.

<sup>109</sup> For an elaboration of this point, see Chris Waters, “The Pink and the Black: Race and Sex in Postwar Britain,” *Transition* 69 (Spring 1996): 210–21.

<sup>110</sup> Kobena Mercer, “Recoding Narratives of Race and Nation,” in *Black Film British Cinema* (Institute of Contemporary Arts Documents no. 7) (London, 1988), pp. 4–14.



cluded that it “is the British, the white British, who have to learn that being British isn’t what it once was. Now it is a more complex thing. . . . So there must be a fresh way of seeing Britain and the choices it faces: and a new way of being British after all this time.”<sup>111</sup>

To imagine new ways of being British means, first and foremost, to abandon thinking of the nation as a homogeneous entity. It means to consider recent critiques of essentialism that challenge notions of universality and static, over-determined identities.<sup>112</sup> It means, to borrow from Stuart Hall, to conceive of new identities not “founded on the notion of some absolute, integral self and which clearly can’t arise from some fully closed narrative of the self”—whether a Black self, a British self, or a self constituted as “stranger.”<sup>113</sup>

This project, of course, also means thinking about race and nation in terms other than those which dominated the 1950s. Even Banton, writing in 1983, argued that the presence of a large Black population in Britain had brought into focus a question no one had bothered to think much about earlier: the English, he suggested, “for the first time in a hundred years, have to ask what it is to define their ethnicity.”<sup>114</sup> That Banton should suddenly problematize the conditions of national identity in the 1980s—even suggesting that the “Spirit of British Tolerance” he had once viewed as innate to British character was largely a myth, albeit one that could have been utilized more effectively than it had been—is indicative of the extent to which, three decades earlier, he and his colleagues took certain attributes of national identity for granted as an unproblematic starting point in their research. Banton’s reassessment points to the profound distance that separates us from the race relations discourse of those years. In the space opened up by the rupture of that discourse we can begin not only to understand how it operated to fix national identity amidst the dislocations experienced in the 1950s but to engage in the process of reimagining the nation in terms other than those of “hosts” and “strangers.”

<sup>111</sup> Hanif Kureishi, “The Rainbow Sign,” in his *London Kills Me* (Harmondsworth, 1992), pp. 34–36.

<sup>112</sup> bell hooks, “Postmodern Blackness,” in Williams and Chrisman, eds. (n. 39 above), p. 425.

<sup>113</sup> Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves,” in *The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity* (Institute of Contemporary Arts Documents no. 6) (London, 1987), p. 45. See also Gilroy, *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, p. 69. For a recent attempt to reimagine national identity in Britain, see Diana Jeater, “Roast Beef and Reggae Music: The Passing of Whiteness,” *New Formations* 18 (1992): 107–21.

<sup>114</sup> Banton, “The Influence of Colonial Status” (n. 40 above), p. 557.