race & community control, media, politics

- Retelling Boston's busing strife
- Development & the Black community
- Race & British media
- "New" racism?

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The Editors

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INTRODUCTION

Late this past spring, The Boston Globe ran a front page article that declared "Despite recent outbreaks, racial attitudes have improved say civil rights advocates." After referring to three recent incidents in the Boston area—an affirmative action challenge to an all-white local Democratic Party ward committee, and white resistance to minority participation in two athletic events—the article concluded that the city was well on its way to a recovery from the racial turmoil accompanying school desegregation in the 1970s, shedding its image as the "Little Rock of the North." It is interesting to note that the first two "civil rights advocates" cited in the article were white—and one, the author J. Anthony Lukas, lives in New York. It was not until the third source quote that a person of color was cited.

Rather than simply highlighting a local political peculiarity, the article, by its "framing" of public understanding of racial issues, provides a window onto current media handling of race and politics in communities of color. It is a subject that seems to have exploded within the national press in the aftermath of incidents this winter in Howard Beach, New York and Forsyth County, Georgia. One of the central questions, then, is this: How are we to understand today's media coverage in a historical period characterized by the popularity of Lukas' Pulitzer Prize winning story of Boston's busing wars, Common Ground, and the much cited
opus of William Julius Wilson, *The Declining Significance of Race?* A second critical question, hinted at by the slant of the Globe article is, how do we get beyond the “official reality” projected by the largely white media, to understand the issues within the nation’s minority communities? In the midst of the battle to set the terms of the post-Reagan agenda, which we are witnessing now, the effort to frame events, and both to define social problems and propose their solutions, takes on an added importance.

It was ironic that in the midst of the coverage of Howard Beach and Forsyth County, “Eyes on the Prize,” the PBS documentary of the American civil rights movement aired nationally. It served as a vivid reminder of that movement’s farreaching challenges to, and effect on, the national body politic. With the memory of that transformation, it should have come as no surprise that a key component of the resurgent Right’s agenda was the containment of the new social movements of that era. But with the Right’s onslaught has also come a collapse of liberal politics—most noticeably around the issue of race. The coronation of J. Anthony Lukas, most noticeable in the Globe but echoed in liberal and Left press as well, and the generalized acceptance of an equating of black and white people’s situations, has been the most recent aspect of a liberal drift from the civil rights mobilization of two decades ago.

As James Green details in his critical reading, “In Search of ‘Common Ground’,” the book elevates the subsuming of race under class currently in vogue with liberals and economic populists alike. In that sense, it reflects a reconsideration of racial policies not only in Boston, but nationally as well.

Perhaps the clearest reading of that development was witnessed in the reaction of Boston’s political and media institutions to the Mandela referendum campaign of 1986. It was a reaction which one black critic labelled “hysterical.” For as much as Howard Beach and Forsyth County intruded on the projection of a “color blind” society, this grassroots campaign, which drew on a nationalist political legacy and sought to reincorporate the predominantly Third World neighborhoods of Boston into a separate city, exposed the city’s alleged racial “rehabilitation” as more style than substance.

When we put aside the media’s marginaliza-

tion and judgment of its “authorities,” recent efforts around land control emerge as vibrant and complex. Thus we seek the voices of those pushing those initiatives. Mauricio Gaston and Marie Kennedy’s “Blueprint for Tomorrow” details the long and varied history of efforts by Boston’s minority community to stem the speculative tide that first neglected, and now seeks to remake, their land—without them. As the authors argue, the fight to control development of what has become some of the nation’s most sought after real estate reflects a situation played out in more and more of the nation’s urban areas.

In “Community & Kinship, History & Control,” longtime community activists Bob Terrell and Chuck Turner reflect on their experiences in those struggles and frame the fight for control as one with national implications and possibilities. The example of San Francisco, where “development” has actually resulted in a shrinkage of the city’s black population, adds an urgency to this political arena. Both Turner and Terrell are members of the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority, a group merging grassroots politics with a 1980s technological sophistication. Initially some in GRNA had reservations about the Mandela approach. As Terrell indicates though, ultimately activists came to recognize the benefits of opening a second front around full control over development. This flexibility, rather than a rigid split which might have been more likely in an earlier era, suggests the maturation of the black community’s struggle around land control.

Turner is clear that, in contrast with earlier decades, the black community more broadly understands that development without full political power spells underdevelopment. He also questions whether this consciousness can be moved beyond a pessimism or despair, if progressives cannot offer not only a vision but literal blueprints for people to work for an alternative. Terrell suggests how developmental approaches rooted in the African and Caribbean cultures might contribute to such blueprints. Projected outside the media’s “official reality,” however, such developments are rarely understood or fully treated in the press. Hence, they remain separated from a broader audience.
As John Demeter argues in “Winter in America: Notes on the media and race,” the recasting of America’s racial experience, and the obscuring of black political history to which Terrell refers, has been an important component of the promulgation of a “color blind society.” The separation of current developments from a historical continuum serves to allow the media to see them as “atavisms” rather than as consistent patterns and policies. Common Ground, with its refusal to note the political struggles of Boston’s black community, embraces such a construct from a liberal perspective.

In Britain, it is perhaps the absence of a mass civil rights movement such as that depicted in “Eyes on the Prize,” that has left the space for the current racist media onslaught under Thatcher. As Nancy Murray describes in “Anti-Racists and other Demons,” the British press, without a legacy that has inhibited expressions of overt racsim, has now moved to portray “anti-racists” as “black racists.” In a time of economic malaise, such scapegoating of “enemy within” has allowed the construction of convenient, yet illusory, targets. While material in the British press finds a reflection only in the “hard edge” of American media, both institutions’ frames serve to reflect Reagan/Thatcher worldview of “national confidence.” It is a confidence that is based on a domestic targeting of those differing from the “traditions” and “morality” of the state. It is interesting to note the parallels to Common Ground’s attack on anti-racists, however, and the media depiction of backers of the Mandela campaign as “racially divisive.” But as articles in this issue detail, the primary social construct directed against blacks, in particular, can be seen in the US in media depictions of the family disintegration, crime, the decertifying of political leadership and the delegitimation of challenges to “official reality.” Whether the British experience is a vision of future directions in US media and politics remains an open, but alarming, question.
Pioneering
for the women of '78

She had walked into their party uninvited
wedging a welcome mat in the doorway
for other women she hoped would
follow along soon.

The loud ones argued
to throw her out immediately. Even her supporters
found her audacity annoying. But once they saw
she mingled with everyone
drank American beer
kept conversations going during awkward silences
helped clean up and thanked the host

and was backed up by law
the controversy
calmed.

She surprised them.
She was reliable.
She always gave her best.
She was invited back.
She became a regular—
always on the fringe
expected to help out

just a little more.

When she stopped coming
they were confused. Why now? Hadn’t she
challenged custom? stared down rumors? ingratiated herself
years ago? so that now her presence was only
mildly discomforting. She never explained.

After all those years
hurling back cannonballs
womanizing the barricades
firing only if she saw the whites of their eyes
it was the lonesomeness
of pioneering
that broke her resistance.

All those silences
about what mattered
most in her life
had worn her,

like the slow eating away of acid on metal:
the damage only visible over time.

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trician (Local 103, I.B.E.W.). She is the author of It’s a Good
Thing I’m Not Macho (Whetstone Press, 1984) and the play,
Mother Country.
Thanks for making America great.
BLUEPRINT FOR TOMORROW

The fight for community control in Boston’s black and Latino neighborhoods

Mauricio Gaston and Marie Kennedy

The story of Boston’s Roxbury could be the story of almost any inner city minority neighborhood in the United States. Roxbury has been the center of Boston’s black community since World War II, and increasingly the center of the city’s Latino community. Located only ten minutes by rapid transit from the city’s growing downtown, it has suffered from disinvestment, abuse and neglect, both benign and malign. The people of Roxbury have experienced enormous disruption, loss of housing and industry at the hands of the market, and injustice at the hands of the state, through urban renewal and highway clearance. All the signs of intense poverty are evident—high unemployment, low participation in the labor force, low educational levels, a high crime rate, flourishing drug traffic, and indicators like a high drop-out rate from school and a high rate of teen-age pregnancy. Some of Roxbury’s census tracts are among the poorest in the country, on a par with the poorest counties in Mississippi or with Indian reservations in the West (Boston Redevelopment Authority 1984). In one area of the community locally known as the “Bermuda Triangle,” 70 percent of the housing stock has been lost to abandonment and arson in less than two decades (Colon 1984). In the context of this disinvestment, and in resistance to it, the people of Roxbury developed an impressive and creative history of organization, struggle, and development.
Yet, the biggest threat to Roxbury today is not disinvestment but the danger of gentrification and masssive displacement. This community, long bled dry of its wealth, is now faced with a flood of investment which can affect it as drastically and as brutally as the last forty years of drought. This threat is eliciting from the community new forms of struggle and organizing, which may become a model for other urban communities confronting a similar situation.

An Analytical Framework

Two central facts stand out about the recent history of Roxbury. First, after World War II, while the Boston area was transforming, reviving, and finally booming, Roxbury became a minority community and went into a drastic physical and economic decline. Second, realisation of the newly enhanced value of Roxbury’s land seems to require the removal of the black and Latino people and businesses that currently occupy the land. To understand these facts, it is helpful first to consider the concepts of uneven development and the distinction between neighborhood and community, paying particular attention to the role of racism in these concepts.

Understanding uneven development begins with the fact that capital flows to those places where conditions are more favorable for accumulation. Indeed, capitalist development and underdevelopment are two sides of the same coin, since the investment in one area generally depends on the draining of capital from another area (Smith and Lefaivre 1984, 47). This process of uneven development, which has been well-studied in an international context, also takes place regionally and within a metro-

*Jacob Holdt, 1985, from American Pictures.*
politan area like Boston.

Uneven development does not occur, as some would have it, "naturally," or simply as a result of the actions of the "invisible hand" of the market. Rather, it is the result of the combined actions of specific investors, bankers, and politicians, which can be identified and analyzed; in essence, the result of the capitalist production of space (Smith 1984, 67-96). It is facilitated by various branches of the state, which insure that conditions are favorable to the accumulation process. In the case of development within the city, urban planning is often the process by which accumulation is facilitated and legitimated (O'Connor 1973).

In particular, communities of color are prevented from developing in part by racism. Discrimination in economic life, education, housing, political activity, culture, the media, all militate against the efforts of blacks and Latinos to develop their communities. The national and local states intervene in this situation in various capacities. These various levels of the state can enact reforms which legitimize the status quo, or, as in recent actions of the federal government, take measures to reinforce the structures of discrimination.

As planners, we find the distinction between neighborhood and community useful. Roxbury, for example, can be analyzed in two ways, both of which are important to an understanding of its unique role in the current transformation of Boston. It is a neighborhood, meaning it has a particular location, is made up of buildings and other supporting structures, and occupies a piece of land. It is also a community, specifically a black and Latino community, which means that it has a social and political as well as a physical reality.

The fate of a neighborhood, viewed as a commodity, at a particular time depends on the flow of capital to the built environment, which is regulated by financial institutions, and on the ground rent structure, which determines the location of investment. As the larger economy and city goes through downturns in accumulation, the neighborhood goes through a devalorization cycle—from new construction, to landlord control, to blockbusting, to redlining, to abandonment—which results in a rent gap. By rent gap is meant the "gap between the ground rent actually capitalized with a given land use at a specific location, and the ground rent that could potentially be capitalized under a [different] use at that location" (Smith and Lefaivre 1984, 50). When a rent gap exists, a neighborhood is ripe for a major transformation: gentrification and displacement.

But the neighborhood is also a place where people live, organize themselves, study, reproduce themselves, their culture and ideas, sometimes work, and generally make themselves into a community.

The needs of people in communities and the needs of capital do not always coincide, and a struggle ensues. The community struggles to survive, to reproduce itself, to develop, and to gain power over events affecting it. From the point of view of capital, a community has a social function, mainly to reproduce labor power and social relations. Black and Latino communities in particular are subject to pressures which maintain significant parts of these communities as cheap labor (or a secondary labor market) and as a reserve army of labor in more or less permanent unemployment. Indeed, discriminatory pressures shape almost every aspect of life in communities like Roxbury, from choice of residence, to access to education and training, to relations between police and community. This makes Roxbury, like the dozens of other Roxburies in US cities, a ghetto (see, for example, Tabb 1970, Goldsmith 1974).

On the one hand, it is desirable for capital that these communities function smoothly, without upsetting the established order, and certainly without disrupting the basic labor market flow. On the other hand, such a stable community tends to generate consciousness of its own oppressed condition, a sense of collective self, networks of social support, creative ideas, solidarity, and political power which contradict the needs of capital to maintain the neighborhood as a pliable "free" commodity for the market (Smith and Lefaivre, 1984, p. 46). A community is a subject as well as an object.

**Boston Rises, Roxbury Declines**

A brief history of recent economic changes in
Roxbury and Boston reveals the transformation and revival of the Boston metropolitan area and the simultaneous devastation of Roxbury. Boston emerged from World War II with problems that came to be typical of northern industrial cities—but these problems surfaced in Boston twenty years earlier than in other “Frostbelt” cities. Between 1947 and 1975, Boston manufacturing jobs decreased from about 112,000 to about 50,000; concomitantly, wholesale and retail trade jobs fell from about 150,000 to about 91,000. The loss of jobs was accompanied by falling municipal revenues, declining city services, deteriorating building stock and infrastructure, and other signs of the urban crisis.

While Boston itself languished, its suburbs boomed. The old pillars of Brahmin Boston, the financial institutions and elite universities, pushed the development of high-tech research and production, fueled by the federal government’s military spending. New industrial parks dotted Boston’s postwar circumferential highway, Route 128. As the suburbs boomed and whites left the city in droves, the migration of people of color to the central city, particularly from the southern United States, increased dramatically and the suburbs were closed to them.

The return of investment to Boston itself came with the recognition that its future lay in administration and finance rather than in manufacturing and trade. The central management of large enterprises required constant interaction among managers, financiers, and such outside experts as accountants, lawyers, and advertisers. The suburbs were not well suited for this kind of infrastructure. The central city, if it could be reshaped to meet the merging needs of industry, was the only place where the regional economy could be effectively coordinated. Besides, permanent capital investment in the city was too important to abandon.

New investment in Boston was facilitated by major highway construction and by one of the most vigorous urban renewal programs in the US between 1952 and 1979. It gave away enormous benefits to corporations willing to locate offices downtown and cleared away large areas of “blight,” meaning obsolete building structures and working-class residential areas situated where other functions had become more desirable to capital. After about twenty-five years of these actions, enough public funds had been spent to create conditions for profitable private investment. Capital began to flow back to the city in the late 1970s.

In charge of this process was the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), given a peculiar dual function recommended by the Boston Chamber of Commerce: the BRA was the planning and redevelopment arm of city government (King 1981, 22). The agency’s centralized power was symbolic of the changing nature of Boston politics and marked the city’s
entrance into a period of professionalized management.

While the postwar transformation revived the Boston region, it crippled Roxbury. As a low-income community of color, Roxbury experienced fully the negative side of uneven development. The “invisible hand” of the private sector led the assault with massive disinvestment, redlining, arson, and abandonment. Between 1950 and 1980, Roxbury’s population decreased by 57 percent (Roxbury Technical Assistance Project 1986). Roxbury’s housing stock, by now mostly 75 to 100 years old, was generally in need of serious repair, but as far as banks were concerned Roxbury property provided no equity. Not only were tenants forced out by landlords who milked and then burned buildings, but even many homeowners—typically with fully paid-off mortgages—were forced to abandon their homes because they could not finance necessary repairs (Kennedy 1978).

Part of the economic pressure on the housing stock was due to the fact that proportionately higher property taxes were levied in Roxbury than in any other part of the city. A 1974 study showed that while Boston’s tax liability as a whole would increase by 20 percent under market-value assessment, Roxbury’s liability would drop by 27 percent (Holland & Oldman 1974, 15). In return for higher taxes, Roxbury got strikingly poor services: “Whole areas, particularly in Lower Roxbury, were allowed by the city government to deteriorate. Vacant buildings were torn down, dumping garbage was permitted in Madison Park...” (“Moving in Boston” 1980, 5). This did not happen by accident. It was deliberate public policy to “triage” neighborhoods, concentrating services in middle-class areas and particularly neglecting those neighborhoods occupied by people of color—specifically Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan (McDonough 1975).

Today 30.5 percent of Roxbury’s population is below the poverty line, and more than one quarter of Roxbury’s families have no worker, despite large family size and relatively few elderly. Roxbury has a homeownership rate of only 20 percent, and 53 percent of all housing and 73 percent of all rental housing is subsidized (Gaston & Kennedy 1985, 13, 21-22). Of the

land parcels, “a little more than half is tax exempt, largely publicly held, and of this, half is vacant” (Boston Redevelopment Authority 1984).

The Community Organizes

Roxbury the neighborhood—a collection of land and buildings, housing and businesses—declined sharply between the 1950s and the 1980s. What of Roxbury the community? The last thirty years in the history of Roxbury have been a rich legacy of struggle, organizing, leadership, organizational development, and consciousness-raising. The very same forces that oppressed and damaged the community influenced the forms of resistance that Roxbury developed to defend itself. The process of self-defense included struggle for civil rights, par-

George Williams photo, Dorchester, Mass.
ticularly against school segregation, for housing, jobs and services, against highway and urban renewal displacement, and for political representation and power.

The forms of expression of this political development have been diverse, forming what black leader Mel King (1981) has called a "chain of change." Given the central role played by education in reproducing social relations and the peculiar character of the Boston School Department (the last patronage stronghold of the old Irish populist machine), the struggle for equal and high quality education has evolved over decades and has been central to the recent development of Boston black politics. Efforts by blacks (and later, Latinos and Asians) to gain access to jobs have been a second key area of struggle.

An important component of these struggles was the black community's increased capacity to generate coalitions, including interracial coalitions, with other forces in the city and metropolitan area. In the late sixties, demolition began in Roxbury for two new major highways, Interstate 95 and an inner city circumferential road called the Inner Belt. Led partly by Chuck Turner, who represented the Black United Front's Operation STOP, a coalition of metropolitan scope, the Southwest Corridor Coalition, was formed. This formation included inner city black neighborhoods and white working-class suburban neighborhoods, both concerned about loss of jobs and housing, along with wealthy suburbs where residents worried about preserving "suburban tone" and environmentalists were concerned about the loss of wetlands. This somewhat unlikely coalition became powerful enough to force Republican Governor Sargent to call a 1970 moratorium on highway construction in the metropolitan area and eventually to redefine the region's transportation plans entirely. This struggle even had a national impact; the coalition was instrumental in the release of Federal Highway Trust Funds (from gasoline taxes) to finance public transit (Gaston 1981).

The Southwest Corridor Project, a coalition of city, state and metropolitan agencies, was formed to develop the land originally cleared for the highway for a new rapid transit line. Under pressure of groups originally organized to stop the highway, and elaborate participatory planning process was developed for the huge project. Ongoing movements have wrested con-

LNS, Allston neighborhood of Boston, 1960s.
siderable reforms from the Southwest Corridor Project (e.g., affordable housing and a new campus for Roxbury Community College).

Until several years ago, blacks and Latinos were able to have little impact in Boston’s electoral arena. While some blacks were elected to represent Boston districts in the State legislature, the “at-large” municipal election system and the grip of a series of machines dominated by Irish and Italian ethnic groups served to block blacks from municipal office. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, black activists ran candidate after candidate, but with meager results. The NAACP’s Tom Atkins, elected to the City Council for one term in 1971, was the first black elected to a Boston municipal office in this century; no other black was to follow until 1977. No Latino even ran for office until 1979, and to date, only one has been elected (to the School Committee).

But in the years since 1977, significant achievements have been made in electoral politics. The Black Political Task force, formed in 1978, has become an organization whose endorsement is sought by white as well as black candidates. Boston’s electorate voted in 1981 to reform municipal government, instituting representation by districts in the School Committee and City Council, and half a dozen black candidates have made the breakthrough into elected office. Most significant, a black progressive candidate, Mel King, was propelled into the final election for mayor in 1983, and, although he was ultimately defeated by a large margin, Boston’s black and Latino communities emerged from the campaign with increased political clout.

In summary, the period since World War II has been a trying one in the city. For the dominant groups in the city, who tend to speak in the name of “Boston,” the period was a difficult transition from an outdated and obsolete city to one which is “modernized” to the point where Stephen Coyle, the new director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), boosts it as the “best performing economy, not just in the country, but in the whole world” (Menzies 1985a). The combined result of a series of transformations and policies has been a prosperous economy, but one tending towards a more uneven distribution of income and wealth, with racial disparities increasing (Boston Redevelopment Authority 1984, 5). The city has a changing labor force, a downtown investment boom, and a growing population of yuppies gentrifying its neighborhoods.

Roxbury, on the other hand, has had “the short end of the stick” in the transformation of Boston. As a community, it suffered a disproportionate part of the loss in old industrial jobs, while gaining access to only the worst among the new ones. As a neighborhood, it was scarred by the demolition for highways and urban renewal. It suffered through forty years of disinvestment with the accompanying abandonment and arson, and yet it strengthened its culture and identity, and began to build a serious political base.

New Pressures for Investment

Over the past several years, the combination of continued pressures for investment in Boston with the limits to downtown growth has led to consideration of Roxbury as a new target for business development. In 1984, according to Boston’s mayor Ray Flynn, $3 billion in new construction was invested in the downtown, mostly into first class office towers. But Boston
is an old city. The downtown building boom has strained the infrastructure and physical capacity of the central city to its limits and threatened its historical legacy. Traffic jams are legendary in the two harbor-crossing tunnels and in the downtown Central Artery, and parking capacity within the city is woefully inadequate for current demands. There is little prospect for large amounts of additional development downtown.

Simultaneously, there is an ongoing fiscal crisis of the local state. In 1979, a statewide plebiscite passed Proposition 2 1/2, modeled after California's Proposition 13. This law limits growth in real estate taxes to 2 1/2 percent of the assessed value of property, the major source of municipal revenue. Boston has been kept afloat financially through carefully negotiated assistance packages from the state legislature, and by selling valuable downtown property, such as parking garages, to developers, which has only exacerbated the inadequacy of the infrastructure. There are, however, no more publicly owned garages and few other properties downtown to sell for premium prices. The state legislature is unlikely to provide such assistance except for emergencies. The administration has to continue to promote new investment to generate municipal revenues.

In short, the pressure to invest is enormous, and the downtown is approaching its limits. BRA director Coyle's strategy is to continue attracting investment, but limit development downtown, funneling it instead into the existing open land nearest to downtown (Menzies 1984, 1985b). The situation can be compared to the controlled explosion of an internal combustion engine: there is a sudden violent expansion of the activities now concentrated downtown, but there are strong constraints against the expansion. The energy has to be directed somewhere.

Roxbury is located minutes away from the central business district, with easy access to public transportation and major regional highways. This, along with Roxbury's large amount of publicly held (and largely vacant) land, would seem to make an ideal new turf for capital. In this context, in early 1985, the BRA released a "Dudley Square Plan" and Flynn's new BRA director, Stephen Coyle, announced that he had lined up twenty-one developers with $750 million to invest in the Dudley Station area (the commercial, transportation and cultural center of Roxbury).

Implications of the BRA Plan

The BRA plan, produced with virtually no community involvement and kept secret until its release, has several major components:

- Development of Dudley Square into a historical town center, with the station renovated into a "Galeria."
- A high-rise "business park," with an initial 750,000 sq. ft. of space for offices, shopping and a 500 car garage.
- Converting the Orchard Park public housing development into cooperatives.
- Construction of new single family housing affordable for families earning "as little as $20,000 a year."

The BRA claims that this proposed development in Roxbury would not cause displacement
since new construction would be mostly restricted to currently vacant land. Although this policy will limit the immediate direct displacement, indirect displacement, if not controlled, will be drastic. A quick analysis of potential residential displacement shows that the danger is severe.

The mere talk of a $750 million wave of investment has already accelerated speculation in the private housing market and arson. The Boston Arson Prevention Commission (1986) recently released a report showing an alarming increase in the number of suspicious fires near Dudley since the BRA announcement. Homeowners in the area report the almost daily receipts of slips under the door from realtors urging them to sell; in classic blockbusting fashion, some of these slips allude to the threat of an influx of Latinos in traditionally black neighborhoods. Every week there is talk of another dilapidated triple decker sold for enormous sums of money. An eighteen unit block of apartments was auctioned in 1980 for $15,000, renovated and recently sold for $400,000. In two years, the manager expects it to be worth twice that on the market (Kaufman 1985). Given the low rate of homeownership, the displacement of tenants in this sector has already begun, before major corporate investment even starts. Some commercial property in the Dudley station area is already increasing in value by 50 percent every few months.

While displacement in the open private market is most difficult to control under current laws and conditions, the semi-public market of subsidized units fares little better. These units make up a large percentage of housing in the neighborhood, and a substantial percentage of them are in financial trouble, as they are throughout the country. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is under contract to continue subsidies for 15 years, but it has also gone to Congress to request a change in regulations allowing the federal government to strip foreclosed properties of the subsidies, and to permit their disposition in the open market with no guarantee of affordability or security of tenure for tenants. Although observers believe it is unlikely that Congress would grant HUD this request, potentially 10,000 people could be displaced in the short run, almost all of them people of color, into a housing market with a vacancy rate of less than 1 percent and with the lowest income-to-rent ratio in the country. The longer-range displacement would be far worse, since many subsidized units not currently on the auction block are in financial trouble and could expect a similar fate in a few years.

Displacement in public housing is a somewhat different problem. There are nearly 2000 units of family public housing in Roxbury; over 200 of these units are currently vacant, awaiting repairs. Overall, the condition of most of Boston’s public housing is so deplorable and the federal posture towards increased, or even continuing, subsidies so negative that what has traditionally been the most secure stock of low income housing is now in jeopardy. The BRA plan suggests that the 700-plus units in the Orchard Park public housing development be turned into tenant cooperatives. Unless the option includes limited equity, it would be difficult for the current low-income residents to resist selling in a lucrative market.

The housing component of the BRA plan, called “Building the American Dream,” addresses the construction of only 1200 new units, in addition to the conversion of public housing to homeownership. By totally writing down the cost of the land, using factory-built construction methods and piggy-backing every available subsidy, the BRA argues that the units could be

Dorchester Community News photo.
affordable by households earning “as little as $20,000 a year.” According to the BRA’s own figures, median household income in Roxbury was only $4515 in 1980 (Boston Redevelopment Authority 1984). And, the number of black households in the entire metropolitan area with an annual income in the $20,000 range is relatively small. According to the 1980 census, only 20,545 black households earned over $15,000 per year in the entire metropolitan area. If, as the BRA plan suggests, Roxbury is to be repopulated to 1960 levels (over twice the present population), the question arises as to whether it will remain primarily a community of color.

The problem of job creation through development in Roxbury has been a primary concern of Roxbury’s leaders for years and is perhaps the single most important issue facing the community. The proposed BRA plan purports to create the kinds of workplaces which have been the staple of Boston’s growth in this decade: hotels and office towers. Little research has been done exploring alternatives for job creation and no attention has been paid to the community’s work preferences.

For a neighborhood like Roxbury, which has been suffering from disinvestment for decades, the prospect of investment, especially on the scale proposed, may appear to some like relief from a drought. But working-class communities of color have insisted on gaining some control of the process, understanding that the current investment wave has the potential to displace enormous numbers of people to the point of transforming the population of the neighborhood. This wave has the potential of destroying the community in order to “save” the neighborhood.
Community Power and Inclusiveness:
The Organizing Committee for a Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority

Community activists responded to this BRA threat by intensifying their efforts to build a broad-based community coalition that could control development in Greater Roxbury. At a press conference held on Frederick Douglas Day, February 14, 1985, the Organizing Committee for a Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (OCGRNA) was formally launched. The OCGRNA demanded a moratorium on land disposition until a degree of popular participation and control could be established. Their position was (and is, in large part) based on several factors. First, the fact that the planning process had been undemocratic meant that the questions posed for the plan to answer were so narrow that various alternatives dealing with job creation, housing, and financing were never even explored. Secondly, and building on the first point, focusing on a specific plan at this point in the planning process would have meant narrowing the debate to the level of nitpicking—necessary prior questions would never be posed; OCGRNA refused to get trapped into an agenda set by the BRA which would have effectively derailed a truly inclusionary process and would have channeled all energy to crafting compromises about inessential disagreements (e.g., whether office buildings would be fifteen or twenty stories—not whether there would be any office building; whether owner-occupied housing would be detached or duplex, not whether more cooperative forms of ownership might be appropriate). Thirdly, the BRA plan only addressed development in a small part of the Greater Roxbury area, whereas the community faces crucial community development and political issues in many areas of Greater Roxbury. OCGRNA recognized that specific development decisions in one area would affect—positively or negatively—the development

Disruption of John Brown Memorial Meeting at Tremont Temple, 1860.
possibilities of the broader community and therefore should not be taken in isolation. OCGRNA called for a geographically more integrated, coordinated, and community-controlled planning process, with powers of decision-making placed in the hands of the various sectors in the numerous Greater Roxbury neighborhoods.

The OCGRNA is an extremely broad coalition, embracing blacks and Latinos, merchants and ministers, politicians and community organizers, public housing tenants and small landlords. In the past year and one-half, OCGRNA has balanced its efforts between concrete planning, grassroots organizing, and coalition building. Perhaps its most significant organizing and coalition-building efforts had to do with the negotiations over control of development in the area around Dudley Station. The BRA, impressed by the level of popular support harnessed by the OCGRNA, floated a proposal to create a Project Advisory Committee (PAC) with members appointed by the mayor and only advisory power over development. The OCGRNA countered by organizing constituency caucuses of small merchants, clergy, tenants, neighborhood associations, community development corporations, and other groups, identifying representatives from each sector, and presenting them for ratification at a Roxbury "town meeting" of over 500 people, as a popularly elected "interim PAC" which would serve until broader elections could be held (it was hoped, within six months). This interim PAC was presented to the mayor as an unavoidable presence, and he was unable to create his own appointed front.

The "interim PAC" won the grudging recognition of city officials and entered into negotiations with the BRA and the mayor. The city accepted the thirteen people whom the community had elected as legitimate members of the PAC but insisted on the appointment by the mayor of eight additional people. Perhaps the greatest initial victory for OCGRNA was that the publicity achieved in the process of electing the "interim PAC" threw a spotlight on the city's land give-away which embarrassed the city into reinstating the de facto moratorium on land disposition, although, in principle, the city continued to refuse to agree to it.

Twelve "Agreed Upon Principles" emerged from the negotiations; their nature has national significance as a model and precedent for community controlled development. Although the PAC was not accorded veto power over plans or on selection of developers, it did negotiate impressive powers which are worth detailing:

1. Establishment of an interim PAC—13 members already elected by the community; 8 appointed by mayor.
2. The PAC will hold community elections in one year.
3. The PAC will be the public participatory body for the area and shall set development objectives and criteria.
4. All requests for proposals (RFP's) issued by the BRA for planning or development will require PAC approval prior to issuance. The PAC will approve all criteria and objectives including type of use, size, income mix, resident and minority job requirements, resident and minority equity participation, etc.
5. Any comprehensive zoning revision or planning for the area will require PAC approval.
6. Any other BRA action which alters criteria or specifications will require PAC approval.
7. Any BRA action or advice which affects development in the area, including choice of developers, will also be reviewed by the PAC. Any differences between the PAC and the BRA staff will be subject to attempts at mediation. If differences are unresolved, both the PAC and the BRA staff will present their recommendations to the BRA Board.
8. BRA will provide full and timely notice to the PAC of any planning or development proposals, actions, etc.
9. The BRA will provide all relevant information, studies, maps, etc. in a full and timely manner.
10. There will be an interagency agreement between the PAC and all City departments.
11. Project Review Committees (PRC's) will coordinate with the PAC. PAC representatives will sit on all future PRC's.
12. BRA will supply technical assistance, place, and budget (amount to be worked out) to PAC.

Mayor Flynn was politically pressured into public support for the agreement—announcing in October 1985, in front of television cameras and more than 500 people convened by the OCGRNA, that "we have a deal." Speedy im-
The PAC countered by inviting the mayoral appointees to participate with other PAC members in a lawsuit to demand that the BRA cease its redevelopment efforts until certain legal requirements were met. In a spirit of community solidarity, most of the mayor’s appointees agreed to join the suit against the BRA; later pressure forced some to back out, but the fact that the mayor couldn’t initially control even his own appointees is instructive.

Among other strategies discussed at the PAC’s town meeting, aside from the lawsuit, were the possibilities of erecting a “tent city” on a key site, organizing takeovers of city-owned buildings, and a major “hands across Roxbury” demonstration with national political figures. A Roxbury homeowners committee was formed and the first of several citywide meetings of about twenty neighborhood groups engaged in development efforts was held at the initiation of the PAC. These groups, representing all of Boston’s neighborhoods except South Boston and West Roxbury, have now formed the Coalition for Community Control of Development and are considering joining the lawsuit. In a tactical maneuver around the BRA’s source of power, State Representative Gloria Fox of Roxbury introduced a bill in the state legislature which aims to create elected neighborhood authorities which would bypass municipal structures and democratize community development.

Parcel 18: What’s at Stake?

The controversy over Parcel 18—the largest development parcel of the Southwest Corridor—provides an interesting case study, further illuminating aspects of the struggle over development in Roxbury. Over the last ten years, the Parcel 18 Task Force, a coalition of tenants, community development corporations, black developers, agencies, and abutting institutions, has been researching, planning, and exploring development alternatives for the site. After ten years, considerable work had been done and was presented to BRA representatives for review. Their response: “Thank you for your input”; they then proceeded to unveil a fully developed plan, quite different from anything the Task Force had had in mind. This
The BRA's parcel design is based on an extension of the city's new service economy of office towers into the neighborhood. While the BRA has planned significant minority equity and participation in jobs, the PAC argues that the parcel should be conceived as an extension of the economy of Roxbury, not of downtown and that something other than towers of "back-office" space must be built. Light industry, small commercial space, and student housing are some of the proposals that they feel bear investigation. Meanwhile, the BRA has extended promises of equity participation to non-Task Force members; the PAC feels that the BRA is using this wedge to buy people off and to split the community. So many Roxbury residents have been offered "a piece" of Parcel 18 that the question arises as to whether even the BRA's proposal of 25 percent minority equity in two projects with projected total project costs of over $409 million is large enough to satisfy the promises (Boston Redevelopment Authority 1986, 95, 96).

Evidence of Development-Related Arson

An even more chilling example of how far the BRA is prepared to go in defending its role and prerogatives in the redevelopment of Roxbury is offered by the response of the BRA to the recent report of the Boston Arson Prevention Commission on the alarming increase in arson in Roxbury following the announcement of the BRA's Dudley Square Plan. BRA Director Stephen Coyle led a virulent attack on the credibility of the Commission's work, calling them "bozos" and insisting that they "improve [their] methodology or resign" (Frisby 1986). He was adamantly opposed to the report's finding of a connection between arson and development, because exposing such a connection would "endanger planned redevelopment" and "hamper potential financing" (Frisby
Besides pressuring the Commission's director to resign, the mayor has proceeded to stack the Commission itself with appointees expected to be more pliable to the mayor's and the BRA's position. Although no one in their right mind would justify arson, the BRA, in pretending that arson is simply a law enforcement problem, has acted to undermine a vigorous opposition to it, particularly in trying to discredit the statistical data that indicates a connection between arson, speculation, and development.

Some of the most creative energy generated by the fight-back in Roxbury is taking shape with less relative visibility in various smaller neighborhoods. Of these localized efforts, the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI) stands out as a particularly interesting example and an indication of trends in local efforts. In fact, GRNA considers DSNI a good example of the type of planning effort they hope will evolve in every district of Roxbury.

The neighborhood concerned is located just west of Dudley Station. It has a population of about 15,000, including Afro-Americans, Cape Verdeans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and other Latinos. It's probably the poorest neighborhood in Roxbury aside from public housing projects such as Orchard Park which it borders. The infamous "Bermuda Triangle" lies within the DSNI area as does much other land cleared through arson and disinvestment. In fact, in the area's 1 1/2 square miles, there are over 1000 parcels of vacant land, most of it owned by the City of Boston (Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative 1986).

The DSNI grew out of a series of meetings held in 1984 of the area's various human service agencies. The Rainbow Coalition and the 1983 Mel King mayoral campaign can be largely credited with helping to move these agencies beyond their former willingness to cooperate to their current development of the trust necessary to plan joint strategy. Because of this in-

Blossoming of Technical Assistance

The intensity and high quality of political activity generated in the community is paralleled by a wave of professional and technical activity in support of that effort. While academia in general has been retreating from the type of field-based projects initiated in the 1960s, the College of Public and Community Service (CPCS) at the University of Massachusetts/Boston—where both the authors teach—has been moving in the opposite direction and finding the effort fertile and rewarding. Beginning with Dudley in 2001, groups of faculty and students at CPCS have been involved in various ways in studying and giving technical assistance to community efforts in Roxbury. The Roxbury Technical Assistance Project (RTAP—directed by Gaston) has combined classes with project instruction in such areas as Community Planning, Human Services, Criminal Justice and Law. RTAP helped research demographics and develop a housing profile of Roxbury, held seminars on organizing for community activists, developed a "Process Plan" for the Dudley PAC, generated policies for non-speculative homeownership, assisted the Planning Committee of OCGRNA to write a housing plan and present it at a "town meeting," and linked with MIT students to write a profile of jobs and firms of the major industrial area near Dudley and the New Market Square Area. RTAP lawyers (also CPCS faculty) have acted as counsel for the Dudley PAC, legal education classes have carried on research on the powers of administrative agencies in redevelopment and the CPCS student-staffed law office have taken on many of the utility cases in the Eviction Free Zone. A profile of human service programs for a part of Roxbury has been completed and a detailed demographic profile of the Dudley Neighborhood Initiative area has been computerized in a spreadsheet.

The Legal Services Center has begun work on a database of all real estate transactions in Roxbury, the data base is being designed so that it can be used interactively for statistical analysis as well. The Eviction Free Zone Coalition, in conjunction with faculty at CPCS Center for Community Planning has also generated a Technical Support Group (TSG). In its initial stages, the TSG looks to harness technicians to research and provide services in five areas: tenure and equity; development; construction and labor; finance; and organizing. Already the Eviction Free Zone is generating victories for tenants fighting evictions; buildings are being converted into limited equity cooperatives (Ball 1986). Technical support has facilitated these efforts.

The main limitation to these various efforts to develop assistance has been lack of resources. Despite lack of resources, the community struggle has generated considerable creative activity in professional circles which is itself a reflection of decades of capacity-building in communities of color and among progressive forces. In some ways, people are better situated to make a difference now than twenty years ago, in the heyday of anti-urban renewal struggles. This seems ironic in the light of the conservative climate invading urbanism.
clusiveness, skillful political and technical leadership, and the fact that the DSNI area has been the focus of much recent struggle in Roxbury, the DSNI has managed to obtain significant resources from business-supported foundation.

A director and full time staff of four have been hired and they have recently released a well-developed request for proposals (backed by $100,000) for comprehensive physical, social, economic development, and housing planning. A campaign to stop dumping of garbage and hazardous waste on the neighborhood’s vacant lots is well underway. Much of DSNI’s organizing and planning work is done in cooperation with other groups in the area. Currently DSNI is working with the Orchard Park United Tenants Association to oppose plans for a new prison and a waste-to-energy plant proposed for location in the industrial zone adjacent to the neighborhood. DSNI organizers are amongst the most active in the Eviction Free Zone Coalition.

Lessons for Other Cities

The current situation of Roxbury may have some peculiarities, but it is in many ways symptomatic of the current situation of working class communities of color in major US cities. Chief among the similarities they face is the problem of racism. It is a central determinant of the condition of life for neighborhoods like Roxbury, permeating every aspect of their economy, demographic structure, institutional environment, and political situation. It created the ghetto, and rendered its occupants vulnerable to the abuses of the market and the state. When conditions determine that the ghetto is no longer desirable to the powers that be, its dissolution is facilitated, or perhaps more likely, its atomization and dispersal into separate smaller concentrations less likely to generate resistance and political power. Since racism is gaining in strength in recent years, it is more likely that other centers of black and Latino concentrations will find themselves under more vigorous attack in the near future.

Roxbury’s location and its proximity to the growing Central Business District is also no anomaly. Black and Latino migrations to northern cities moved into locations abandoned by a labor force which had fled the city in similar conditions throughout the country. Disinvestment, whether planned (as in Roxbury’s history of redlining) or market driven, is a common condition among black and Latino neighborhoods. The majority of vacant land in Roxbury was in fact created through national, not local, programs of “blight removal,” urban renewal, and highway construction. The “triaging” of services is a national practice for the period. The concentration of publicly assisted housing now in danger of losing subsidies is a national problem.

But, if new forms of abuse are taking shape in Boston and Roxbury, so are new forms of resistance and struggle. Central to the recent effort has been the Organizing Committee for a Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority. In its vision of class alliances and its call for representation by “sector” (tenants, homeowners, clergy, agencies, small business owners), it reflects the lessons in unity of past struggles and political campaigns. In its effort to think in terms of neighborhood and local organizing, it reflects a growing trend by oppressed groups in this country to “localize” their efforts in order to mobilize their bases. In its potential for actually delivering some popular victories in the 1980s, it is a fountain of hope.

At the time this article was written, Mauricio Gaston and Marie Kennedy were both faculty members of the Center for Community Planning UMass/Boston’s College of Public and Community Service. Both were longtime community activists and worked with the Roxbury Technical Assistance Project to aid the Roxbury community in the fight against displacement. Mauricio died on Sept. 13, 1986. A notice appeared in Vol. 20, No. 2-3 of RA. Marie is continuing her work at the college and in the community.

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The Mandela Campaign: A Summary

On November 4th of last year, close to 50,000 citizens of Boston living in or near the predominantly black area of Greater Roxbury voted on whether the area should leave Boston and incorporate as a separate municipality to be called Mandela, in honor of South African black leaders Nelson and Winnie Mandela. The separation proposal—technically a non-binding proposal to “de-annex and reincorporate” Roxbury, which was until 1868 an independent town—whipped up a storm of controversy. Boston city officials damned it as “economically preposterous and at worst, a program of racial separation.” The Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP), sponsors of the Mandela initiative, maintained, “We want land control because land control is the key to self-determination.” The separation referendum was defeated by a 3 to 1 margin. However, the proposal rekindled a debate that has simmered in US black communities for over a hundred years: can the black community (or any other community of color) better achieve well being by assimilation into the white society, or by establishing community control over development? The arguments that rocked Boston in the month preceding the vote on Mandela hold lessons for communities of color across the country.

The Actors

Three groups of actors played the most important roles in the drama of the Mandela referendum: the originators of the Mandela idea, the Boston establishment which sharply attacked the idea, and the collection of black leaders and activists who ended up taking different sides on the issue.

Two people, public television producer Andrew Jones and architect/urban planner Curtis Davis, founded the Greater Roxbury Incorporation Project (GRIP). Inspired by the incorporation of mainly-black East Palo Alto, which became a town in 1983, they started a breakfast discussion group, then in 1985 called on Mayor Flynn to hold a plebiscite in Roxbury over the question of forming a separate city. When Flynn refused, they gathered the 5,000 signatures necessary to put the question on the ballot as a non-binding referendum instructing state legislators of affected districts to begin the process of reincorporation. Jones noted, “We didn’t create this area, we just described it. The city of Boston is so incredibly segregated, it was easy to divide.”

GRIP co-founder Davis admitted to a certain impatience, “We concluded that it [a successful movement for reincorporation] wouldn’t happen if we went with the traditional approach. Instead, we decided on a storm-trooper approach.” He added that “We decided early on that we wouldn’t do any fund-raising. We spent our own money to avoid the charge of being beholden to outside interests. We used our own shoe-leather.”

Marie Kennedy and Chris Tilley

GRIP appealed for votes based on several rationales: reversing the decades of racist neglect experienced by Roxbury, controlling the impending flood of investment, and simply gaining accountable government. Although the reincorporation strategy clearly draws on black nationalism, GRIP often adopted moderate and even “all-American” rhetoric: GRIP’s main position paper begins, “Independence. It is as much a part of the Massachusetts spirit as it is the American one, if not more so.” GRIP’s literature emphasized, “Our community is integrated and our city will be, too.”

The second group of actors, the Boston white establishment, reacted with a self-righteous anger born of wounded liberalism. Boston’s leading daily newspaper, The Boston Globe, in a near-hysterical outpouring unprecedented since the 1970s racial violence associated with busing, published by our count at least twelve negative articles on Mandela in the three weeks preceding the election. The articles included two editorials and two signed columns, charging Mandela advocates with “deceitfulness,” “negativism, untruths, and confusion,” making “loud, angry charges,” being “hostile and divisive,” and “promot[ing] racial segregation.” The Globe, along with other opponents of Mandela, persisted in calling the reincorporation proposal “secession,” a term which GRIP rejected. The Phoenix, Boston’s leading alternative weekly, joined the Globe in deploring Mandela.

City officials were not to be outdone in the rush to denounce reincorporation for Roxbury. Rev. Bruce Wall, a critic of Mandela, told a Phoenix reporter that he had never seen Mayor Flynn so angry over an issue. A typical comment from Flynn was, “We should not slam the door on the future to make up for the problems of the past.” Flynn’s administration released a report that projected Mandela would run an annual deficit of over $135 million. In the month before the election, city workers were instructed to assume any inquiries about Roxbury (e.g., about assessments and land disposition) were coming from Mandela supporters and they were to withhold information until after the election. Flynn’s political organization was mobilized to stop Mandela at the polls; city workers were seen at many polling places during working hours.

The Globe and the Flynn administration made three main criticisms of GRIP’s separation proposal: it would pull Blacks out of Boston just at the time they were starting to make progress, it would be fiscally infeasible, and even if it was not adopted it served to inflame racial divisions. But why was the reaction of Boston’s powers-that-be so violent? We believe three motivations were involved behind the rhetoric.

First, city officials and the liberal corporate interests represented by the Globe have staked their political and development agenda on the image of a
Boston that has healed its racial divisions. That image is required to attract further development necessary to shore up Boston’s shaky fiscal base and to assure Flynn’s reelection. The Globe’s stake is also significant; for over thirty years the Globe has been connected with Boston-based financial and development interests concerned with re-building Boston’s economic power. Mandela threatened to shatter that image.

Second, they seek to block initiatives for grassroots community control over development—not only in Roxbury, but in communities across Boston—and to perpetuate the “democracy” that depends on the exclusion and demobilization of the many, or at best their subordinate participation in initiatives crafted by the reformers in City Hall. A vote for Mandela would have represented a public mandate for community control by a large fraction of Boston’s population.

Third, as pointed out by James Jennings of the University of Massachusetts, the white power-holders of Boston are doing their best to control black leadership in the city—to suppress insurgent black leaders, and to facilitate the emergence of “cooperative” black leaders. In particular, Mel King, who endorsed the referendum, remains a key figure for independent black and progressive politics in the city. And indeed, King was singled out for particularly vicious criticism in articles that predicted that support for Mandela would end his political career. Even after the defeat of the referendum, Flynn and the Globe blasted politicians who supported Mandela as well as, in the Globe’s words, “politicists who counseled ‘maybe’ on this important issue.”

Meanwhile, the black figures who voiced opposition to the referendum were catapulted to prominence by the media as “reasonable” spokespersons for the community. The Globe hailed the new black leadership that prefers “working quietly within the system, rather than confronting it.”

Leaders like Mel King and State Representative Byron Rushing, who had supported and in some cases helped to initiate earlier proposals for a separate Roxbury, quickly supported GRIP. Grassroots groups such as the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority hesitated longer, put off by GRIP’s single-minded and sometimes sectarian insistence that incorporation was the only way to solve Roxbury’s problems. But the ORNA, as well as progressive multiracial groups such as the Rainbow Coalition (a spin-off of Mel King’s 1983 mayoral campaign) eventually endorsed the Mandela referendum as one strategy for community control and self-determination.

The sharpness and implicit racism of the public attacks on Mandela by the Globe and the Flynn administration motivated many black activists and other progressives to defend the initiative even more strongly. Some other supporters faded under fire, however. Black state senatorial candidate Bill Owens—an interesting character who called for a charge of police lines at the giant 1974 March Against Racism in Boston but later joined the Republican Party because, he claimed, the Democrats were not responsive to blacks—told a Globe columnist that while he “philosophically” supported the reincorporation and would vote for it, “I’m not encouraging people to vote for it because I don’t have all the information.”

The One Boston Campaign, the organized group opposing Mandela, surfaced just about three weeks before the election, and was described by the Globe as “made up largely of minority clergymen and business and political leaders.” Its two most visible spokespeople were Bruce Wall and Charles Stith, two relatively young black ministers. Both had challenged Flynn on racial issues in the past, and ironically Wall had even joined the call for a Roxbury plebiscite on separation in 1985. Wall pronounced that “A number of us have planted the seeds of opportunity over the last seven years or so, and we intend to stay here,” but also acknowledged that he had in the past used the separation proposal as a source of leverage over Flynn. GRIP had botched the opportunities for such leverage, he argued, by taking itself too seriously.

Black business owners interviewed by the Globe complained that reincorporation had little to offer them. Richard Taylor, president of the Minority Developer’s Association, stated, “I don’t really believe much of the basis of the Mandela proposal is grounded in trying to solve business problems. I think its root is based in trying to gain political self-determination. . . . There has been no discussion on how it will affect the overall business climate.” Some businessmen stood to lose directly—for example, the minority developers who have a piece of Flynn’s $400 million deal. John Cruz, a minority contractor who is part of that deal, observed, “Roxbury only recently has begun to attract outside capital. . . . Secession would put it even farther behind.”

Although Wall and Stith echoed some of the Flynn administration claims of new opportunities for blacks in Boston, most black leaders who opposed Mandela took a more independent position. State Senator Royal Bolling, Sr., patriarch of Boston’s mainstream black political dynasty, supported the effort to put the question on the ballot, but opposed the content of the proposal, saying, “We have the swing vote to determine any election. So why give up the whole pie for just a slice?” Bolling’s son Bruce, currently City Council President, initially backed the referendum. His press statements showed him being slowly dragged into opposition.

The Outcome

If the advocates of Mandela saw incorporation as one tool in a broader strategy, why did the Globe and the City choose to cast the referendum as a single-issue vote? Mel King explained his view, “It is my
belief that they purposefully focused on racial
divisiveness and separation as a way of keeping people
from focusing on the real issue, and that is the
control of the land."

The Mandela referendum went down to electoral
defeat by 75 percent to 25 percent. What are we to
conclude from this lopsided margin?

The answer is not simple. For one thing, because
of the shape of Boston's voter districts, 65 percent of
those who voted on the Mandela question were
white, although 74 percent of those living in Mandela
are black, plus 10 percent Latino. But the margin of
defeat was similar in all the wards involved, those
with a mainly black population as well as mainly
white wards, so we don't believe that this was the key
factor.

To some extent, it is appropriate to compare the
referendum to the Puerto Rican vote for the pro-
independence parties (which is consistently small) or
the Quebecois plebiscite on independence (which
was defeated). Like these other groups, Roxbury
residents would take the risk of political and
economic retaliation and isolation if they actually
opted for separation. Dasody does not. The
dominant ideology constantly drives home the notion
that the oppressed populations are incapable of handling
their own affairs. On the face of it, the evidence
—poverty, unemployment, high crime—seems to
reinforce this notion. Thus, the 12,000 people who
voted yes on Mandela were taking a step that
required courage and consciousness.

It must be added that Mandela's advocates did not
succeed in building broad support for or even understand-
ing of the proposed change. GRIP started out
with a narrow agenda, campaigned for only a few
months, and did not build a grassroots campaign.
Groups like the GRNA came around late to support
for Mandela, and although they integrated incorporation into a broader vision, they had limited success in communicating that vision to the black community. Despite the hysteria of the Globe and Mayor
Flynn, the black community did not get terribly excited about the issue: voter turnout was low, and
there was nothing like the buzz of organizing and voter registration that accompanied Mel King's
mayoral campaign.

Nonetheless, the referendum had a concrete
political effect which constitutes a positive opening in
Boston politics. It highlighted continuing problems in
the black community, revealing that racism is more
than just racial epithets or physical attacks on
black. It placed the issue of community control—of
police, development, services—squarely on the agenda.
While the Globe and city government spokes-
persons harped on the racial divisiveness of Mandela,
very black leader who spoke on the issue—including
Ali and Stith—acknowledged the importance of in-
creasing community control.

Groups like the Greater Roxbury Neighbor-
hood Authority continue to organize for community con-
trol in a variety of arenas. In fact, the GRNA has
been active in pulling together a citywide Coalition
for Community Control, which links together
neighborhoods across the city in demanding greater
community authority over development. Boston's
powers-that-be tried to use the Mandela referendum
to discredit the GRNA and other black groups and
leaders that seek to pursue a community control
strategy. We believe that instead, the debate over in-
corporation is likely to give new visibility and a
political boost to that strategy.

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COMMUNITY & KINSHIP, HISTORY & CONTROL:
Two Community Activists Talk about Boston’s Future

Bob Terrell and Chuck Turner are activists with broad histories of political work focused on the empowerment of Boston’s black community. Both were founding members the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority (GRNA), and are in its current leadership. As grassroots organizers, they give us a concrete picture of how different segments of the black community perceive the city elites’ current assault on Roxbury and how they respond to the “full control” stance of both the GRNA and the Mandela initiative to make greater Roxbury a separate municipality. Bob’s current work is predated by years of tenant organizing in the South End, a multi-racial, working-class neighborhood that vigorously fought the Boston Redevelopment Authority’s displacement of the people in that area. Part of an older generation of political activists, Chuck is recognized as one of Boston’s most energetic and durable progressive leaders. He was a co-chairperson of the Black United Front, a coalition of civil rights groups founded in 1968, and he was the director of the Third World Clearinghouse, a community coalition founded in 1975 which was notably successful in uniting black, Latino, and Chinese labor groups. From each of them, we sought information on the community issues immediately at hand as well as some perspective on the national implications of these community-related struggles.

April 1979 memorial march for black women murdered in Boston. Ellen Shub photo.
Interview with Bob Terrell

RA: Describe the context in which recent black political efforts around land control have emerged.

Bob: Over the last two and a half years, development issues have been in the forefront of questions discussed in the black community. What is the future of the black community in terms of urban development? That is the primary issue right now. On all sides, Roxbury is surrounded by major development projects that have been pushed by the state. There are problems with speculation and arson in the private market. Boston's housing crisis is extremely acute in the black community. Put together, all of that means rising rents, sales prices, and major struggles with the city around disposition of public land. So development necessarily has become the issue that really drives the community.

After the 1983 mayoral election, a number of people felt that it was time for the community to better coordinate and get a handle on all of the development that was about to hit the community simultaneously. In January, 1985, a number of organizations met to try to assess this situation and try to figure out what we should do as a community. And everyone—from elected officials to heads of social service agencies to independent activists, people from CDCs (Community Development Corporations) and the neighborhood associations—everyone we could think of was invited to that meeting. We reviewed all the outstanding problems and all the outstanding projects and we pushed for the creation of a neighborhood authority that would try to obtain some political power and control over the development process.

RA: Did people have a sense of agreement at that early stage? How would you depict the spectrum of political perspectives involved?

Bob: Well, there was a great deal of struggle and tension within the group because people had different political perspectives as to how they saw urban development. There were some people who felt that those large-scale development projects would be a symbol of progress. It's very similar to what you have in Third World countries. Here it became apparent that the government and corporate elite were launching a major effort to redesign Roxbury, with millions of dollars in investments behind it, and there were some people who, because of their own perception of development or because of their class interests, saw that development proposal as beneficial to the neighborhood: it's progress. It's a change. It's going to mean something better for the community.

A number of us were much more critical. We saw other kinds of impacts and other kinds of effects on our neighborhood. For example, a couple of weeks before that historic meeting, it was leaked to the press by a city agency (which has since been phased out of existence) that the BRA had a $750 million investment plan for the Dudley Square area. Now, some people looked at that and said, "Finally the public sector has ceased its disinvestment policy in Roxbury. This is a major initiative by the Flynn administration. They're trying to do some good things for Roxbury and bring the neighborhood into the development boom that has hit Boston." That's how some people viewed it. They took the rhetoric of the Flynn administration seriously and they took the rhetoric of the BRA seriously. But there were those of us who looked at that $750 million investment and asked, "But what kind of investment? For what kind of land use?" So the struggle has always come down to: What kind of development do we favor? How do we want the land used? And who will have access to what's built on it? And what will be the impact on the rest of the community in terms of market forces, values and that sort of thing? That has been how the politics of the situation have broken down. It's not always a cut and dry thing of liberal vs. conservative or Left vs. Right. Because a lot of conservative folks will, on one issue, say, "Yes, we should revitalize the Dudley Square area." But when they think about what it's going to do to their tax bill, in terms of property taxes, then they say, "Well, wait a minute, speculative investment may cause me some long-range problems in another kind of way."

RA: Conservative folks? You mean homeowners?

Bob: No, just people whose politics are (I hate to use Left/Right) mainstream. In the black context, your assumptions about who will oppose radical initiatives around land control can be misfounded. Folks who are not terribly opposed to the system as it is will become quite critical of the city's development proposals because of how it might affect them directly. Take the case of black private developers from the neighborhood. The have a very specific set of interests and because of the racism in the city of Boston, they are confined, pretty much, to developing within the community. And they have a real problem typical of groups in Third World countries who occupy a similar position in that class structure: They
want to make money. They want to be able to accumulate enough capital to do the kinds of projects that will allow them to compete with their white counterparts. But they're being forced to do that in a community that can't sustain what it is they want to do. So, on the one hand, we're always saying to them, "We want affordable housing built." And on the other hand, the public sector has cut back its commitment to affordable housing.

Now, where the black developers could make a real killing and make a lot of profit is to build stuff downtown. But the power structure until very recently has kept black developers out of downtown. So they're in a real bind. And our constant pitch to them has been, "Look, if you build affordable housing for us in the community, we'll support your getting the subsidies and the resources and the linkage funds and whatever else you need to build. And if you build affordable housing for us, we'll support your right to develop downtown." That's always been our pitch to private people.

In the last two and a half years we have established contact with a number of other organizations, and we also have a public process which we call the "town meeting" process, where we invite people from the community. And basically, we take our political direction from what people say at that meeting. I mean, if the community is violently opposed to something we want to do, then we don't do it. Most of the people from the GRNA live in the neighborhood and they've got connections with their neighborhood association, their church, the block club, or whatever, and wherever we've gone and had a chance to talk to people one-on-one or in small groups or in neighborhood associations. Wherever the GRNA has had a chance to make that kind of contact, we've found that people are very suspicious. When they hear about major investment coming, when the public sector announces that they are going to do something for the black community, right away people are suspicious. Because we know these improvements are not for us. We know that the grand scheme over time is to move everyone out of here, get us off the land because the land has become valuable. About two years ago, the Globe ran an article saying Roxbury is a real estate gold mine. And right after that there was the beginning of mounting speculation and arson in the neighborhood. So people understand, intuitively and from lessons of the past. For example, I am from the South End originally, and we were pushed out of the South End by urban renewal. Many people of my generation in the black community look at the whole development process with the earlier experience of being traumatically dislocated by it.

RA: It seems you are highlighting differences not
around visions of development, but rather around tactics and strategies.

Bob: Just about everyone we've come in contact with is opposed to the dismantling of the community by displacement. But there are different strategies and tactics put forward as to how to combat that. The GRNA believes that we need a democratically-elected neighborhood authority or neighborhood council that is given or somehow obtains the political and legal authority to control all the development in this area. Now, whether that means a contractual agreement with the city or the state, whether that means the BRA ceding that authority to us, whether that means getting it by way of state legislation or city ordinance (which we're doing), or through a lawsuit (which we're doing), or by any combination of those mechanisms, what we want is such broad and mass support, politically, at the grassroots level that a developer or a public agency simply cannot enter the community without coming to us first. And slowly, a lot of small developers are beginning to approach the GRNA and the PAC (which is something the GRNA created in response to a city initiative and is a recognized body now, not just by the community but by the city on some levels). If we have enough mass support—which is our objective in 1987, to expand and build a real mass base—then they can't just come in here and ignore us because we can raise the cost of doing business to such a level that a developer will say it's not a good business climate. We can force them to negotiate. Now in many parts of Roxbury, a developer can't just come into a neighborhood and start throwing up a building. They've got to deal with the Joint Development Committee in Highland Park, or the Garrison Trotter Neighborhood Association, or whatever the local group is. And what the GRNA is saying is we need to coordinate all of that so that whether it's a public or private initiative, whether it's a major public sector investment or major investment of private capital into the neighborhood, they can't just walk in. Because we've got too much political clout and we can make it too difficult for them to do business. So they have to negotiate.

RA: Has the GRNA's focus on movement-building and full control encountered opposition from some established black leaders who made their way in an earlier political framework and who have played more accommodationist roles?

Bob: I think the differences of opinion that we've had with other sections of the black community have been over the issue of whether we should control development, as opposed to being in an advisory capacity. Some people say, "Look, the best you're going to get is the Mayor and the state to recognize you as a legitimate body of advisors. Our position is, 1) that's not good enough; and 2) as citizens, we can always give advice to the government. I mean you can do that through your elected officials. You can write letters, you can have meetings, and all that. We're talking about actual power and control over development. And a lot of folks have a problem with that. They think it's unrealistic.

RA: Does it threaten their power?

Bob: In some cases it would. In fact, in some cases, the fact that we're struggling for it in and of itself is a threat to them, but it shouldn't be. If I were a member of the city council, if I were a state representative or a state senator, I would welcome the GRNA. I mean, I would have all the press conferences in my office. I would let them use my office because, as far as I'm concerned, in American society a black leader has nothing to lose by taking a strong nationalist position. They have nothing to lose at least in terms of their relationship to the black community. For example, during GRNA's outreach, I never have encountered a group of working-class black folks who have said to us point blank, "What you are doing doesn't make sense." This does not mean there is a simple forward push from the community. There is an historical dynamic of its own and it takes a while to get to a certain point where people are ready to go onto another phase. But GRNA and other groups are
building on the political culture and political history that was in the neighborhood. Whenever we have town meetings, we average 200 to 250 people; we’ve had as many as 500 or 600 at the town meeting. And whenever we put forward what to some people are extremely radical positions, they’ve been adopted.

RA: Like...

Bob: Like suing the city, or like asking for, or trying to negotiate for, essentially all the powers that the BRA has. Now, for some people that is a radical proposition, because we would then have private citizens out of the black community controlling everything that’s done in City Council Districts 4 and 7—which is roughly 25 percent of the city. People in the black community don’t have any problem with that. And the few black leaders who do have a problem with that have now been positioned in such a way that they cannot publicly oppose it because the sentiment of the community is, “We have to protect ourselves, and the best way to do that is to have power and authority over all development, over all planning activities, over all zoning activities. We no longer want the bureaucracy downtown making decisions for us. We want to make those decisions. Again, a national sentiment: it’s very old in the black community. That’s why Mandela was given a hearing.

RA: Does the nationalist sentiment conflict with another dimension of GRNA’s politics—a push for inclusiveness? How do people relate to your reaching out to different communities of color and new immigrant populations?

Bob: Historically, black folks have always been less antagonistic to the presence of immigrants and people from other countries coming into their neighborhoods and settling. We’ve always been far more tolerant than any other community you could name, in this city or any other city. We’re very tolerant, but oftentimes, a lot of immigrants who come here don’t want to associate with black folks because blacks are identified as being at the bottom of the American totem pole. They will frequently shy away from us, because they do not believe that we have anything to say to them that makes any sense or is helpful to them. I mean, if you come into a new city and you want to talk to some folks who know their way around and have the power to do something for you, and you don’t perceive black folks in that way, then there’s a problem. Now, some do. There are some Cape Verdeans and some folks from the islands who immediately embrace the black community because of their own sensibilities or their own attitudes or their own politics. Sometimes the job they have will bring them into contact with the black community. For example, the hotel workers union has a lot of black folks like Cape Verdeans or Hispanics and they’re molded into a strong political force that has really shaken up the hotel industry in this town.

RA: How do you assess the work done to coordinate diverse peoples behind a radical politics of land control?

Bob: I think models are being developed around coalescing different cultural groups. The Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative has done a good job in its community. It’s very diverse. There are Cape Verdeans, Haitians, Afro-Americans, and a few whites living in the area and they’ve done a pretty good job at putting folks together. And I think that they’ve been successful at doing it because they’ve respected the independence of everybody’s culture;
they even have a system of simultaneous translation in their meetings. I refer to them as a mini-United Nations.

RA: What has been critical in bringing groups together in such a unified fashion?

Bob: Again, I think there’s a lot of dialogue among a certain portion of the leadership (my age and younger). What we now have to do is jointly build our mass bases and we somehow or other have more communication at that grassroots level. Because that’s where the real antagonism is. It’s the perception some blacks have of Hispanics and some Hispanics have of blacks and it’s at the grassroots level that folks are going to have come together and share some ideas. Because they have exactly the same situation. If we get this place, they’re also going to get this place. And this is a real challenge. Boston is not like New York City, where the Latinos and black communities intermingle and overlap on several levels. Boston has always been very turf-oriented. Even so, a key factor in the success of organizing has been that there is a community of activists with a history of working together and defining the issues broadly.

RA: Do people come out of the same experiences?

Bob: Not always. In the Hispanic community, there are a lot of folks who come out of the struggle for independence in Puerto Rico—the struggle against U.S. imperialism. So when they come to this country, a lot of them feel that they’re only here temporarily. The real struggle is in Puerto Rico. Then there was a shift in the seventies, when people said, “No, we’re becoming part of the American working class and we have subtle communities in New York or Boston or wherever and we’re going to be here for a while and we’re going to dig in and begin to organize. A lot of those folks and a lot of black activists were able to come together and talk. I remember in the late seventies, in particular, I knew all the Hispanic activists in my neighborhood. You know, we all hung out and drank and partied and talked politics and did work collectively. But that is not the mode of communication between our communities. In fact, one reason why Mandela failed is that blacks didn’t do proper outreach in the Hispanic community. Nobody really explained what the proposition was all about.

RA: Is there anything else you would add that informs the organizing you do?

Bob: Intellectually, there are some things happening in the black community that are very, very interesting. All around the country, there’s a real concern about the cultural attack that’s happening against black folks. I was in Cincinnati in November; there was a conference there on the black family with folks from all over the country. The black social workers convention is going to be here in Boston emphasizing the same concern: the black family and the whole cultural process. We went through the seventies and we went through the eighties; we went through Buppie-ism and Yuppie-ism and integration and all that sort of stuff—and now people are saying, “Given the fact that on several levels America is falling apart culturally, what are we as black folks going to do? What is our response to the industrial system falling apart all around us?”
There's been several levels of response. One is a cultural renaissance: sharing our history with the young people and pushing to investigate (as a number of black intellectuals are doing now), ancient African traditions. Going back and looking at ancient African societies and rediscovering both our scientific and technological past has real implications for development. When you do that, when you begin to look at ancient Egypt and Ethiopia and the Sudan and you look at all the great empires of western Africa, you begin to develop a perception of development that is non-western. You begin to understand that what took place in the West was very particular to the West. And that many of the theoretical conceptions that have come out of that experience, both bourgeois and Marxist, are Euro-centric. And so there's an interesting synthesis. The whole appropriate technology movement and a lot of new ideas around development are now linking up with the experience and the value system of our ancient African past. And this sort of fulfills a prophecy that most of our major black historians have talked about since the nineteenth century: that the liberation of black folks in this country is very much connected to our understanding of our African past. The trajectory that black folks were taking, which was disrupted by slavery, is now being rediscovered.

RA: How does your notion of community development connect with definitions of the family that come out of the black experience, rather than white middle-class models? This seems pressing since the white establishment has aggressively revived the Moynihan Report and the view that the collapse of "the traditional nuclear family" is key to all that hurts blacks.

Bob: There's a real need in the black community to get away from this notion of the nuclear family. We have to get back to our cultural tradition of the extended family. And that's going to have a major impact on how we redevelop the community: housing patterns, working at home, job patterns. Everything gets shifted around when we return to an extended family network. It has major implications for urban development.

RA: What ideas do you have about that?

Bob: Well, more work should be provided for people in their neighborhoods. Housing should be redesigned. Urban areas are much too congested; we should push out and use more land. There should be a higher ratio of land to people. Then you would be able to accommodate new designs for housing that would accommodate large extended families.

Now, I was lucky in the South End. My immediate family lived in one house; my cousins rented an apartment right next door; and my other cousins owned a house further down the block. So we were able to keep our family network together. Folks who come from the Caribbean sometimes have problems because they're used to living together in extended families. And you hear all these comments like, "How could all these folks want to live in the same building or the same house or the same apartment?" What they're doing is cultural. They're trying to maintain their extended family because they understand that if they get all broken up, they're going to have serious problems living in America.

RA: Let's turn to Mandela—the conception and the campaign itself. How did you and GRNA folks view it?
Bob: Well, first, the idea of Roxbury as a separate municipality actually goes back to the seventies. But it wasn't until 1985 that the folks who founded GRIP tried to give it some organizational life. The reason that a lot of people were interested in Mandela was because it was another strategy for controlling land. It was another way of instituting a community control process.

The choice of the name, Mandela, was made by the people in GRIP for their own political reasons; they wanted to make a link to the South African struggle; they were employing an internationalist rationale that is consistent with earlier Afro-American nationalist traditions. I understand their reasoning, but I would have preferred another process for choosing a name; I would have let the folks in the neighborhood do it.

At first, those of us who were in the PAC or the GRNA, the folks who had done that body of work, for a long time took no position on municipal incorporation, but once Mandela got on the ballot, it was clear it was going to be a community-wide issue and we supported putting it on the ballot so folks could vote it up or vote it down democratically. But we also felt that we wanted it to pass for a simple reason: We felt it was important to keep the issue of land control alive. And this was another tactical option that the community could use to its advantage. And also, the first step would be a feasibility study. A feasibility study would expose the real conditions in the community and this would be an invaluable resource for organizing. This is the reason the city and state opposed it. Remember, it was a non-binding referendum. The state legislature wouldn't be called upon to do anything; it simply instructed our elected representatives to convey to the legislature our opinion on the subject. That's all it did. But why did Ray Flynn put over 300 city workers on the street and hire a special consultant to raise funds to defeat it? And why did Boston's corporate elite and its political arm, the Vault, put up money to defeat it? The real opposition was not indigenous; it was forged by a few individuals who were funded from outside.

RA: Even someone like the Reverend Stith was just a front for Flynn?

Bob: Well, let's just say that Reverend Stith's political position perfectly coincided with Ray Flynn's political position. Add to that the fact that the funding for his Campaign for One Boston came from the Vault and the fundraiser that Ray Flynn hired privately to raise money to defeat the question went to the Campaign for One Boston to finance their operation. Given all that, I'll let your readers draw their own conclusions.

RA: You've suggested how you, and others from the GRNA, viewed the benefits of the Mandela campaign. Were there also reservations?

Bob: The GRNA decided that a struggle to establish Roxbury as an independent city should be viewed as a positive tactical option, if nothing else, to pressure the city and state into acceding to the community's demands regarding development. But we also have to look at the issue of whether or not Roxbury, as a separate municipality, would have a relationship to the state structure similar to the one it now does. There are basically five different charters that a town or city can choose from that would affect how they organize their town or city government. And all of them are based on the state constitution so none of them are really going to structure in democratic control. I've always maintained that there would still need to be a neighborhood authority even in the new municipality.

RA: Sort of like a union still needs a radical caucus.

Bob: That's right.

RA: What about differences between tactics inherent in Mandela, as compared to the GRNA? The Mandela campaign was essentially electoral politics, distinct from the grassroots movement-building approach cultivated in GRNA. Aren't there tensions between the two? Must one choose one over the other, or can you use both? This question touches not just on Boston, but on areas elsewhere in the nation.

Bob: I always think of electoral politics as a tactic in a larger strategy. And I think, like any other tactic, you should figure out how much time and energy you want to put into that to get the gains you want. But I think it's a tactic. It certainly isn't the only one. I think that there are probably twenty-five others we should investigate and utilize. So the GRNA and Mandela can and do mesh.

You see, black folks can't afford to back themselves into an ideological corner and then, from that corner, be limited in what they can do tactically. I think they have to move out into the middle of the room and use any and all tactics: from public actions to organizing unions for folks that are non-unionized,
from running progressive or radical candidates for office to organizing alternative institutions—whether it's a food co-op or a school or a housing cooperative. We have to use all of those strategies across the board. We have to not only march on city hall but we have to sue the city as well. We should use every single tactic we can think of to move our issues forward. I don't think we should back off from anything. Everything that mobilizes and brings people out is an advantage to all of us. I don't care who does it. It doesn't matter if people are concerned about picking up leaves in Franklin Park and they turn out 5,000 people. The idea is, the more people, the better.

But it's also a matter of how you perceive organization. We may have only 100 people that are members of the GRNA, but if 80 percent of the neighborhood believes in what we believe, they don't need to be members. They don't need to come to all the meetings. All we need to know is that the majority of the neighborhood backs what we're doing. That's all we need to know.

RA: And the more tactics you've got...

Bob: ...the more people will come out.

RA: Do the lessons you're learning here in Boston help to deepen and broaden the struggle nationally? Does it help to define a model?

Bob: I think what the GRNA is doing, what Mandela was doing, what the Initiative is doing, what a number of groups in Roxbury are doing definitely have direct applicability in other urban areas. If you go to Chicago, New York, or Philadelphia, there are similar problems. And there are areas of Harlem, areas in D.C., areas in Detroit with the Renaissance program, and areas in San Francisco where black populations are threatened with displacement. San Francisco, by the way, already constitutes a case where a city suffered a net loss of its black population directly due to displacement, office tower development, the encroachment of downtown on neighborhoods, etc. It's the same thing that we see in Boston. So I think that, although the models may change and how people organize to deal with the crisis might shift, what we're doing here can certainly be duplicated, amended, changed, and improved upon in other parts of the country. The challenge is the same. The black community's going to have this challenge no matter where we are.

RA: So you think that development is really the key issue?

Bob: No question that, for us, development is going to be the key question for the remainder of the eighties and for the balance of the twentieth century.
Interview with Chuck Turner

RA: How would you compare the current political struggle for land control with earlier efforts in the sixties and seventies?

Chuck: In the two preceding decades, political groups came out with financial strategies that focused on affordable rent. Using hindsight, we can see that their target was not only too narrow, but would eventually become, fifteen to twenty years later, economically obsolete. So in this round of discussions, people are talking about equity ownership and cooperative housing—strategies that allow people who live here not just to be renters, but to have authority over their situation. This shift, by the way, does not represent an increase in militancy over the past. During the two preceding decades, organizing was very focused on increasing access to power and control; but today there is more sophistication in terms of what strategies can, in fact, lead to control. So the focus is currently on equity housing as opposed to rental and on having clear authority over how decisions are made, rather than just being a participant in an advisory way.

I’d like to make another contrast with the political environment today and that of the sixties. Then, there was a strong nationalist perspective that said that we have to create our own economic bases of power and support. It was a minority viewpoint, but it was heard and respected. At that time, the majority of folks in the black and Hispanic communities in Boston were trying to push into the established economic system. Organizations and individuals were focusing on how to get into the police and fire departments, how to gain city jobs, how to get a foot into the private sector. Now, two decades later, there is a lot of skepticism about the ability to move into the overall commercial economy and experience any success there. People realize that even if they can get jobs—because of racist attitudes, it’s generally as laborers, clerks, even lower-level administrators—they still have little chance at gaining a level of income that’s going to enable them to build a life for themselves.

RA: In 1984, after a series of meetings, GRNA formed as the community’s response to the current development crisis. Looking back, have there been major surprises in how events unfolded?

Chuck: First, the city hasn’t pushed the land disposition as strongly as we thought initially. Despite

from Movement Toward a New America, Mitchell Goodman, ed.

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leaks of grand designs, the BRA has wound up focusing on only one parcel, Parcel 18, the most highly-valued piece of community land. Even on that, they have not been able to keep pace with their rhetoric of 1985. And that’s good; it’s working to the advantage of the community. The fear was that they would try to push much more quickly to do dispositions. And I imagine that there’s been a desire to do that. But the opposition has made that much more difficult.

Second, for me personally, it’s unusual that the black churches haven’t gotten involved as much as I would have expected. I’m not sure of all the reasons why, but I would have imagined that, from the standpoint of the maintenance of the congregation, and their own situation, it would have made a lot of sense for the churches to play a very active role in the dialogue about what would happen. While there have been some churches who have gotten involved, in general the churches haven’t tried to exercise as active a role as I would have expected.

Finally, although I wouldn’t characterize it as a surprise, it is encouraging that during the last several years, the base of support for full control over development has maintained itself. While some organizations are not as strongly behind it as others, there has been an enduring core of adherents for the idea that the community should empower itself.

RA: Let’s shift to Mandela. How would you describe people’s relationship to the concept? Also, how do you make sense of how little support it received in the voting booths?

Chuck: I think everybody acknowledges that fundamental power over how decisions are made is the most effective way for the community to gain its objectives. Even conservatives (those who represent business interests and the more private development concerns) take the position that community authority would bring rewards. What holds people back from actually voting for Mandela — and this is why the vote was 75 percent opposed and only 25 percent in favor — is the fact that people don’t see a feasible economic strategy that would go along with the political power.

RA: What about the process? Did it move too fast for the community? Some black activists were raising
political questions about the Mandela campaign—
too top-down and/or mystifying, perhaps, or class
differences within the black community?

Chuck: In my view, the main difficulty was the lack
of an economic analysis, of a clear perspective on how
the operation of Mandela would affect people’s lives.
If that had been there, some of the political process
issues wouldn’t have been raised as much. For
example, one of the key political concerns that was
raised was the lack of an educational process for the
community. When people talked about that, they
were talking about the problem of economics and
whether or not there would be enough discussion to
really help people understand. Of course, there were
substantive political questions, like: Who would
make moves for power? Who would run for mayor?
Who would be the council people? Even so, people
feel a certain amount of ease around the idea of a
council that came completely out of this community,
but they get anxious wondering how much money
there would be for police, fire, public works, and
other important services. The lack of an economic
analysis reflected negatively on the political debate
and was decisive in Mandela’s rejection.

The absence of a strong economic analysis
stymied people’s ability to be behind Mandela on a
very individual level. For example, if I’m a twenty-
three year old who wants to raise a family in Roxbury
and wants to have an income of at least $15,000 a
year as a way of moving forward, how do I handle my
economic situation? Mandela didn’t speak to that.
(Of course, “One Boston” didn’t, either.) And then
there’s the larger question that puzzled individuals—if
we’re all together, how do we provide money for city
services? Mandela hadn’t laid that out. The Mayor
also contributed to the confusion by claiming that we
would only be able to raise $350 million a year but
would need $450 million. The people in Roxbury
who say that the way to subsist is to integrate
ourselves into the fabric of the larger system—around
development issues—by and large, they have limited
room to maneuver.

RA: Do you think the issues and modes of struggle
around development undertaken in Boston are rele-
vant nationally?

Chuck: Sure. Look at Detroit. Obviously the eco-

nomic infrastructure there can’t or is unwilling to
support the people who are there. In many ways,
people of color on the East Coast are facing problems

that people of color and white people are facing in the
industrial part of the country as the economy
switches. Here, because you have a white, Yuppie
population that’s moving into the city, into a lot of
commercial jobs, there is a sense of buoyancy in the
economy, a sense that things are moving forward.
Blacks and Hispanics, especially the young, become
more of a backwater.

When you go out to the Midwest, you realize
that there the whole economy is the backwater to the
commercial development that you see on the East and
West coasts, and there’s lots of consternation and
unclear, because you can’t see how the economic
base can provide a framework for growth and
survival. So what we are dealing with here—around
development—certainly connects with other arenas
nationally.

RA: Speaking of young people, what role do they
play in community organizing? Are they more
susceptible to despair or cynicism?

Chuck: Our youth look out into a world where there
are no answers that are worth anything; that is, a kid
coming out of high school, thinking about what to do
and how to move, can find it very depressing. The city
is very glamorous; it emphasizes style, form and
status—all wrapped up in a financial and materialistic
framework. Yet the reality is that there’s no way
young black people can rationally see themselves as
part of it. At the same time, these young blacks and
Hispanics and Asians, who are coming up and trying
to get into that world, are bumping up against older
people of color who are out there trying to move in
and move forward. That competition brings on even
greater alienation and desolation.
I think that young people are finding a variety of ways to deal with the pain—from drugs, sex, involvement in a very fast life. They are looking for a sense of aliveness in this situation that the dream of the future does not provide. In past times in the black community, as well as the white community, there were certain dreams—dreams that didn’t work for all of our young, but at least there was a vision for the future. Personal discipline was a value because it supposedly allowed you to go through this series of steps that would in fact have you emerge with family and living place and some sense of stability. I think that’s gone. If you go to Detroit, and see how 250 to 300 youths are being shot by other youths every year, that should tell you something about the anger and despair and the lack of any vision that engages young black men and women.

There isn’t a sense of community; there isn’t an assurance that we are engaged in a process of developing this community that will enable us all to be stronger and feel more vibrancy. While that was there in the sixties, as the base of moving forward, I think that that’s no longer there as a bridge between the various generations. And that’s the most difficult problem that we face. This sense of alienation among young people is confronting all the neighborhoods, but in black and Hispanic neighborhoods where there’s this history of being kept out, it’s even more acute than it is in South Boston or Charlestown or East Boston, where at least the mythology that they can still make it in is there. Here, we don’t have that mythology, so our kids are looking at the reality, which working-class kids throughout the city are eventually going to have to face.

RA: What do you think is going to help engage young people? Is it cultural stuff, political efforts? Are Jackson’s campaigns making a difference?

Chuck: Well, I’d say that Jesse is the only politician on the national level that is even scratching at the surface of the problem. And I think he’s emotionally tuned into it. His statement on Howard Beach was a clear indication that he really understands, on an intellectual and emotional level, the nature of the dilemma of capitalism: to be trite, that white ghettos are jammed in the same way that black and Hispanic ghettos are jammed, given their similar relationship to industry and capitalism’s manipulations. He understands that. However, the Democratic Party shows no capacity to either understand or deal with the despair that is spreading through the country and its youth.

Farrakhan, I think, also appreciates the dilemma at a much broader conceptual level. He understands the dilemma of the country and the lack of moral values, but it’s hard for him to articulate a vision of how to move from the current lack of integrity toward a sense of wholeness. So he’s like a prophet, and Jesse is like a radical in the Roman Senate, and eventually I think Jesse will walk out and try to fuse moral and political action. But right now, it’s depressing. Youth are left out there with no counter-perspective to materialism. If materialism is the sole goal of the society it means that without money, you have to prey on each other. So we’re in a tough situation.

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Chuck Turner is director of the Center for Community Action and vice-chairperson of the Greater Roxbury Neighborhood Authority.

Diane Lorello, Ken Schlosser, and Ann Withorn conducted these interviews.

“Featuring ‘Conflict, Fear, and Security in the Nuclear Age’—The Challenge of the Feminist Peace Movement in Italy by Elisabetta Addis and Nicoletta Tiliacox, and, Her Story of War: Demilitarizing Literature and Literary Studies by Lynn Hanley; On the German Question: Left, Right and the Politics of National Identity by Hans-Georg Betz; US Media and the ‘Election Coup’ In the Philippines by Frank Brodhead; Letter from Berlin; Tribute to Genet.
SEARCHING FOR 'COMMON GROUND':
A Review Essay

James Green

*Common Ground*, the Pulitzer-prize winning book by J. Anthony Lukas about three Boston families during the desegregation crisis, has received widespread praise and intensive publicity, and despite its imposing length of over 600 pages the book has become a best-seller. Reviewers liked it for telling the “compelling” stories of city families in turmoil and for describing the “gritty” reality of race and class conflict. Like other books in the new non-fiction genre, this work provided real-life stories as sensational and gripping as fiction. “This is the riveting stuff of genuine tragedy. . .” wrote Boston novelist George Higgins for *Newsday*, “. . . a true story vastly broader in scope than the nonfiction novels of Truman Capote and Norman Mailer.” Perfect material for a television “docudrama,” which is what will become of *Common Ground* next T.V. season, according to plans announced by Lorimar Productions, who bring us that long-running saga of corporate greed and family hate, “Dallas.”

*Common Ground* has all the ingredients of a great tragic novel, though Lukas swears “Nothing has been disguised or embellished.” Indeed, many reviews, like the one in the *L.A. Times*, tout is as “A book that pulls the reader along like fiction,” but with “a careful, dispassionate reconstruction of events. . .”. It is, said *Time*, “a model of thoroughness
and balance.” Lukas combines, according to the Baltimore Sun, “the narrative skill of a novelist and the breadth of view of a social historian to tell this story.”

The book describes three very different families experiencing this “turbulent decade” in Boston race relations: the Divers, a liberal Yuppie family who become “urban homesteaders” in Boston’s South End; the Twymons, a female-headed black family who live in a nearby housing project; and the Irish working-class McGoff family of Charlestown. The McGoffs, as the Twymons, are a female-headed, project family in a poor Boston neighborhood, suggesting the “common ground” working-class families of both races occupied in Boston during the 1970s.

Lukas could not have picked a theme more tragic than the nation’s flawed efforts to achieve racial equality. In a slightly more subtle way, Common Ground reflects another dilemma, rarely treated with any literary power: the failure of liberal social policy and, more generally, the limits of the liberal vision of racial equality within a class-structured capitalist society.

Common Ground is compelling and dramatic. Like many people, I found reading the book fascinating and profoundly troubling. Lukas exposes the pain and agony of race, class and, indirectly, sexist oppression in the city by listening carefully to his subjects and helping them tell their stories (or at least aspects of their stories).

Liberal critics and some on the Left praised the book for offering a “class analysis” of busing, which took some of the social blame for white resistance off the shoulders of ethnic working-class neighborhoods, and placed it on those of suburban decision-makers and power brokers who lived outside the city and did not have to share what Lukas called the “burden of desegregation.” Some liberals of the populist stripe, like those who campaigned for Boston’s current Mayor Ray Flynn (who had been a leader of the South Boston anti-busing movement), found support for their view that social policies attacking racism are divisive and that the solutions to racial inequality are economic. Disillusioned liberals and some conservatives liked the book for criticizing the problem of policy-making by court decree and for questioning the social costs and educational outcomes of desegregation in Boston.

Common Ground has been praised and presented not only as “the Boston book” but the best book about the modern urban crisis
and the failure of liberal social policy. “The most important book on an American city that has ever been written,” declared the New England Monthly. It is particularly appealing to many liberals who are disillusioned with social policies directed at racism and who are guilty about the blame working-class whites have received for opposing these policies. As one reviewer remarked, the book implies that attempts to solve the race question should be deferred until the class problem is addressed. In this way, Common Ground can be read as a class-conscious book.9

Black reviewers and other critics have taken Lukas to task for implying that class is more important than race, for ignoring the black movement for civil rights and desegregation, for unfairly judging the results of busing, for soft-peddling white racism by drawing sympathetic portraits of white resistance leaders and minimizing the racist violence they provoked or condoned.

In numerous forums around Boston, Lukas attempted to answer his critics. He even said that he was not even writing a book about desegregation or racism, that he was just trying to give a journalist’s inside view of what life was like for three families in the midst of urban crises. Some of this is an understandable writer’s defense: don’t attack me for the book I didn’t write. But much of what Lukas said was revealing, raising questions about his motivation and orientation.

In this review I hope to develop some of the points critics have made and provide an analysis of why the book is being read as it is. What meanings, explicit or hidden, does the author provide about busing and desegregation, and about racism and class conflict? What are the implications of the book for our understanding of race and class antagonism, for desegregation policy and for anti-racist work?

I want to examine four meanings that reviewers and others have derived from reading Common Ground and explore their political implications. Whether Lukas intended to give those meanings or not is beside the point, though I will try to show where the author gives historical and social meaning to his descriptions of three families “caught in a turbulent decade...”. The four central social and political meanings the book’s narrative conveys are:

First, Common Ground suggests that the problems desegregation encountered resulted mainly from poor decision-making by Judge Arthur Garrity and lack of leadership from the Church, the Mayor and other politicians. The focus remains on white leaders because the crisis over busing was significantly, if not primarily, a “family feud” between the Irish liberal policymakers and politicians and the “little people” who felt betrayed. In other words, the development of the struggle over desegregation is seen as much in terms of a conflict between white liberals and white inner-city working-class people as it is between a determined black civil rights movement (and its allies) and the equally well-organized white resistance. Hence there is little history of black Boston as a whole. Black family history is substituted for black social and political history.

Second, the book presents the struggle over busing not only, or even primarily, as a racial conflict between blacks and whites but mainly as a class conflict between the poor white Irish and the liberal suburban elites (represented by the Boston Globe's editors, and by “two toilet Irish” like Judge Garrity and apostate politicians like Sen. Edward Kennedy). In other words, class (which Lukas calls a “dirty secret” in American life) played a major role in the conflict. Lukas does not say class was more important than race, but he says something equally disturbing: that “class resentment did as much as anything [read: including racism] to feed the fires of [read: white] resistance in inner city neighborhoods.” This emphasis on the class aspects of the white resistance serves to minimize the significance of organized white racism. Indeed, Lukas is impressed not only by the class resentment of the white opposition but by its attachment to community and neighborhood, without racist connotations.

Third, Common Ground implies that since the white resistance and its leaders were class conscious, they would have offered less violent opposition if the suburbs had also been desegregated through a metropolitan busing plan. Thus, the middle- and upper-class towns would have shared the “burden of desegregation,” reducing inner-city white class resent-
ment and violent resistance.

Fourth, the book raises serious doubts about busing. Because it aroused so much class and race resentment, created such a violent response, provoked white flight and caused chaos in the schools, Lukas doubts the value of desegregation as an educational and social policy. In the last three pages of the book he presents Colin Diver’s doubts about legal solutions to problems of social inequality. Indeed, by 1976, says Lukas, “the goal of effective school desegregation had been substantially undercut by the steady drain of white students.” (Lukas, pp. 648-650) The book ends with a back and forth academic debate about the educational value of desegregation based on the first two years of busing. Though the conclusion leaves us with a typical journalist’s “on the one hand, on the other hand,” the entire interpretive weight of the book leads the reader to question the wisdom and value of the court order.º

**The Decision-Makers**

*Common Ground* features portraits of five white leaders: Mayor Kevin White, Judge W. Arthur Garrity (who wrote the busing order), the anti-busing City Councilor, Louise Day Hicks, Humberto Cardinal Medeiros and *Boston Globe* editor Thomas Winship. Lukas not only leaves out the black leaders who shaped the desegregation struggle, the court order and the community response, he misses as well the significance of black history. The book begins and ends with the soul-searching of Colin Diver, the white liberal lawyer. Lukas’ concerns are apparently enunciated by Diver. They literally frame the book.

When asked at a community forum why he offered five portraits of white leaders involved in desegregation and not one black, Lukas said he supposed he should have had a black but was unable to find any one person who stood out like the white figures he profiles and analyzes.

This not only betrays a journalist’s bias for a certain kind of biography, but reveals a bias against black leadership and a fundamental misconception about what led to the confrontation over busing. None of these white personalities had anything to do with the social changes that forced Judge Garrity to make the decision; the civil rights movement and its leaders did, but apparently, none of them were as as a judge or as agonized by indecision as the people Lukas highlights. Except for Hicks, they were all classic ambivalent liberals.

Lukas’ incisive legal history of desegregation in his chapter “The Judge” ignores the pressure the civil rights movement put on the courts and reveals an elitist bias in the sources. (Lukas, pp. 644-50) In Common Ground, the debate over desegregation is conducted largely among Harvard social scientists; it is a dialogue between white liberals and neo-liberals, not a dialogue within the black community where there was an important discussion over community-controlled schools. While Garrity and the others become central figures in the struggle, important black leaders like Tom Atkins, Ruth Batson, Ellen Jackson, Mel King, and Paul Parks are ignored. The only references to King refer to white middle-class people’s feeling that King made them nervous. (Many whites found him “an unnerving figure,” Lukas, p. 304.) Louise Day Hicks is taken very seriously and exonerated of charges of racism; she was really an opportunist “who didn’t really have anything against black people.” Mel King is, instead, by implication, guilty of frightening white people by being too militant on the issue of racism.

Lukas also refuses to take seriously the community control movement which had been a crucial part of the desegregation movement in Boston. Lukas dismisses it, saying “that most blacks had little faith in community control,” while the history of the desegregation struggle suggests something very different. He ignores the attempt made by Mel King and other black legislators to work out a compromise with white legislators like Billy Bulger, of South Boston, that would have allowed both for black and white community control. Ironically, Lukas, who favors a metropolitan busing plan over the Garrity order, ignores the significance of Operation Exodus (to bus black students to better white city schools) and METCO (the voluntary plan to bus black city students to suburban high schools), which Mel King calls “community controlled busing.” Again the contrast is stark. The conclusion is inescapable: Lukas is simply, perhaps willfully, ignorant of black history and biased toward an interpretation which focuses on white decision-makers (no matter how indecisive) rather than black activists and powerless parents. Instead of seeing desegregation as part of a history of Boston blacks moving “from access to power,” Lukas portrays black people—through the Twymon family—as victims of historical forces and decisions beyond their control.

Though Lukas hopes to use family history to encourage the reader to see the many sides of the crisis, he spurns black history when it comes to explaining how the desegregation case got to Judge Garrity in the first place. Thus, he writes “... the struggle in Arthur Garrity’s courtroom that year (1974) often resembled an Irish morality play, fought out between various conceptions of what it meant to be Irish in contemporary Boston. It was a family feud.” Lukas wrote this in an article before the book was published, entitled “A Touch of Class: Boston’s Busing Fight was largely a feud among its Irish,” with Ted Kennedy and Arthur Garrity portrayed as the “two toilet” Irshment who had made it and anti-busing leader Louise Day Hicks representing the “little people.”

This is a little like John Jakes’ view of the Civil War as a tragedy that divided a white family. It is also reminiscent of the traditional school of historical interpretation of the Civil War and the Reconstruction which saw those conflicts as between the North and South, or the capitalist bourgeoisie and the planter slavocracy, with black people as victims or witnesses. Until W.E.B. DuBois’ Black Recon-
structure, white Americans lacked an understanding of the role blacks themselves played in deciding the war’s outcome and the shape of Reconstruction policy. In his impressive research, Lukas ignores the outstanding works on the desegregation struggle in Boston written by Mel King, Byron Rushing, Henry Allen and Peter Shrag, a journalist who knew how to do social history. It is more colorful and requires less analysis and interpretive responsibility to write family histories than to write social history from a black perspective, but this approach would have done more than affect the book’s readability: it would have altered its meaning.

Lukas has been praised for his deft handling of the three family histories, which he energetically traces back many generations. They provide the “breath” of social history, in the minds of some reviewers. But these histories raise serious questions, too. How did Lukas select them and what meaning does he give their histories?

We can only speculate about the reasons for the selections. Certainly picking two female-headed project families, from white Charlestown and a black South End neighborhood, helps convey the view that poor blacks and whites indeed occupied “common ground.” But what if Lukas had picked a family of white homeowners whose breadwinners had fairly well-paid jobs in segregated city departments or building trade unions? Would this have conveyed a different meaning about the stakes in the desegregation struggle? Would it have suggested that white workers in Boston had a material stake in defending their relative privileges? What if Lukas had picked a black family of homeowners, like the Debnams, who were defending their home against racist white gangs? Would that have helped to show how the racism reflected in school desegregation had deeper roots in residential segregation? Indeed, what if Lukas had picked an activist black family, like the Debnams, to compare with an activist white family of anti-busers like the McGoffs? Would that have given the readers a different sense of the activism in the black community and the stakes it saw in desegregation and in defending themselves against racist attacks? I understand that Lukas at first investigated the Debnams, but later chose their relatives, the Twymons, as the black family featured in the book. I wonder why. Lukas seems determined to show that racism was less important than class resentment in creating the white resistance and the violence. Thus, in describing the Debnams’ fight to protect their home against racist attacks he accused “radical missionaries from Cambridge” of trying to make racism “a central issue in the city,” as though it was not an issue in black people’s lives. (Lukas, p. 524)

Lukas’ approach leaves black history to two families of color—the Twymons and the Walker Debnams—and leaves it out of the analysis of the court order and the events that produced it. As civil rights activist Ruth Batson said bitterly, Common Ground “completely leaves out the struggle that was carried out for so many years by black people in Boston” and she fears the book will “forever distort” the history of desegregation in the city.

Class Analysis or “A Touch of Class”

Having examined Lukas’ historical interpretation, let us turn to the most interesting aspect of the book: his class analysis of desegregation and the busing crisis. As I said above, this sort of class perspective on racial conflict appeals to a variety of liberal, populist and leftist reviewers who all are opposed to, or disillusioned with, anti-racist organizing and social policy. Lukas draws heavily on the view psychologist Robert Coles offered at the time, one supported by Boston journalists like Mike Barnicle and Alan Lupo who spoke to, if not for, white working class readers. “I don’t think that busing should be imposed like this on working-class people exclusively,” Coles told Barnicle in a Globe interview. Suburban people should share in the process. “The ultimate reality is the reality of class,” Coles concluded. “And to talk about [busing] only in terms of racism is to miss the point.” (Lukas, 506)

This view has a certain appeal. Busing was imposed on white working-class people who opposed it; it was forced, because it came through a court order; it did limit white residents’ access to their neighborhood schools; it was a policy made by white professional people, not working-class people; it did call up poor white resentment against the liberal Irishmen like
Garrity and the Kennedys, and this could be understood as a kind of “class resentment.”

Common Ground concludes with a thought-provoking discussion of class, Lukas seems to share Colin Diver’s new understand of the “class dimensions” of desegregation. Diver came to see the racial dilemma “less in purely racial and legal terms, more in class and economic terms.” Indeed, “wherever he looked he saw legal remedies undercut by social and economic realities”—a real dilemma in desegregating public institutions when the labor and housing markets remain segmented. “Eventually, he believed, the fundamental solution to the problems of a city like Boston lay in economic development. Only by providing jobs and other economic opportunities for the deprived—black and white alike—could the city reduce the deep sense of grievance harbored in both communities, alleviate some of the anti-social behavior grounded in such resentments, and begin to close the terrible gap between rich and poor, the suburb and the city, the hopeful and the hopeless.” (Lukas, p. 650)

Class analysis is necessary to understand the busing crisis and racial conflict in Boston, but Lukas does not really offer it to us. Instead, class is separated from race and presented as a sort of competing oppression (very much like many Boston Irish people view their history—as one of oppression equal to that of blacks). Thus Lukas found himself in the uncomfortable position of being seen as emphasizing class over race, when his main mistake was not seeing the connection. Class is also separated from class consciousness, so that if busing opponents show class resentment toward liberal suburban judges and politicians, they are by implication class conscious. Thus, Louise Day Hicks is presented not as conservative or reactionary, but as a kind of urban populist, like one of her followers, the current mayor Ray Flynn. “She was staunch for labor and the Democratic Party. . . .” Lukas writes in “A Touch of Class.” “Her invective focused on ‘the special interests,’ ‘the Establishment,’ ‘the outside power structure,’ ‘the rich people in the suburbs,’ ‘the forces who attempt to invade us.’ ‘You know where I stand’ was her most famous slogan, but another was ‘Boston for the Bostonians.’ By Bostonians she meant ‘the workingman and woman, the rent payer, the home owner, the law-abiding, tax-paying, decent-living, hard-working forgotten American.’” Lukas seems to have absorbed the unspoken assumption which flaws many populist appeals: the notion that the working class is only white. Thus, the remarkable response one often hears to anti-racist and desegregation politics: how can you get “working class” support for that?

What Lukas gives us is “a touch of class,” not class analysis. There are at least three major problems with the class interpretation he offers: first, he exaggerates class conflict in the black community, and ignores it within the urban white community, preferring to focus mainly on the “family feud” between the inner city and suburban Irish. Second, he is so focused on the “class conflict” between urban anti-busers and suburban liberals that he ignores the real ruling class in Boston and its role in creating the crisis. And third, he fails to understand the interpenetration of class and race in the United States and the influence racism has had on white class consciousness. In sum, racism, parochialism, and job consciousness of populist leaders like Louise Day Hicks is under-
estimated, while their antagonism to the wealthy suburbanites and privileged liberals is confused with class consciousness.

First, Lukas' history of the Walker-Debnam family and, to a lesser extent, the Twymons, emphasizes divisions of class, culture and region. "Battles of region and class [were] fought out within the Walker household," he writes. (Lukas, p. 61) There is nothing wrong with describing these differences, though it is surprising that gender conflict—so fully described by black feminist writers—is missing. The problem is that Lukas has no understanding of the impressive ways in which black families and communities came together, whatever the particular family history. He is ignorant of the history of black family structure and reconstitution described in the important work of Herbert Gutman and Leon Litwack. Because he focuses on the micro-history of black families he misses the macro-history of black community-building and the importance of extended and alternative forms of family life and kinship. These bonds of community transcended family feuds. This is the kind of internal view of black family and community we gain from Mamie Garvin Field's luminous reminiscence of black Charleston, The Lemon Swamp and Other Places.

Of course, the micro-history of the McGoff's Irish family shows parallel divisions of class and culture. Lukas shows how Irish family life contributed to fierce community consciousness in neighborhoods like Charlestown, but he underestimates the class divisions within the community. In focusing on Charlestown there is an understandable attraction to a strong sense of community, which Lukas describes well. The class differences within communities like Charlestown and South Boston are not so obvious to an outside observer, but they are there, as any project kid from Southie will tell you.

Lukas' discussion of class barely touches on the real Boston ruling class. Common Ground does make a contribution by providing a devastating account of institutional failure in the Catholic Church, liberal confusion in the Boston Globe and political cowardice and blind ambition in the Mayor's office. But only on two occasions does the author discuss the city's real economic rulers and their role in the drama.

Once Lukas actually refers to the "city's ruling class" (Lukas, p. 36) in describing the scene when Boston's black community rebelled in 1967 and Mayor Kevin White requested help from the city's ruling elite—organized into a

Dudley Station, Roxbury. Mural by Dana Chandler, Jr., photo by Akin Duro.
committee of bankers, businessmen and lawyers called the Vault. White asked the Vault for $100,000 to sponsor a James Brown concert in the Garden, which had been cancelled out of fear of racial violence. The Mayor also asked the businessmen for a million dollars to provide "emergency palliatives" for the Roxbury "tinderbox." Banker Ralph Lowell, a descendant of one of the city's oldest elite families replied: "I am afraid the figure you mention is out of our league."

Worse still, the banks promoted residential segregation and racial confrontation with block-busting mortgage policies in Dorchester, a populous working-class section of Boston. Lukas expains how twenty-two Boston banks banded together to provide mortgages for low-income blacks in a program called the Boston Bank's Urban Renewal Group (B-BURG). However, these mortgages were granted to blacks only within a narrow strip of land cutting through Dorchester which had traditionally been the Jewish community. The path skirted the Irish Catholic neighborhoods that had "resisted Jewish encroachment and were likely to repel blacks even more adamantly," as Lukas explains. "By taking the line of least resistance, B-BURG had done nothing to help blacks break out of the ghetto. It had merely enlarged and reinforced the ghetto." After this incisive analysis, the author seems to let the banks off the hook by describing the B-BURG effort as an example of how the "best intentioned programs" sometimes produce "dubious social consequences"—in this case "unintended consequences." (Lukas, pp. 211-12)

These touches of class reveal big gaps in the picture Lukas presents of the crisis. Missing is an analysis of the real ruling class of bankers, corporate lawyers, and big businessmen who made Boston a leading center for the concentration of capital (second only to New York), but refused to share any of that wealth in the poor black and white neighborhoods. While the "New Boston" policies created a glittering downtown and skyrocketing real estate investment, the neighborhoods stayed poor and the median income remained strikingly low. New jobs went mainly to suburbanites while white workers, extremely hardpressed during the recession of the seventies, fought it out with even more depressed workers of color for scarce jobs, housing and schooling opportunities for their children. By only touching on ruling-class responsibility for poverty and racial conflict, Lukas shows his limited understanding of class oppression and also his misunderstanding of white working-class consciousness and how it has been shaped by racism.

Lukas admits that he is puzzled by this consciousness. "In my conversations with Charlestown's Irish-Americans over the years, I found relatively little rage directed against the fabled Yankees, generally perceived to be effete bystanders in the city's central dramas. And despite many acts of violence and ridicule heaped on blacks during those years, it often seemed to me that they were less the genuine
objects of that anger than scapegoats for a terrible rage directed against others.” And the others were the suburban Irish, “their own kids who had deserted the old neighborhood, the old church, the old tavern, the old pieties for the comforts—and immunities—of the suburbs.”

No wonder black readers were outraged by the way in which Lukas “tragically underestimates or ignores the depth of . . . anti-Black feelings” in white neighborhoods. One of the problems with oral history, even the compelling version Lukas offers, is that people are often providing cover stories. Lukas listened carefully to what white people told him about their feelings and he believed and respected what he heard. Indeed, the people being interviewed probably believed what they were telling him. Like Louise Day Hicks, they had “nothing against black people.” Southern blacks have often said that one of the most outrageous aspects of Northern racism is white people’s unwillingness to own up to their feelings and to admit that their actions toward black people do not comport with their language. Lukas had indeed written a book about hatred, but he doesn’t seem to know it and neither do the readers who call it a healing book. As Globe columnist Ian Menzies put it, this is not a “loving book” that does a “great service” to the city. It is a “book about hatred, which it has done nothing to reduce.” And “hatred, like sex, sells.”

We need to know that Boston has an unusually hateful history, and that ethnic and community identity, especially among the Irish, evolved here in a particularly negative, conservative way. That evolution had roots in the hate the Irish immigrants encountered and the class resentment they experienced through enforced poverty, incarceration, condescension and exploitation. This is what Boston Irish oral histories tell us so eloquently. This is also the class resentment that Mayor James Michael Curley harnessed in an inconsistently but generally populist attack on the Brahmin elite. “His main political strength was his ability to define, dramatize, and play upon the discrimination, resentments, and frustrations suffered by the Irish community in its long passage from despised immigrant minority to a politically irresistible but economic blocked majority.”

But Curley’s populism was exceptional. He was a maverick who rebelled against the intense parochialism and racialism of the Irish ward bosses and the extremely conservative Catholic Church, personified by Cardinal O’Connell who openly discriminated in favor of wealthier parishioners.

The political and cultural history of the Boston Irish developed in a context of militant Protestant reform which included the anti-Catholicism of the Know Nothing movement and the anti-working class aspect of prison “reform,” compulsory schooling, and other forms of social control. Led by a very conservative Catholic clergy, the Boston Irish developed a reactionary posture toward these reforms. The Irish Catholic reaction to Protestant reformism included a deep antipathy to the anti-slavery movement. Another path might have been taken. In 1848 Daniel O’Connell, the “Great Liberator,” spoke at an abolitionist meeting in Faneuil Hall and presented a petition with 60,000 Irish signatures demanding abolition of slavery. This could have been the beginning of an Irish-American move to support anti-slavery, but it was not. Originally, the reactionary posture of Boston Irish leaders was related to the anti-Catholic, anti-labor character of white Protestant leaders. But, by the time of the Civil War, Irish Democratic politicians had helped turn suspicion of anti-slavery politics and Protestant reform into a full-blown racist fear that free people of color would compete with the Irish for jobs. So in a distorted way class consciousness of a narrow sort fed racist consciousness.

Reactionary scapegoating often exploded in the Hub even when blacks were a small ghetoized minority before World War II and race was not a major issue in Boston politics. Italians constantly faced violence from North End Irish gangs during the 1890s until the Irish retreated across the Bridge to Charlestown. Lukas mentions this in his colorful portrait of Charlestown communalism, without appreciating the ways in which intense parochialism bred an atmosphere of hate. He does comment on the amazing anti-Italian and anti-Portuguese prejudice among many Irish Catholics, but he does not explain it or relate it to neighborhood identity.
Lukas has said that his book is really about the conflict between the black demand for equality and the white urge to preserve community. He thought both values were important, but he failed to fully understand the xenophobic aspects of communalism. He also failed to learn from black history that community and equality are compatible and that race is the main reason these two values seem to be in conflict.

James Michael Curley tried to overcome some of the most reactionary aspects of ethnic parochialism and Catholic conservatism. He created a citywide patronage machine that included Italians, Jews, East Europeans, Asians, and Blacks as well as Protestants. In doing this he broke with the old ward bosses and their narrow ethnic politics and refused to pay homage to Cardinal O'Connell, who supported Franco during the Spanish Civil War.25 As a city politician Curley made himself accountable to working-class voters throughout the city and espoused a fairly class-conscious kind of urban populism recently revived by the current Mayor Ray Flynn.

But Curley's populism was not the mainstream of Boston politics and ultimately did little to foster tolerance or to alter the city's cultural politics. Indeed, Curley himself at times fostered an atmosphere of hate. He deliberately curried favor in the 1930s with the reactionary radio priest Father Charles Coughlin and turned to vicious red-baiting when the Communist-led unemployed movement exposed the breakdown of Curley's patronage when he was mayor in 1932-33. Curley made speeches to hold his support in the Jewish community when he ran for office during the 1940s and he even joined the NAACP, but he had no real influence on the terrible outbreaks of anti-semitism that afflicted Boston. In the 1950s Boston also became a center of support for Sen. Joe McCarthy's crusade against Communists, liberals and civil libertarians. Of course, McCarthy was even coddled by Jack Kennedy, who represented the new liberal wing of the Irish Democratic machine. As an Irish Catholic labor activist told me: "The Boston Irish loved Joe McCarthy. My mother-in-law still thinks he was crucified."26

Nat Hentoff, recalling his boyhood in Rox-

James Michael Curley (left) and "radio priest" Charles Coughlin.

bury during the thirties, describes the huge audience for Father Coughlin's Sunday afternoon radio broadcasts. "He would preach in his musical voice this extraordinary equation in which the Jews were both the worst of the bloodsucking capitalist bankers and the Bolsheviks running the USSR. Some of his more zealous supporters would, on the basis of this inspiring message they heard every Sunday, go find Jews' heads to bash." No wonder that by the early 1950s Nat Hentoff felt compelled to "leave the heavy air of Boston, with its tribal hatreds, the anti-Catholics sometimes being almost as venomous as the anti-Semites, and all mocking the Negroes."27 Hentoff left just when the largest black migration to Boston was beginning.

Tom Atkins, the first black to serve on the City Council in modern times and leader of the NAACP during desegregation, wrote: "Lukas would have the reader believe that the
resistance to desegregation in South Boston, Charlestown, and other white areas was more turf-defense than racism, thus ignoring the ample evidence that resisters weren't shouting 'buses go home,' but rather 'niggers go home.' 228

The point is not to condemn the Irish as the most racist group in Boston. Other ethnic groups developed their own tribal hatreds. The Italians' victimization by the Irish did not make the North End a more tolerant place for people of color than Charlestown or South Boston. 29 Indeed, it might have been more dangerous for people of color than those mainly Irish neighborhoods where a few blacks lived in projects in the 1960s.

In seeking to understand, explain, and defend the Charlestown Irish, Tony Lukas can only take at face value the Townies' defense of community and family, their class resentment and ethnic pride because he cannot understand the negative actions those feelings produced against people of color. Thus, Common Ground reads like a loving book and completely misses the palpable fear and hatred that hung over Boston like a cloud of poisonous gas in the early 1970s. Racism did not come out of thin air. That poison had been pumped into the atmosphere for decades. 10

In sum, we need more than a touch of class to understand Boston's racial crisis. We cannot separate class from race. We have to be able to explain that class divisions were not just drawn in the ways that Charlestown residents described them to Lukas—between the inner city whites and the suburban Irish liberals who betrayed them. This was the kind of class consciousness that demagogic Democratic leaders had been fostering in Boston since the abolitionist days. This was Louise Day Hick's game; she deflected class resentment away from the big bankers and businessmen who foster class and race conflict and away from neighborhood bankers and businessmen like her father. This is the same game being played by Jimmy Kelly who parlayed his leadership of the militant anti-black South Boston Information Center into a seat on the present Boston City Council. Kelly talks like a class conscious trade unionist (he was an official in the Sheet Metal Workers union) but in the city council he votes against rent control and supports the big developers.

To Lukas, politicians like Hicks reflected Irish Catholic class resentment more than
racism. He says in an article, "Louise’s stand against segregation tapped a resentment rooted less in race than in class" but he ignores the role demagogic politicians and trade union leaders had in shaping a narrow job consciousness which was often masked with class rhetoric and he misses the significance of racism in shaping that consciousness. It was so well understood, so deeply ingrained by the 1970s that all Hicks had to say was "You know where I stand."

When the anti-busing groups defended neighborhood schools and complained about sending their kids to dangerous neighborhoods, they spoke to real communal and parental concerns, as Lukas shows in his profile of the McGoffs. And in the minds of some parents these concerns may not have been racially motivated. In other cases, genuine fears were manipulated and used as codewords to promote racial fears and racist attitudes. Of course there was plenty of vicious overt racism expressed during the busing crisis (only described briefly in Common Ground), but the codewords were more common, and Lukas does not know how to interpret them. Because he misunderstands the social and cultural history of Boston, he takes the language of class at face value and misses the conservative and often racist components underlying it.

There was a class dimension to this, but not the one Lukas identified. This was the Irish-dominated patronage machine which Louise Day Hicks represented through her control over school department jobs. That machine really controlled public and much private employment and gave white ethnic access to certain economic opportunities. It was understood that this access would not be shared with other groups, especially blacks, Asians and Hispanics. (Lukas ignores the violent struggle that took place over construction jobs during the same period of Boston history.) During the seventies, white working-class people supported politicians like Hicks, and later "Dapper" O'Neil and Jimmy Kelly, who maintained this advantage in terms of access and opportunity through patronage. Ironically, whites did not gain much of an advantage over blacks in the quality of schooling they received (though they did get teachers of their own kind and better access to resources). They did gain material benefits, however, including control of better paying city and union jobs that could lead to an escape to the suburbs, as all of Alice McGoff's siblings escaped from Charlestown.

Monte Neill, a historian of Boston education and race relations, makes these conclusive observations: "What Lukas fails to do is to indicate the overall hierarchy in the relative positions of poor working class whites over poor working class blacks. In effect, he adopts the position of [current Mayor Ray] Flynn: we're all poor together. He does of course, see race as a problem, but his book fails to reveal that race and class are not two distinct problems but are interconnected because in the US race is also a class category: Blacks are kept last hired and first fired, in the lousiest jobs, most unemployed, etc." Because Lukas fails to see racial aspects of class segmentation, he ignores the crucial role played by the poor white working class (and the politicians they elect) in reinforcing segmentation. "For all their complaints against the Yankees and the two toilet Irish, the poor Irish in Boston have allied with these enemies against a weaker enemy, the blacks," Neill concludes. "So long as they continue to do so, real change will be severely limited."

Lukas declares elsewhere that he is no Marxist, and does not propose a socialist solution. This presents a serious philosophical problem of the book: having proposed a class analysis of racism, social policy, housing and economic opportunity, the author shrinks from class conscious political solutions. The author is essentially a liberal elitist and pessimist who has no faith in the ability of working people to find "common ground" or make a class analysis of their predicament. That is why he places Colin and Joan Diver, the liberal "urban homesteaders," in such a central place in the story. Though they were not actively involved in either side of the busing struggle, they are made to represent the enlightened, educated professionals in government and the foundations who will save the city from warring races and classes. When the Divers pack up and leave the South End for suburban Newton, Lukas seems to despair. The Divers and their friends seem to leave the city because of desegregation (though they supposedly came to live in an integrated neighborhood). Lukas shares Colin Diver's neo-liberal fears of counter-productive policies
like desegregation as well as his fellow Harvard graduates' concern with "class issues." (Lukas, pp. 642-43, 650) Ironically, class is being used here to criticize one of the few opportunities black and white people in Boston had to get together and fight for educational resources they had both been denied.

Finally, for all of Lukas' emphasis on class he ends up painting a strictly black-and-white picture which ignores other social differences. Lukas ignores ethnic and class differences in the communities of color. The METCO program to bus black children to the suburbs was an effort at community controlled busing, but it also removed children whose parents wanted to be particularly involved in school issues, and many of those parents were black professionals and business people who were leaders of community struggles on other issues.34

Lukas simply wipes out other ethnic groups of color, including Asians and Hispanics, who were seriously affected by the whole desegregation struggle. Miren Uriarte's oral histories of Boston Hispanic leaders reveal a constant complaint that these people are left out of Common Ground, gone without a trace. The growing Hispanic community was caught in the conflict over busing. It refused to support the anti-busing movement, but it found that the court order subverted the "clusters" of Spanish-speaking students required for a bilingual program it had achieved only a year before the busing order. In this sense, Hispanic parents had a far more legitimate criticism of the order on educational grounds than white parents; they eventually had to go to court to try to protect the bilingual program. But even though Hispanics were hurt by the order and even though they were at a desperate preliminary stage of just fighting for access to public schools, they refused to join an anti-busing movement that made the black community its target. Paradoxically, leaving Hispanics and Asians out of the story exaggerates the racial nature of the conflict. By ignoring ethnicity and nationality, Lukas unconsciously heightens the significance of race, by excluding groups who are not part of the white resistance or the Afro-American community.35

It may make a good story, and good TV, to see the Boston busing wars as a colorful "feud between the Irish" and another tragic chapter in America's ongoing conflict between poor blacks and whites. But it is a distorted story, one which does violence to people's history and to people's understanding of what desegregation meant to the city as a whole.

Sharing "the Burden of Desegregation"

Lukas criticizes the Garrity order for not including the suburbs in a metropolitan plan, thus asking wealthier whites to "pay the price" and "share the burden" of desegregation with poor whites. Presumably, a metropolitan plan would have reduced white resentment and resistance.

Lukas dismisses black opposition to this kind of solution, even though it was universal. However, he fails to explore the reasons for this opposition. Tom Atkins explains it this way: "... the Supreme Court made it abundantly clear that 'the scope of the violation determines the scope of the remedy.' In Boston the copious record compiled in federal court established that Boston officials manipulated Boston boundary lines, discriminated against blacks in filling Boston faculty and administrative ranks, used buses deliberately to separate Boston blacks from Boston whites, deliberately assigned black and white Boston students and staff in a racially segregative manner, discriminated in the allocation of Boston educational resources, manipulated Boston grade structure so as to create racial segregation, deliberately overcrowded Boston's black schools when white schools were under-utilized, and deliberately cited Boston schools so as to take advantage of Boston's residential segregation."36

Not only did Boston have a legal, moral and political obligation to provide equal educational opportunity to all children, but all of Boston's residents had an opportunity to hold their own city's educational system accountable, something metropolitan busing would surely have diluted. Lukas also underestimates the resources Boston could have brought to bear if it had a real commitment to quality public education. Boston Latin School's quality (as a college prep exam school) shows what might be possible with the right support. Boston did not need the suburbs to educate its children, black or white. By ignoring the class differences within the city, the fact that more
privileged whites had long sent their kids to parochial schools, and by ignoring the real ruling class of bankers and businessmen who withheld their vast financial resources from the public sector, Lukas leaves the impression that Boston schools could never have served city children without a busing plan that asked suburbs (which also vary in class and wealth) to share the "burden."

Lukas implies that a metropolitan plan would have reduced white resistance to desegregation, if not heightened white acceptance. He ignores the possibilities of white resistance to busing in Boston's notoriously segregated suburbs. Indeed, the anti-busing movement drew many suburbanites into its ranks, even though they were unaffected. In 1974 only four suburban communities voted to continue METCO and five rejected it.37

And it is not necessarily salutary for black and white working-class children to be schooled with wealthier privileged kids. Urban culture, black and white, is different from suburban culture. "Rock Against Racism" was one of the many progressive programs that emerged out of the racial crisis; it showed that street kids of all backgrounds had a common youth culture, one that could be expressed in a desegregated urban school system.38

Furthermore, Lukas sees only the divisive aspects of desegregation, not the possibility that desegregation within the city of Boston would make it possible for working-class whites and people of color to create political coalitions to demand better education. That political possibility—which does not interest Lukas—was an impossibility as long as a dual school system existed. It is then no surprise he skims over the abysmal quality of Boston public education for all races, something which did not escape earlier journalistic investigations of the patronage-ridden system. During the 1940s Louis Lyons wrote that "a narrow-minded Catholic establishment had rejected federal aid to education and had opposed 'every advance in public education.' " Nothing had changed by the 1960s when the public schools were truly impoverished, and nothing would change until the civil rights movement challenged the system.39

Though Lukas admits metropolitan desegregation was legally impossible (the Supreme Court rejected these plans for the reasons Atkins explained), he still proposes it—which seems academic at best, and at worst an attempt to use class resentment to justify race inequality. It is offensive not only because it ignores the possibility of white and black
class unity, but it sees desegregation only as a "price" working class whites had to pay. (Lukas, p. 27) And this says a lot about how Lukas regards black people.

Commenting on the debate about Common Ground, Mel King had strong words for those people who hold that the busing order was "a way in which the so-called preferred people were not forced to carry the burden—the burden—of the desegregation process." His message to them was: "Black people are not a burden." Keynoting a conference on the "New Boston" at Boston College in 1984, he declared: "That is a mean and vicious way of saying something about black people and people of color in this city." "We were, and in fact are, an opportunity," he continued. Desegregation was an opportunity for people who live in this city "to open up and act in the most humane way possible. And they blew it." King concluded that Boston citizens had an opportunity to say, Let's have a city where, in Old Testament terms, "all the tribes were welcome" and not say the responsibility was on someone else. "The responsibility was right here, and the opportunity was a great one."40

The Consequences of Desegregation

One of the most disturbing readings of Common Ground is that the struggle over busing was not worth the price. Lukas refuses to take responsibility for this reading, and says he was not writing a history of desegregation. He does, however, conclude the book by evaluating only two years of desegregation and by raising serious doubts in the reader's mind about the value of busing, given white flight, the increase in white class resentment, the "impoverishment" of the public schools and what he sees as a lack of class integration in the classroom (with the removal of white middle- and working-class kids). As one left reviewer notes: "Lukas paints a picture of a struggle that originated in righteous claims, but degenerated into a grotesque convulsion that benefited no one. He ends the book with head-shaking dismay, wondering ever more loudly whether the court ordered changes in staffing, in disciplinary policy, in curriculum, and in pupil assignment policies were worth the struggle."41

Desegregation was worth the struggle for several important reasons, even if it produced increased racial conflict, white class resentment and flight from public schools. "Eyes on the Prize" reminds us that even the most outrageous aspects of Jim Crow segregation fell only after extreme white violence and white flight. Public schools in the South are now primarily black in many areas, because whites refuse to support them. But this does not make desegregation a failure, because the primary goal of this struggle for people of color was not integration, but access to educational resources and institutional power. I wonder if Lukas would doubt the value of desegregation in the South because it increased poor white class resentment and white flight from the public sector. I doubt it. Lukas is expressing the disillusioned liberalism of the 1980s and masking it with a concern he and Colin Diver share for "class issues."
Common Ground also suggests that a more accommodationist plan would have reduced white resistance and hostility. There is simply no evidence that fewer numbers of black students would have made any difference in reducing resistance or increasing acceptance of busing. Indeed, the author notes that even the small number of minority students who attended Charlestown High School in 1972 suffered from racist attacks, two years before busing. (Lukas, p. 286) He also suggests that a compromise plan for Phase II which called for less busing and different pairings would have encountered less resistance. He also presents favorably those who rejected the NAACP's position on the compromise it referred to as a "Munich accommodation" favoring peace over justice. (Lukas, p. 249) Lukas ignores this criticism and praises the plan because it had the support of the "broad middle" which incited Boston's two daily newspapers, the Mayor and the Governor. But what about the die-hard, well-organized white resistance? Would it really have been placated by such a compromise? Lukas does not say, but the city's history suggests that white racism has nothing to do with the numbers of black people involved in desegregation. Indeed, the vast social science literature on desegregation shows conclusively that white resistance is no greater when thorough desegregation takes place; it also shows that race relations improve when there are more blacks in classrooms rather than less.

The desegregation struggle in Boston has created a "racial imbalance," but it is a very different imbalance than before—and this was by choice, not by coercion, as it was under the old dual system. In this sense white flight does not undercut the goals of desegregation as Lukas maintains. (Lukas, p. 650) The effort was part of the black community struggle to move from an apartheid situation to a position of gaining access and then power in the public sector.

Lukas also fails to understand how desegregation began to change the city as a whole. Because he focuses so much on white "class resentment," he fails to see how the crisis helped to change white people and shift the terrain of political discourse in the city. Lukas actually writes quite well about the "Last White

Class" at Charlestown High and the painful attempts of black and white kids to get to know each other. Lisa McGoff is obviously changed by the experience, and unlike all the other generations of white Townies who went to the neighborhood high school, she has an opportunity to meet and relate to people of color. Forced segregation had deprived earlier generations of that opportunity and that possibility for human growth. For all the empathy Tony Lukas feels about the injuries of class suffered by the McGoffs of Boston, he shows a liberal skepticism about the potentiality for change among white working-class people.

This is all the more surprising because he actually writes revealingly about how the experienced challenged Alice McGoff. She was torn at her daughter's graduation by "seemingly irreconcilable emotions." For years she had crusaded with the Powder Keg against Judge Garrity's "judicial tyranny" and for an exclusively neighborhood school. Lukas calls this a "fight for self-determination" which was hardly what Alice McGoff and poor whites had before busing. Indeed, Lukas only once mentions the poor conditions of the High School before desegregation (p. 285) "Yet Alice had watched with mounting admiration as Lisa assumed leadership at the school (which included peacemaking), managing through force of personality to restore some vestige of solidarity and tradition. Her child was a determined young woman now, armed with the courage of her convictions. Some Powder Keg members might complain about Lisa's role at the school, suggesting she had somehow sold out to the "pro-busers," but Alice defended her, proclaiming a mother's pride." (Lukas, p. 554) Finally, Lukas misses what the desegregation struggle meant to Boston politics in a longer and broader sense than a journalist's view of history can convey. The struggle brought along with it a movement to desegregate the work force, especially the lily-white staff of the Boston Schools; it held schools more accountable to parents and less to the patronage bosses; it forced other powerful institutions in the city to address the problems of public education; it led to a successful fight for district representation and challenged white control over the school committee; it generated support for Mel King's two campaigns for mayor, which made
racism an issue in city politics for the first time. Finally, it compelled some white people and encouraged others to deal with people of color and to hear discussions about racism. The struggle also offered them a choice about how they wanted to relate to their fellow citizens in the public sphere. Many whites chose to defend exclusion, to reject an opportunity to share the city's resources, and to deny their children a chance to interact with people of color, but these are not good enough reasons to doubt the policy which gave them those choices.

In sum, Common Ground raises important questions about the meaning of the desegregation conflict in Boston and about the injuries of race and class. Unfortunately, the author does not take responsibility for all the meanings the book conveys. Common Ground is a book of the disillusioned eighties, filled with doubts about the equality agenda forced on this country by the civil rights movement. In a public forum Lukas said the book was about the need to reconcile community and equality in this society. This is an understandable desire, but it is all too easy to view demands for equality as being subsersive of community, especially when they come from a minority. It is too easy to question the militancy of equal rights movements when in fact we should question our definition of community and wonder how meaningful communities can be if they are premised on inequality.

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Footnotes


2. Ibid.

3. See reviews in left publications by Mark Zanger, "Crossfire," The Nation, October 5, 1985 and Brian Powers, "Schooling in America," Socialist Review, 90 (Nov.-Dec. 1986), pp. 120-24. Both have criticism of Lukas, but both conclude that the book left them confused and wondering which side they are on. For those on the Left, Lukas's class analysis recalls the argument of some communist groups that busing was a ruling class plot designed to divide the working class and heighten racial conflict, an argument Radical America editorialized against during the early months of the busing crisis in 1974. "Racism and Busing in Boston," Radical America, Vol. 8, No. 6 (Nov. Dec., 1974).

4. Quotes from paperback edition of Lukas, Common Ground.


7. In a prepublication "op ed" piece, Lukas is more explicit, criticizing the Garriott order for creating white flight and further "racial imbalance in the schools," leaving the public schools "poverty stricken." It also "hampered the drive for 'quality education' because most social science research suggests that improved classroom performance depends on integration by social class as well as by race." *Ibid.*


9. Mel King, *Chain of Change* (Boston, 1982).


14. John Demeter is the source of information about Lukas starting out with an investigation of the Debnam family. The criticism that the Left was making racism an issue was also made of Mel King by progressive supporters of his opponent in the 1983 mayoral campaign. This controversy over racism as a campaign issue is discussed in James Green, "The Making of Mel King's Rainbow Coalition: Political Change in Boston, 1963-1983," *Radical America*, (Winter 1984) reprinted in Jennings and King, *From Access to Power*.


16. The first book about the busing crisis in the city was written by Alan Lupo, a Boston native and insider journalist. Lukas might have acknowledged the book since it presents virtually the same kind of class analysis, as it argues that Boston might have spared some of its agony if the suburbs had been included. The major difference in Lupo's book is its emphasis on Boston's violent history of ethnic, race and class hatred, which Lukas ignores, and its sympathetic portrait of Mayor Kevin White, who looks very bad in *Common Ground*. Alan Lupo, *Liberty's Chosen Home: The Politics of Violence in Boston* (Boston, 1977).


24. Paul Mishler, "Ourselves Alone: The Antebellum Origins of Racism Among Boston's Irish-Americans," *Debate & Understanding* (Boston: Boston University Martin Luther King Center, 1983) makes a revealing analysis of the Irish Catholic hostility to abolitionism which is rightly connected to the influence of a Democratic Party that fostered liberty over a morality viewed as a Protestant obsession. The Irish identification with the Democratic Party came at a time when the Southern dominated Party was defending slavery. Irish politicians joined in this defense. Hostility to abolitionism translated to racism in another way: "the class status of the Irish Americans and their relative weakness politically led to strategies to advance their interests to the exclusion of others." The Boston Irish hated the Yankees, but the Catholic leaders who emerged were forced to negotiate rather than fight the Brahmins. However, the Irish could compete with the blacks and "lord it over them." "Hostility toward the Yankee elite was deflected onto blacks who shared religious and Republican party affiliation with the Yankees but who were, in the final analysis, powerless." pp. 85-86.


29. For an example of how an earlier outside observer romanticized Boston's ethnic neighborhoods by ignoring racial hatred and violence, see Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, 1961), p. 33 which claims with dramatic inaccuracy that the North End's streets were used safely by "people of every race."

Postscript: On June 11, 1987, the Boston Globe featured a front-page article announcing that the Divers were returning to Boston—having bought a condominium in the white middle and upper class Back Bay section. The article described Joan Diver as being free of worry since her children had finished high school in the suburbs and were now in college. The Globe will continue coverage of their progress with periodic reports. The Editors.
34. Anthony Hill, who is researching a book on the history of Afro-American education, criticized METCO on these grounds. Jean McGuire, METCO director, responded that if white parents had a choice to send their children to private or suburban schools, then blacks should have the same choice. This does not however speak to the social consequences of a METCO program. "Metco at 20" *Boston Globe*, May 17, 1987 See Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma*, p. 74 on the "negative effects" of voluntary one-way busing plans. Also see Mel King's criticisms in *Chain of Change*, p. 87.
35. Thanks to Professor Miren Uriate of UMass-Boston's College of Public and Community Service for sharing the results of her extensive interviews with leaders in Boston's Hispanic community.
38. Reeebe Garofalo, "Rocking Against Racism in Massachusetts," *ONETWOTHREEFOUR: A Rock 'n' Roll Quarterly* No. 3 (Autumn 1986), pp. 75-86.
40. Mel King remarks at a conference on the New Boston at Boston College, October 5, 1984. Thanks to Judy Smith and Sharlene Boogd Cochrane for a video-tape of this speech.
42. Hochschild, *The New American Dilemma*, pp. 80-81 on the negative effects of incrementalism in desegregation. All studies show that "making many simultaneous changes achieves more desegregation and avoids more problems than making few or serial changes." *Ibid*. Also see Martin Patchen, *Black-White Contact in School: Its Social and Academic Effects* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1982), p. 331 which points out that race relations were worse in schools where blacks were in a small minority.
43. Jennings and King, *From Access to Power*.
44. See comments that make this point much more strongly in "12 Years Under Desegregation," *Boston Globe*, April 27, 1986, p. 1 especially by a black student who was part of the first class to go through desegregated schools from the start. When Doris Brown entered high school, she said everyone expected violence. She heard stories about riots in Hyde Park High School. "But when I got here, it had all changed," she said. "There was a whole different set of kids here. We had all grown up together in elementary and secondary school. Why all of a sudden would we start fighting?" She worried about white flight but quickly pointed out, "If the schools had remained separate, I wouldn't have had a chance to meet a lot of different kinds of people." *Ibid*.

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*Feature Story: The Militarization of Central America*
Lukas' Morality Play

In the spring of 1976 erstwhile Harvard fellow and Pulitzer Prize winning author J. Anthony Lukas stepped up to the counter at Cambridge's Red Book Store. Having begun his search for "common ground" in the Boston school desegregation crisis, he was looking for access to a part of the current turmoil that his academic credentials couldn't offer. He was seeking activists who he had learned were assisting black families defending their homes against racist attacks in Boston's recently integrated neighborhoods.

Thinking back to that meeting, I remember a distrust of liberal journalists Surface as we talked. But my sense of his political limitations was overcome by a frustration with the way local and national media were telling the Boston story. I felt particularly frustrated by the ignoring of what had been happening in a number of Boston's neighborhoods—away from the center stage of the school crisis. In our conversation, Lukas didn't try to oversell himself. He pitched objectivity and expressed a desire to cover what black families were experiencing in the neighborhoods. He wanted a reference to facilitate his introduction to two families he knew were under siege in the city's Dorchester and Hyde Park sections.

Tony Lukas got his introduction, met with the families, eventually choosing the extended family of one as part of his central narrative. He also spent a bit of time talking with neighborhood people and those of us who happened to live outside the city proper, who had come to the families aid.

When we next met, nine years later, his book had appeared and was on its way to garnering him a second Pulitzer Prize. Having labored through that work, with an increasing incredulity I must say, let him know what I thought about what was missing and what was misinterpreted. He seemed taken aback and commented that he hadn't received any similar feedback to that point. Considering the small circle of friends and sources indicated by the book, I didn't find that surprising.

What I did find ironic, if not surprising, was Lukas' sharp disparaging of anti-racist activists—particularly given Common Ground's lament about the need for suburban involvement in sharing the "burden" of desegregation. Some of his narrative regarding efforts to support the right of black families to live where they choose was downright soppy. But his crediting of efforts to make racism a central issue in mid-70s Boston should be seen as a critical scapegoating that facilitates the embellishment of his thesis.

Some brief points. He consistently confuses Racial Now (RUN) with the Hyde Park Defense Group. The former, which assisted the Debnams of Dorchester, was primarily organized by working class Bostonians. The latter group, which worked in Hyde Park, was populated by, as he calls it, "radical missionaries from Cambridge"—though Boston, Somerville, and other areas were beneath the strokes of his broad brush. He didn't spend enough time with each group to be able to make the distinction. Lukas' account of the Henry Walker case—Alva Debnam's brother who was arrested in a July 4, 1976 incident that left three white neighborhood youths injured—also demonstrated a confusion on his part. He expresses the opinion that activists who had been supporting the two households were ambivalent about whether Walker committed the act for which he was eventually tried and convicted. Lukas attended the trial and was supplied with the Defense Committee's literature which unambiguously stated that we were supporting him because of a belief in the right to self defense. It was a political perspective that the author might disagree with, but which was publically stated nonetheless.

Lastly, as Jim Green discusses in his comprehensive critique of Common Ground, the author must take responsibility for the meanings that people derive from reading the book. His red-baiting and criticism of anti-racist activists, while harmful and unmerited, pales next to the author's distortion and slighting of black political and social history in the city. But there is a pecking order to the author's sympathies. He shows obvious warmth for the liberals, the Divers, and a more subtle, but no less palpable fondness for the McGoffs. He is at his most objective, social scientist/journalist persona with his black subjects. Within the narrative of the Twymon family, their relatives, the Debnams, play the role closest to that of "undesirables." When he examines and details the criminal records of two family members, it is with a much closer eye than he puts to the McGoffs or any of the book's white characters. In fact, so absorbed does he become in relating one of the McGoffs' version of the infamous beating of black attorney Ted Landsmark that he weaves in, without disbelief, comments that Landsmark provoked his own beating by walking into an antibusing mob. It is that same absorption that leads him to end one section with the offhand observation that the Debnams were "intruders in [the] midst" of their white Dorchester neighbors.

Finally, Lukas also presents within the Debnam narrative, an incident that serves as one of his main parables. His account of the rape of a white leftist by a family member she had offered to drive home is the book's most detailed description of personal violence. The author spends twice the space allotted the Walker case to retell in titillating style, step by step, the agony of the woman's violent assault. It was a difficult section to read. I don't think it is overly cynical to assume, given Lukas' numerous asides about radicals and about the woman's ingenuous involvement with blacks, that he is presenting us with a morality play. It is a parable of the dangers of whites becoming involved with blacks, and also of the naiveté of the white Left in taking up anti-racist work. It is also difficult not to view this incident as an indirect justifier of white flight—and it is white flight, even the "agonizing" white flight of Lukas' disillusioned, "liberal" hero, Colin Diver, that caps his story.

John Demeter is an editor of Radical America and was a member of the Hyde Park Defense Group and the Thomas Walker Defense Committee in 1976-77. He now lives in Boston.
WINTER IN AMERICA
Notes on the media and race

This is the first article in a two part series on race and the media. The second part, which will center on a discussion of race, politics and media in Boston, will appear in a subsequent issue.

For Dave Witterski

John Demeter

More than any period in recent memory, the US of late 1986- early 1987, seems to come the closest to resembling the surrealists notion, "society of the spectacle." And in the midst of our inundation with scandals and "big events," from Contragate to Pearlygate, from Zippergate to Embassytgate, the messenger has become as big a story as the message itself.

Network television executives are called before Congress to assure the preservation of the "public trust" in the face of costcutting by corporate accountants. The media's own polls show an alarming dissatisfaction not only with the targets of their investigation, but their very role as investigators. In one intriguing coupling, an association of journalists has recently turned to the Advertising Council to counter this image problem. Prompting this recent action was a survey showing that one in three Americans felt negatively about the press, and another sampling revealing that one in five citizens would remove freedom of the press from the First Amendment. The planned campaign will focus on the theme, "If the press didn't tell us, who would?"

Given the dizzying array of spectacles being paraded before us, it seems that an equally appropriate question would be, "Just what is the press telling us?" Focusing instead on questions of style and "appropriateness," very little media criticism is taking up issues of

Opposite: Dec. 27, 1986 solidarity march in Howard Beach, New York after murder of Michael Griffith a week earlier. Michael Kaufman photo/IMPACT VISUALS.
direction and ideology. In a period as critical as the current media-defined, "end of the Reagan Revolution,"1 such questions are needed. In this article I will offer some speculative thoughts on one such area—one that rarely is touched in the current criticism—the implications of media coverage about race. The information is based on a sampling of national print and electronic media and is meant to provoke wider consideration. Examining media treatment of race at this historical moment, I believe, offers the opportunity to watch ideology in the making. New frameworks are being shaped; the battle to define what race means in this society is in process. In a later piece, I would like to use some of these national observations to discuss the curious relationship of race, media, and politics in Boston.

Deciphering the "new racism"

In his study of the interrelationship of mass media and the New Left,2 Todd Gitlin talked of news coverage as social management. He detailed the ability of the media to orchestrate everyday consciousness through their pervasiveness, accessibility and centralized symbolic capacity. While the practices he outlined—ignoring certain political developments, selectively emphasizing others, and relying on "official" versions of reality—were identified in relation to the treatment of a large political opposition, I believe they can help decipher the massive current attention to the "new racism."3 In fact, perhaps one of the more provocative questions about this coverage is whether, in the absence of an influential and farreaching social movement like the civil rights forces of three decades ago, the media is now attempting to shape consideration of public policy.4 What has produced the recent awareness in print and electronic media of the discrimination, bias, and outright racism seemingly touching every aspect of community life? Given the political spectrum within the media, what can we learn from the parameters of the discussion about race? In light of the Republican attack on civil rights, and the lack of any substantive Democratic response, is there a struggle to set the terms of the "post Reagan" agenda and avoid a volatile challenge as this country experienced barely two decades ago?

There were times this past winter, in fact, when the images from "Eyes on the Prize," the documentary of the history of the American civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, seemed to jump generations onto the nation's evening news. The line between history and current events appeared thin indeed—separated, only by the "colorization" of the latter-day newsreel footage. The timing of the six part series, broadcast on the nation's PBS stations, was deeply ironic, appearing only days after the Ku Klux Klan attack on civil rights marchers in Georgia and barely a month after the Howard Beach, New York racial attack that left one black man dead.

For a national media which had just begun to stir from its trance-like state with somewhat aggressive coverage of the Contrascam scandal, the incidents in Georgia and New York prompted coverage of a phenomenon seen sweeping the country. In keeping with media constructs of conflict and confrontation, the coverage increased when civil rights activists mobilized responses to the New York and Georgia attacks. When those marchers came under verbal and physical abuse as they rallied, cameras and pens recorded the sights and sounds. In an apparent break with the usual media constructs, background and investigatory pieces appeared, there were followups to the stories and serial discussions of racism and race relations. Connections were discovered to other incidents across the country. At the University of Massachusetts campus in Amherst, an assault on black students who were celebrating the New York Mets victory in the World Series, received relatively minor treatment in October. By late winter, after a state investigation had charged that several white students had initiated the racist rampage, the incident was pictured as part of a phenomenon that included public slurs, cross-burnings, and physical attacks at schools throughout the country. As the New York Times editorialized with apparent surprise, "Crude overt racial bigotry has again come out of campus closets and onto the quads."5 Among the roster of institutions involved were some of the nation's elite, most of which had carried liberal reputations as incubators of student political activism in the
1960s. Today, the Times intoned, they "seem to be incubators of racial intolerance."

The coverage contrasted provocatively with the relative absence of discussions within recent journalism. In the aftermath of Howard Beach, the information and reports of racism's continuing presence in every aspect of community life, from the media itself to professional sports, from the education of our youth to even the location of the nation's toxic waste sites, appeared with growing frequency. After Forsyth County, and its stark mirroring of the footage of "Eyes on the Prize," any attempt to look at these events as anomalies seemed to explode.

But as those incidents intruded upon the absence of coverage in the media, they also intruded upon a key aspect of the promotion of the conservative agenda in the Reagan era: the containment of the "new social movements"—the racial minority, women's and peace movements—which were held responsible "for the decline and dislocations Americans had experienced in the late 1960s and after."

"News" and "Reality"

Another part of the frame attached to stories is the shifting between "news" and "official reality." Separating the events of this past winter from "history"—the events pictured in "Eyes on the Prize," for example—helps to strengthen the media case for seeing them as not part of a historical continuum. It is a way of saying, we dealt with racism in the past, and we can deal with it now. The New York Times calls these outbreaks "atavisms." Throwbacks. Columnist Anthony Lewis of that paper, even while criticizing the Supreme Court decision denying racism in the state of Georgia's application of the death penalty must first assert:

The great achievement of American society since World War II has been to turn away from the racism that marked our history. Unfairness of all kinds remains. But we have made extraordinary progress in ending official racism: the expression in law of racial hatred and fear.

But the "laws on the books" approach offers
little comfort when there is no enforcement, or worse, as Juan Williams has commented, when the Reagan approach has been

... to narrow the entire civil rights policy debate to a zero-sum game in which blacks are trying to take away jobs and opportunity from whites. In that atmosphere there is little room for a middle ground. Blacks and whites are polarized. It is all too apparent that while Reagan's men speak in self-righteous tones about discrimination against hardworking whites and the need for blacks to do more to help themselves, these men have twisted the Civil Rights Commission into an advocacy group for the administration's position that helping blacks is reverse discrimination."

For all the verve the media suddenly showed in uncovering the racism behind the events of Howard Beach and Forsyth County, its surprise at these overt manifestations was a result of its own constructs—its failure to cover racism in the previous decade; its inability or unwillingness to distance from the "official" proclamations that were moving toward a "color blind" society. Additionally, using the New York and Georgia incidents as touchstones, served to allow racism to remain outside the institutions of power, including the media.

If the majority of press coverage of national race policies didn't exactly dovetail with the agenda of the Teflon president, neither did it offer dramatic protest. As importantly, by not relating evidence of continuing patterns of racial discrimination—from voting rights abuses to weaknesses in enforcement of civil rights statues—to the Reagan administration policies that encouraged them, the media effectively marginalized those forces challenging "official reality."

The story lies as much with the continued objectification of the communities of color, their images presented through mass media, as it does with who reports the news and what "sources" of information are used. As for the latter, the court victory by the black defendants in the New York Daily News case showed that it has much to do with the order of the media's own house. The general lack of discussion about discriminatory policies within media organizations points a critical finger at the "public trust" as much as any other perceived abuses.

Perhaps one of the clearest self criticisms was voiced recently by Ted Koppel, host of the ABC-TV "Nightline" program. On the April 6 show that featured the much-reported racist remarks of baseball executive Al Campanis, that there were few blacks in managerial or executive positions in professional baseball because they lacked "the necessities" to assume such work, an embarrassed Campanis tried to turn the tables on his interviewer. Asked how many black TV executives there were, Koppel answered,

"If you want me to tell you why there aren't any black executives, I'm not going to tell you why it's because the blacks aren't intelligent enough. I'm going to tell you that it's that whites have been running the establishment of broadcasting, just as they've been running the establishment of baseball for too long, and seem reluctant to give up power. I mean, that's what it finally boils down to, isn't it?"

The Federal Communications Commission, it should be noted, it currently reviewing its policy of granting preferences to women and minorities in station licensing, fearing that such a plan may not result in "diversity" and might prove "unconstitutional."

**The Bottom Line**

In addition to these aspects, we need to look as well at the economic terrain. Local and national media operations, we are constantly reminded, are businesses after all. And whether the process is hostile or friendly, they are increasingly being consumed into larger conglomerates. Any understanding of their power has to sift political opposition with corporate competitiveness. At present, 27 corporations control most of the American mass media. And, to add to that, one recent report cited, "many of today's media barons made their fortunes doing something else. Laurence Tisch of CBS controls a real estate empire and Lorillard, the country's fourth largest cigarette maker. General Electric, designer of nuclear power plants and much weaponry, now owns NBC."

Lest there be any misunderstanding of the interrelationships, the "daily diary of the American dream" (as the Wall St. Journal's ads tout) is ready to remind us of the ultimate
balance sheet:

There are huge costs to creating a persecutable class of citizens. More women and minority workers will be unfairly burdened by the "affirmative action" stigma at a time when many are making it on their own. Racial incidents in New York and Georgia and on several college campuses suggest that laws favoring minorities may help lead to tragic consequences.14

These areas begin to explain why, although coverage of race issues has increased massively this winter, the political spin on the coverage, most of which is more hidden than the Journal's, continued within already existing editorial biases.

We also need to ask why the Contrascam scandal has provided the media with a convenient "window" to enter the "Reagan Revolution" on news as well as op-ed pages, while the bankruptcy of a domestic policy that lies behind the reaction of Howard Beach and Forsyth County has not brought such a systemic critique. As in the split treatment of subway vigilante Bernhard Goetz, within the media the consensus on how to confront our racial history remains contested.

With the rise of the Right the very parameters of the debate have shifted immensely. Rarely are progressive or radical non-governmental opposition voices heard, even on the op-ed pages of the "liberal" press, while the likes of the Moral Majority's Cal Thomas can be seen regularly in The Boston Globe. While the president may be forced by trappings of office to join in commemoration of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, no such restrictions exist for the likes of nationally syndicated columnist William F. Buckley. Buckley's response to the media attention given the Howard Beach incident was typical:

It is simply not correct, the evidence of one's senses confirms, that race prejudice is increasing in America. How does one know this? Simple, by the ratings of Bill Cosby's television show and the sales of his books. A nation simply does not idolize members of a race that nation despises.15

While the Right argues that racism no longer exists, the neo-liberals are not very far behind. The New Republic would also proclaim that now is the time for self-help:

... to the extent that there has been some decline in the proportion of blacks in our elite colleges and universities, these activists would have us ascribe it to racism—rather than to the ongoing crisis in the ghetto that leaves more and more blacks less and less prepared to acquire the academic skills necessary to a gratifying and useful life.16

This theme was echoed in The New York Times, after its initial editorial on campus racism, with a followup entitled "Lost on Campus: Minority Momentum," that declared "minority youngsters too often defeat themselves."17 Thus, while problems are identified within the social fabric, the national paper of record is still free to boost the administration "bootstrap" theory as well. The refusal to accept any terms but white society's own, so evident in both pieces, stretched to interesting dimension as the Times evaluated black politics in New York City.

In "Blacks in New York: The Anguish of Political Failure," the paper observed that there is "general agreement that blacks are not represented in city government in a way that would reflect their numbers or voting power." Citing "politicians, scientists, pollsters and campaign organizers," the following reasons were listed for the "failure of blacks to unite and to enter the city's governing coalition:"

- A current absence of black leaders with wide appeal.
- An inability to rally Hispanic voters and white liberals in a supportive coalition. [Author's italics]
- Political infighting among blacks, a geographic dispersal and a considerable diversity in backgrounds.
- Difficulties in raising campaign funds and the dependence of at least some black politicians on patronage and services controlled by county political organizations and City Hall.18

It may be one thing to label Howard Beach, or a campus cross-burning as evidence of racism, but in examining the black community's political failures, one seems to only need to know how they fail themselves.

Even when "positive" angles are presented about black politics, it seems that news ac-
counts direct their efforts to “certifying” leaders and creating a rather narrow spectrum of “sources.” The rise in legitimacy of black conservatives in academia and as administration appointees is one area reinforced by the media. And it is difficult to view the current coverage and not think of Jesse Jackson. Thinking of present media attention to race issues as preparation for dealing with his presidential candidacy does not seem cynical. It should prove illuminating to see shifts in coverage now that Gary Hart has withdrawn. Some commentators have already reluctantly tagged Jackson as the frontrunner, but a number of recently released polls have begun including candidates who have shown no interest in running or have taken themselves out of consideration—as in the case of New York Governor Mario Cuomo. The double weight of Democratic Party presidential candidate and “black leader” has already produced some startling descriptions as the following phrases from a Washington Post profile of Jackson show:

“. . . President of Black America.”
“Hard-nosed politicos say the Rainbow exists mostly in Jackson’s mind.”
“‘He scares me a little,’ a prominent southern black official said. . . .”

“You’re saying that Jesse Jackson is a low life?” one of the authors asked. “That’s about it,” the man said.”

“But at Harvard, Jackson gives a masterful speech, for intellectuals anyway . . . his slang recedes, except when he cornrones it up . . .”

Other coverage, as in the Times article on black political leadership in New York, can vary. For example, the report cites the excitement in the black community over Jackson’s 1984 campaign: “no local candidate has generated the interest Mr. Jackson produced to reverse historically low levels of registration and turnout among black voters.” The paper, which of course has much to say about the certifying of such leadership, did not let a Jan. 28 Jackson op-ed piece on Howard Beach slip by without comment. In his statement, Jackson spoke of Howard Beach and Harlem as “two sides of the same coin, a coin devalued by Reaganomics.” He was scolded in a Feb. 2 “Editorial Notebook” by Diane Camper for “shrewd” electoral posturing and for obscuring “the central racial character of these incidents.” “Inability to rally Hispanic voters and white liberals in a supportive coalition” apparently is relative.

Two other examples show that identifying leadership and strategy stretch beyond even Jackson. When editorializing on the “new campus racism,” the Times intoned, “Civil rights leaders correctly point to the Reagan administration’s indifference or even hostility to black concerns. Administration leaders rarely speak out strongly against racist acts.” Less than six weeks later, despite the fact that the president still had not met with black leaders or congressional representatives in his six years in office, the paper ran a center front page article on his address to all-black Tuskegee University in Alabama. PRESIDENT OFFERS VIEW OF PROGRESS BY BLACKS IN THE U.S. read the headline. Dissident views again are contrasted to official reality.

The Great Fear

In a news analysis entitled “Marching on Racism: Practical or Passe?” the Times carried the contrasts to debates on strategy. The article announced that “civil rights experts” were “questioning whether the methods that defeated institutional racism in the 1950s and 60s can prevail against the more subtle racism of the 1980s.” So subtle was the 1980s’ racism that it had prompted the paper to run a multipart series on New York’s racial situation, racism in professional sports, and racial tensions in various metropolitan area schools and neighborhoods. In the 60s, the article offered, the “demands were clear . . . the target was Congress, the courts and the White House.” But beneath the “debate,” the real fear emerges. The writer reported a worry, among black leaders, that a lack of clear-cut strategy had “left their nonviolent approach . . . open to criticism from those who feel more direct confrontation is needed.” With no mainstream movement to manipulate, the bogey of angry, violent protesters is raised. It is a picture that does not stray far from the fear of “black criminals” that is often raised in media crime reports.
Three weeks later Police Commissioner Benjamin Ward, in an interview published on the first page of the Times Metro section, offered the paper what it had been searching for. He worried that unresolved tensions over Howard Beach, the Goetz trial, and police acquittals in recent deaths of blacks would fuel a "long, hot summer." For the sensational tabloid New York Post, that line was already crossed. Editorializing on the "Day of Outrage" march shortly after Howard Beach, the largest black protest in quite a few years, which had wound its way through midtown Manhattan, the Post denounced the marchers as "Mau, Mau." So deep has the Reagan worldview seeped into media consciousness about race that it is fairly common to see contradictory and bizarre comments carried within short news items and investigatory reports alike. In the conclusion to a two page report on housing patterns in the city, the Times quoted a resident of an all-white neighborhood, "I don't think people here see prejudice as a cancer, but as a way of maintaining the status quo." In a short item on the arrest of one of the Howard Beach defendants on assault charges in an unrelated incident, the story quoted the man's mother, "It's disgraceful, it's just a case of reverse discrimination."

In the midst of the current national attention, the curious relationship of race, media, and politics in Boston offers another revealing window. A little more than a decade ago the city's turmoil over school desegregation recast its reputation as the "Athens of America" into the "Little Rock of the North." That history, much to the dismay of the current city administration and its major newspaper, The Boston Globe, remains a touchstone for the present national turbulence. One of the first New York Times reports on the January 17 attack in Forsyth County described it as "the most violent incident of its type since mid-1970s Boston." And as coverage in local and national press revealed, it was a 1983 Boston case that provided the Howard Beach special prosecutor with the model to break the impasse and push indictments of the white youths charged in that incident. In the case of the Boston attack, several white youths beat and chased a black
man onto nearby subway tracks where he was struck and killed by an oncoming train.

From its anti-colonialist heyday in the late 1700s, through its experience as the Northern center for the anti-slavery Abolitionists in the mid 1800s, Boston has held a reputation as the moral and political conscience of this nation. When racial violence erupted in opposition to the city's school desegregation in the mid 1970s, images of hate and violence on Boston's streets became international news. In 1983, international attention returned as community and political activist Mel King's "Rainbow" campaign for mayor brought him through a victory in the preliminary to the final election—the first black to reach that level in the city's history. To many in the media, that election signaled a "turning of the corner" on the city's recent racial turmoil. Despite the fact that white populist Ray Flynn, a former antibusing leader from South Boston, was overwhelmingly elected in the final (with 80% of the white vote and four percent of the black), commentators pictured the campaign as "issues-oriented," with a mutual repudiation by both candidates of the previous decades' bigotry.

Both the capital city's mayor and the state's governor, Michael Dukakis, are riding the rebirth of Boston to a national political stage. Dukakis is among the frontrunners for the Democratic presidential nomination (placing behind Jesse Jackson in most polls). Flynn has shuttled around the country touting the city's rejuvenation, and even addressed the Jan. 24 civil rights rally in Cummings, Georgia. But, as is the case nationally, there is an underside to the local miracle that has seen this city rise to the top of the national housing market and become a booming center for high tech and service industries. As the city moves closer to predictions of a Third World majority among its residents by the turn of the century, its communities of color are experiencing the highest infant mortality rate in the US, an increasing re-segregation of their public school system, and an unrelenting pattern of discrimination and violence.

The second part of this article will detail the media's role in coverage of black and Third World community activism, of minority political candidates, and its active role in opposition to community efforts to control development.

John Demeter is a member of the editorial board of Radical America. He was the media coordinator for the Mel King campaign during the Eighth Congressional District race in 1986 and is currently researching material on US media and racism.

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FOOTNOTES

1. "Distrust of Reagan Shown in Poll" New York Times May 8, 1987. In discussing the results of a CBS News/New York Times poll on public reaction to the Iran/Contra scandal, significant percentages of respondents were cited as displaying an increasing distrust of the president and an increasing sense that the media was "overplaying" reports of the investigation.

2. "Campaign On Behalf of Free Press," New York Times April 28, 1987. As Philip H. Dougherty's "Advertising" column revealed, the ad campaign will use the examples of exposing Marcos' corruption in the Philippines, the press' clarifying of Chernobyl, the exposing of Austrian President Kurt Waldheim's past and the reporting of the Challenger defects. For the role of US media and reporting of events in the Philippines, see Frank Brodhead's article in Vol. 20, No. 1 of Radical America.


The second part of this article will refer to the study and media reaction to it. The study discusses differences in reporting of news from Boston's black community in white and black media and concludes, on the basis of a one-month sampling, that 85 percent of the major media's articles reinforced stereotypes about blacks.


14. Reported in Geoffrey Stokes' "Press Clips" column, Village Voice April 7, 1987. Excerpt is from an editorial opposing the recent Supreme Court decision on affirmative action for women and minorities.


21. See footnote 5.


24. The specific incidents referred to were the acquittal of New York Transit police in the beating death of Michael Stewart following his arrest for painting graffiti in a Brooklyn subway station, and the acquittal of a police officer in the shotgun killing of Eleanor Bumpers during an eviction.

25. Quoted in Thulani Davis and Tom Robbins "Day of Outrage: The Face of a New Black Power" Village Voice Feb. 3, 1987. The authors describe a key aspect of the local black mobilization—its young, nationalist character, and a grassroots leadership beyond the "recognized" black officials the media feels it "understands." For its part, the New York Times has incorporated similar sentiments. See "Black Extremists and Howard Beach" by Michael Myers (an Op-Ed piece) which blames black "extremists" for jeopardizing the rejuvenation of "a multiracial civil rights movement." (author's ital.) Jan. 13, 1987. In "Violence Against Blacks Spotlights Racial Strife" by Samuel Freedman on Jan 2, 1987, the article leads with an account of blacks cheering Larry Davis, accused of wounding six police officers, with chants of "Lar-ry, Lar-ry" as he was being taken into custody "the way they might [cheer] a boxer stepping into the ring."


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ANTI-RACISTS AND OTHER DEMONS:
The press and ideology in Thatcher’s Britain

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Nancy Murray

Ever since Member of Parliament Enoch Powell went on the offensive against Britain’s black population in the 1960s, the press has given his forays inordinate attention. The xenophobic fears and racist stereotypes which constitute “Powellism”—seeing black people in terms of an alien influx which has violated the deepest instincts of a formerly homogeneous people—had become part of a press-created “common sense” about race long before Margaret Thatcher gave them political respectability in her “swamping” speech of January 1978.¹ Since then, Powell’s racial interpretation of the nation, with its imagined unity and Burkean reverence for tradition, as well as his supposition that it is “natural” to want to be with one’s “own kind” and protect home territory from the incursions of strangers, have found a home in the range of national papers, in the polite prose of the Guardian as well as the virulent right-wing gutter press.

But three years after the Falklands War quite a specific aspect of Powellism has been systematically taken up by most sections of the press.² In his notorious “River Tiber” speech of April 20, 1968, and again, two years later in his Birmingham election speech of June 13, when he sounded the alarm against Britain’s “enemies within,” Powell had targeted a dangerous, aggressive minority of “immigrants” and their supporters, who were

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determined to “consolidate their members, to agitate and campaign against their fellow citizens, to overawe and dominate the rest”—leaving “the rest,” the white majority, without a sense of who they are, and what is their rightful heritage. By the mid 1980s this “dangerous minority” who sought to oppress the majority had been given a new name: they were the “anti-racists,” a catch-all term applied to any person or group who sought to combat the racist practices of white society, or who embraced the pluralist creed of “multiculturalism” in the hope that cultural pluralism was, in itself, an antidote to racism. For the past two years anti-racism and cultural pluralism have been the objects of an organized press offensive, culminating in the revelation that racism is something which black people inflict on white. In the process, an unashamedly racist “white culturalism” has been summoned forth, as if in this way the sickly national “rebirth” which took place in the South Atlantic could be indefinitely prolonged.

Monetarism has not only failed to provide a clinical solution to the pathology of social democracy but, with its deepening of social divisions, and acceleration of economic decline, it has come to seem a massive self-inflicted wound. The Falklands magic has faded, and it is becoming more difficult for the press to portray Margaret Thatcher as a resolute leader, clothed in Churchillian robes, who alone could arrest national decline and make the country “great” again. As a sign of their increasing desperation, Tory image-makers at the recent Party conference urged the media to improve their “presentation” as the only way to shore up an ailing ideology.*

The media are therefore expected to provide what the government cannot deliver: convincing reasons why Thatcherism is on course, proof “that the long years of retreat and self-doubt are over.” The government is relying on the media to “market” not only specific policies, but the Thatcherite world view, with its dichotomies of good and evil, productive and non-productive, law-abiding and criminal. According to the new style of “conviction politics,” the government does not merely govern, but—animated by the spirit of British nationalism “which has fired her for generations past”—it wages a regenerative war for the nation’s moral well-being and economic salvation, and stands between the people and the prospect of naked lawlessness represented by the Labour Party. The media played a crucial role in the vanquishing of the “external enemy” in the South Atlantic and in Thatcher’s re-election: its continued support is essential if the loyal troops are to be kept in line and the battle against the “enemy within” to be fought and won.*

In 1970 Powell had envisaged a two-pronged attack in the internal “battle of Britain”—mounted, on the one hand, by those disruptive elements which used “organized disorder” to undermine the morale of the police and the authority of the state and, on the

*The current buoyancy of the Tories in the polls reflects the success of the press in discrediting the alleged “loony leftism” of the Labour Party. So blatant has the smear campaign become that it has even been found worthy of mention by the Boston Globe’s editorial column (See “Loonier-than-thou campaign”, January 23, 1987).
other, by the dangerous, indoctrinating minority. By the mid 1980s Powell’s war had become Thatcher’s: his oppressed majority was preyed upon by the ever enlarging ranks of the enemy within, and her press gendarmes had taken the offensive. On the other side were all the forces which weakened the body politic, and had to be contained by the law-and-order state—the criminals and hooligans, the scroungers and feckless unemployed, trade unionists and Labour Party activists, striking miners and peace campaigners, Greenham women and women wanting abortions, permissive parents and subversive teachers, anti-racists and urban rioters, left-wing extremists and professional agitators. And in the front line, where Powell had placed it, was “race” with all its Powellite overtones: exploited to infuse the people with a sense of national identity and patriotism, and to create the climate in which the Tories would appear the sole and necessary defenders of the nation.

**Thatcher’s Press Cadres**

During the Thatcher years, the political spectrum of the daily press, for some time the narrowest in western Europe, has contracted still further, with only the Mirror and the Guardian opposing the Tories (some of the time). This narrow political spectrum is one consequence of the most concentrated press ownership in the West: four large conglomerates produce four-fifths of the daily output of nearly fifteen million papers, and most of the Sunday papers. Competition for the 80 per cent of the population who read a paper every day has more to do with style, pitch and marketing gimmicks, than with genuine differences of outlook. Among the tabloids, United’s Express (with sales of just over 2 million) and Star (selling half that) compete for midmarket and working class readers with Associated’s Mail (at nearly 2 million), Maxwell’s Mirror (3 million and shrinking) and Murdoch’s Sun (with a daily circulation of 4 million, the largest selling paper in the West—and nearly 3 times the size of the largest daily in the U.S.). The “quality” papers compete for different age groups among the middle and upper classes, with Murdoch’s The Times (less than half a million) catering to the young professionals and businessmen, the Telegraph the old (with sales of a million, it was recently purchased by the Canadian Conrad Black) and the Financial Times the more “enlightened” capitalists, while the Guardian has its “liberal” market of half a million readers all to itself.

Since the “New Right” began to consolidate itself in the early 1970s, the press has been a major platform for the propagation of its views. Considerable cross and vertical fertilization has been provided by committed right-wing journalists and freelance writers, whose natural haunts are the quality papers—The Times and the Telegraph—but who are willing to “slum it” for the sake of reaching the people. Few are as omnipresent as the self-proclaimed “West Indian expert,” Roy Kerridge. But several columnists have over the past few years significantly lengthened their reach as the Right has grown in self-assurance, with the Birkbeck College philosophy don Roger Scruton and associate editor of The Times Ronald Butt writing mostly for The Times, but also, on occasion, for the Mail; the right wing convert Party, to which it lends support. In the last few months its retreat toward the center has become more pronounced, largely in reaction to the success of a new up-market paper, Whitton Smith’s Independent, in wooing disaffected Times, Telegraph and Guardian readers. A radical popular publication does wait in the wings—the News on Sunday, put together with local Council pension funds and trade union support, and due out this spring. But its pre-launch gestation has been marred by bitter dissension about the sort of paper it should become. The circulation figures given here pre-date the appearance of the London Daily News and the Independent, as does the analysis which follows.
Paul Johnson writing mostly for the *Mail*, but also for the *Sun*; the Bristol University Professor of History John Vincent writing mostly for the *Sun*, but also for *The Times*, and so on.

Outside the Fleet Street circuit, many of these journalists hatch their ideas in the same think-tanks that have been responsible for the ideological thrust behind Thatcherism. The social authoritarian citadel of Peterhouse College, Cambridge, has provided intellectual inspiration for Scruton, Johnson, Peregrine Worsthorne, deputy editor of the *Sunday Telegraph*, and George Gale of the *Daily Express*, as well as for the Salisbury Group (formed in 1977) and the journal which came out of it, Scruton’s *Salisbury Review*. Scruton was also a founding member of the Conservative Philosophy Group (1975) which has invited Powell, Johnson, Butt, the *Telegraph’s* assistant editor, T.E. Utley, and the prime minister herself to share in its deliberations. Other journalists—like the *Telegraph’s* Alfred Sherman, once director of the Centre for Policy Studies (a leading resource centre of the New Right), and freelance educationalist Baroness Caroline Cox—tend on certain issues to inhabit the libertarian end of the new right philosophical spectrum. Still others who align themselves to the right are, like Honor Tracy, natural Powellites, who claim to give voice to the “instincts” of the people.

But whether or not they share a coherent right wing outlook, these journalists, and the editors and sub-editors who solicit and process their material, have all been instrumental in molding a version of reality which reflects the shifting Thatcherite amalgam of “free enterprise” individualism, social discipline and coercion. And what—given its abysmal economic record, and its failure to build up new institutional links with its working-class and petit-bourgeois supporters—could be more important to the Tory Party than a collaborative press which has applauded it for breaking the welfare consensus, which has assisted it in facing down the miners’ Scargill and left wing local authorities; which has given shape to Tory preoccupation with politicisation in schools, permissiveness in families and criminals in the streets; which has helped create the climate for vigorous new policing methods; and which has inflated the word “hooligan” and “subversive” to include just about anyone who does not see things its way?

**The Press Campaign against Anti-Racism**

Over the years, the papers have created a magnetic field around the terrain of race, being attracted and repelled by the same ideas, stereotypes and issues. But recently there are signs that such a general concurrence has been supplemented by some element of design, as papers have merged in the common intention to debunk anti-racism. Editors select their targets, send journalists to research their stories, and then withhold publication until the timing is right in campaigning terms. Once one paper...
publishes a “race” story, no matter how trivial, others are likely to follow the same trail. And so the same “news” item (often of no readily apparent news value) and accompanying feature can be run in different papers, sometimes under the same byline, sometimes not.

In the case of Paul Johnson’s nearly full page report of plans by various Labour councils to change street names in order to commemorate blacks and “class warfare,” the original Mail story appeared virtually intact in the Sun the following day under Johnson’s name. But a day after a Mail exposé of “the torrent of lies and twisted truths that is indoctrinating our society today”—a nearly two page attack on a cartoon book produced by the Institute of Race Relations and a video on policing produced by the Greater London Council—the Telegraph came out with its own report on the book and video. On occasion, a feature (or even a letter) in one paper has become the subject of a leader in another—an instance being the Mail’s prominent center page “success story” following the Brixton “riot” of 1985. The Mail’s story focused on a black manager of a clothing shop in Brixton, who demonstrated “how to succeed in Britain whatever your color”—with drive, determination and the refusal to be intimidated by young black shoplifters. In a Sun lead story the following day, the Mail article was quoted to show that “Britain is still a land of opportunity” and black people “shouldn’t blame their problems on their colour but ‘try, try again’ and you will be successful.”

It is no coincidence that, in all these examples, it is the Mail which has been first with the story. If different papers give their own imprint to presentations of race, from the “respectable racism” and lofty argument offered up by The Times and Telegraph at one end of the social spectrum, to the pandering to prejudice by the Star and Sun at the other, the Mail occupies a central, and uniquely important, position in the market. It is the only daily paper which sells to all social groups, but addresses itself particularly to the key Thatcherite constituency, the lower middle class. Under its editor, Sir David English (knighthed by this government), and its committed band of subeditors, the Mail has spearheaded the assault on the “enemies within,” regularly devoting its combined lead and feature page and much of its “news” to those topics beloved of the New Right: the “loony left,” law and order, indoctrination in schools, the menace of anti-racism. Claiming a readership of over five million (it sells nearly two million copies a day), the Mail

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RACISM IN BRITAIN: AN INTRODUCTION

There have been Africans in Britain for nearly 2,000 years and black communities for 200 years. The recent period of substantial immigration dates from 1948, when the state's solution to the post-war labor shortage was to encourage the able-bodied in its colonies and former colonies in the Caribbean and Indian sub-continent to "come home" to Mother England. Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, already British citizens by virtue of the 1948 Nationality Act, were recruited to rebuild Britain's war-torn housing and roads, to work in the factories and hospitals and on the buses, and to live in conditions dictated by the (unofficial) color bar.

A decade later, the labor shortage was at an end, and so was the official welcome. Anti-black riots occurred in Nottingham and various parts of London in 1958, with sections of the press inflaming the situation and demanding an end to immigration. From 1962, a series of immigration acts were passed (by Tories and Labour alike) which openly discriminated on racial grounds, ending primary immigration from the (black) New Commonwealth, making it difficult—and finally, virtually impossible—for relatives to join those already legally in Britain, and creating different categories of citizenship which made British nationality worthless for many black passport holders. Racism was thus institutionalized in the power structures of the state, with the police, immigration officials and courts, as well as the education, welfare, health services and media reinforced in their racism by Parliament and the force of law.

In the 1964 general election, Peter Griffiths, the Tory candidate for Smethwick, told voters "if you want a nigger neighbor, vote Labour." He won. Within four years Enoch Powell, the Tory MP for Wolverhampton, was to outdo Griffiths in racist demagoguery, prophesying that rivers would foam with blood and old English ladies would find excrement pushed through their letter boxes unless immigration were reversed.

From his early inflammatory speeches until the present, Powell—considered the 'race expert' in Britain—has been fawned upon by the media. Following Powell's rhetorical lead, sections of the press during the 1970s became adept at conjuring up 'floods of immigrants,' engulfing neighborhoods and overwhelming the hard-pressed taxpayer with incessant demands for welfare handouts—all of this at a time when immigration regulations increasingly prevented black people from settling in (and even visiting) Britain. Britain, the press proclaimed, was in danger of being 'swamped.' The 'swamping' of banner headlines meant numbers of blacks (too many) and influx (potentially unending). Politicians who evoked 'swamping' promised to hunt down 'illegal' immigrants (the term 'immigrant' had been extended to the second generation) and to encourage black citizens, including those born in the country, to leave. Meanwhile, on the fringes the National Front and other fascist groups took it upon themselves to make things so bad for black Britons where they lived, worked and travelled that they would want to "go home".

How can one understand the upsurge in popular racism of the last twenty years? During the 1970s and 80s 'race' became a particular focus of social fears as the state, with press support, took on increasingly authoritarian functions in order to deal with a wide range of perceived threats to the "British way of life"—economic breakdown, "permissiveness", working-class militancy and political "extremism", Northern Ireland and "terrorism", immigration and "black crime". The imagined problem of "too many blacks" was compounded by the naturalization in Britain of the American-style "black mugger"—a bogey whose existence was "confirmed" in March 1976 when the Metropolitan police of London first issued highly dubious "mugging" statistics on a wave.

of media publicity. Thereafter, race and crime news were steadily to converge, as sensational images of a menacing ‘black criminality’ were manipulated by the press to prepare public opinion for more vigorous forms of policing and to deepen divisions within the working class. The effect on the ground of the race-numbers-crime mixture, especially when served up by Enoch Powell with full press orchestration at a time of growing working-class impoverishment, has been nothing short of murderous.

Some three million black people now inhabit the inner city wastelands of Thatcher’s Britain. In London, Liverpool, Birmingham, Leicester, Leeds, Cardiff and other cities where industry once flourished, they continue to have the worst of everything—the least desirable housing, education and jobs, the highest rate of unemployment (more than twice that of whites, when overall unemployment hovers at 13 per cent), and the ever-present danger of harassment or assault by racist thugs on the streets and by their counterparts in the police force.

Black people in Britain have long organized to defend their communities and fight for working class interests, as A. Sivanandan has demonstrated in his seminal history of black protest. Indeed, the very term ‘black’ has been used by Asians and Afro-Caribbeans as a political color, signifying their common struggle against racism and exploitation. In 1981, and again in 1985, protest became explosive, as black youth around the country took to the streets in revolt. In Sivanandan’s words, the youth have been “kept out of work and indeed of society by the dictates of institutionalized racism. And so they take nothing as given, everything is up for question, everything is up for change: capitalist values, capitalist mores, capitalist society. And their struggles find a resonance in the struggle of the unemployed white youth and the cities burst aflame.”

The image of Britain burning inspired the government and the popular press to seek explanations everywhere but in the stark facts of racism and inner city distress, and remedies in an increasingly militarized police and the dismantling of civil liberties. If Thatcher does succeed in winning a third term of office, the role of the press in legitimating the emerging ‘law and order’ society—at the expense of black people—will deserve much of the credit.

Footnotes


2. A. Sivanandan, From Resistance to Rebellion, Race & Class pamphlet No. 10. Available from the Institute of Race Relations, 2-6 Leake Street, London WC1, UK for $3.00. The Institute has made this text the basis of the first pictorial history of Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, The Fight Against Racism. It is the fourth in a series of educational pamphlets for young people, which include Roots of Racism, Patterns of Racism and a cartoon book, How Racism came to Britain. All are available from the Institute of Race Relations.

has made intelligible to the many what Scruton and Butt have pitched at the discerning few. Its tone is self-righteous and partisan; it makes no attempt to project an aloof objectivity. Thus, when Scruton wrote on education for the Mail, his article was decorated with scurrilous headlines and sub-heads and an array of hammer-and-sickle emblems—removing him from the “above-the-fray” pose that The Times had vested him with.¹³

The Mail has pioneered a number of techniques to make its stand on race (and more recently, anti-racism) an effective campaigning tool. At its most blatant, it has resorted to pure invention, presented with maximum effect, in order to herald or influence a change in government policy. Such was its “One in five babies in Britain are coloured” front-page revelation, which it later admitted had no basis in fact.¹⁴ Again, in its “Scandal of the brides for sale,” the Mail offered no evidence even when challenged for its front-page exclusive (plus accompanying feature and leader) about young teenage girls of Asian descent being “sold” by their parents to strangers seeking UK citizenship.¹⁵

The Mail has at other times relied on repetition to convince the public of the “truth,” running consecutive articles around the same theme, and getting well-known campaigners of the right either to write them or offer their byline. Repeatedly it has given prominence to black people who are willing to deny that racism is an issue in their lives, or to complain of the effects of “positive discrimination.” It has, without legal restraint, conducted its own judicial inquiries, and in one notorious instance claimed to “solve” a crime which the black community had (mistakenly, in the Mail’s view) laid at the door of white racism.¹⁶ And it has not hesitated to use its influence with the Home Office in order to get across its opinion about the type of black people wanted in Britain—such as the hard-working, middle class, Roman Catholic Pereiras, who had a flattering image of all things British, and who had become success of things in their rural Conservative stronghold that the father of the family had once played Father Christmas to village children.¹⁷

The Mail has, it seems, appropriated and further debased the role of “Crusader” which Lord Beaverbrook had carved out for the Daily Express—still its closest mid-market rival, whose editor was also knighted by the Thatcher government. This is not to say that the Express has failed to play a part in the current campaign against anti-racism and cultural pluralism: on the contrary, its regular columnist George Gale has, for eight years at least, argued that the “society which was Britain never wanted to become multi-racial, and it does not want to now” and claimed that race relations legislation was designed “to frustrate the determination of the British people to retain their own identity.”¹⁸

Gale and his editors have long been open admirers of Powell; their paper, the Sunday Express, was the platform for one of his earliest utterances on race (“Can we afford to let our race problem explode?”)¹⁹ and his recent post-Handsworth “I told you so.”²⁰ But, Gale apart, the Express is not—like the Telegraph,
Times and Mail—a favored locale of well-known new right "race" specialists, and it has tended to be more of a joiner than an innovator—but a joiner which can be even more vehement in expressing its views on race than the race-mongering Sun.

Legitimating Racism

What the Sun dispenses at one end of the social scale, its stablemate The Times legitimates at the other—or, to put it differently, it is because of the legitimation given to Powellism by the Telegraph and The Times that the virulent racism of the tabloids is tolerated—and even encouraged. For years, sections of the upmarket press have filed Powell's conceits as "facts" which could be drawn upon for "think pieces" about society. During this time, the Butts, Worsthorne, Shermans and nameless leader writers have filtered reality through Powellism, giving it the ruling-class imprimatur. While the yellow press has alerted the people to the incoming "floods" of immigrants, and the terror of black crime on the streets, the quality press has given such "scare" the stamp of respectability and the weight of truth, and erected the framework (Britain as a just, tolerant, formerly homogeneous society) within which race was to be discussed. The quality press has accepted that "natural fears" connected with the black presence are fully justifiable: the incoming numbers are too many, and mugging is "an activity of young black men." But for journalists of the Right, flexing their muscles in the mid 1970s, the media clamour about immigration and crime was not enough. Butt, Andrew Alexander ("The time has come to make a stand in favour of racialism"), Worsthorne, Sherman and Utley maintained that there was a "conspiracy of silence" about race, imposed by the old liberal establishment in collusion with various pressure groups, race relations advisers, like-minded media workers, churchmen and educators who were seeking to suppress open discussion about the "problem" of black people in order to establish their "moral ascendancy" over the gagged population—an old idea of Powell's. As Thatcher promised to break the welfare consensus, these journalists took it upon themselves to break the so-called "silence" and the "moral ascendancy" which kept all aspects of race from being discussed. There was to be an open season on black people.

With Thatcher's "swamping" speech and her coming to power the following year, the press fanned anticipations that at last something significant would be done to satisfy the people whose "instincts" had been violated by the black "influx." The press egged on the government to make it highly unpleasant, if not impossible, for black dependants to join their relatives in Britain, and at the same time colluded with police in the on-going criminalization of black youth and with Tory Party indifference to rising racial violence in the inner cities."21

Thatcher's re-election on a wave of nostalgia for past greatness and xenophobia has imparted a kinetic energy to racist ideology, which has expanded to colonize ground disputed by one or other of the "enemies within." The campaign against anti-racism has had two overlapping phases: in the first, the battleground has been the anti-racist initiatives of Labour-led local councils; the "enemy"—the white extremists and their black allies or (more generally) pawns; the goal—the exoneration of white culture. In the second, the campaign has broadened out to include two new fields of battle—the schools and inner cities—and the press has become more relentless in pushing forward the attack. The New Right's intertemporal, at time almost apocalyptic, denunciations of anti-

Logo for Greater London Council (GLC) year long anti-racist campaign.
racism have moved from the columns of the quality press into lead and feature pages of the tabloids, with the papers warning their readers that they are facing the threat of cultural annihilation: white extremists and their allies, the “black racists,” have mounted a “reign of terror” over the white population en route to their goal of total domination.

**Discrediting Anti-Racist Initiatives**

The catalyst for the offensive against anti-racism was the proclamation by the Labour-led Greater London Council of 1984-5 as Anti-Racist Year, and the decision by other Labour-controlled local authorities to make the fight against racism a political and ideological priority. In its eagerness to discredit simultaneously both the cause of anti-racism and the Left, the press has widened the parameters of what constitutes news. During Anti-Racist Year and since then, anything, no matter how trite, ephemeral or false, could become fodder in the press campaign, as Labour councils, as Thatcher led the campaign to abolish them, were portrayed as nests of extremists who were simply using black people for their own political ends—for their votes, their support in anti-abolition and anti-rate-capping campaigns, or simply to get some ideological mileage on Toryism.24

Ridicule was one method which the press employed against cosmetic or purely symbolic gestures proposed by councils, or alleged to be in the making. For instance, over fifty articles criticizing the Left—some a full-page long—appeared in the national and regional press when there was an alleged leak from Lambeth Council that it was about to ban its road safety symbol, Tufty the Squirrel, on the grounds that it was both “racist and sexist.” The fact that the story was bogus did not deter the papers, which found Tufty irresistible—what respectable member of the working class would support a party which purged racist squirrels?

Other anti-racist initiatives were discredited as the undemocratic proposals of “tin-pot dictators” who “can’t see further than their own slogans.”25 When Lambeth Council announced that, as part of Anti-Racist Year, it was considering changing the name of Rhodesia Road to Zimbabwe Road, the Mail rounded up the residents of the street and had them photographed, with a black woman prominently in front, demonstrating their united opposition to the change. This, and subsequent proposed name changes, attracted press attention not only from staff reporters, but also from right wing heavies like Paul Johnson.26

The facts were often at a premium. In early September 1985, for instance, the Sun, Mirror, Star and Express all pounced on the “news” that Hackney council was about to change the name of Britannia Walk to Shaheed-E-Azam Bhagot Singh Avenue (“Britannia no longer rules the waves in a left wing council borough . . . But local Cockneys—who are likely to be OUTNUMBERED by immigrants within 10 years—are furious. ‘They’re making us foreigners in our own country.’”)27 In fact, Bhagot Singh’s was one of forty possible names being considered for a new portion of road: Britannia Walk’s future was not in jeopardy. But the press took what it wanted from a council leak, seeing a sinister design (as well as left wing comedy) in the proposal to name a street after a “notorious revolutionary who was hanged for murdering British soldiers.”28

During Anti-Racist Year, and since it has drawn to a close, any attempt to look at British history, culture and institutions from the black perspective has brought the press on to the offensive, exonerating British society from imputations of racism, and reaffirming British values and “way of life.” Consider the press
reaction to a campaign against that embodiment of racist culture, the gollywog. Over 200 articles have been written about the Robertson's Jam caricature, and with only a handful of exceptions, these have either indigantly defended this “nursery room character . . . much loved by generations of true English children” or have ridiculed the campaign, with the Mail getting black people to put the boot in. As far as the press was concerned, the post-Falklands public should be able to cuddle this nostalgic symbol of imperial rule with impunity. And is it fanciful to suppose that at least part of the reason for the press determination to keep this racist emblem where it belonged—on jam jars, in story books (the “bad” doll among the good), infantilized, in the arms of children—was the fear that black people were getting out of hand with their complaints about racism? The symbol was ‘lovable’, like Little Black Sambo (also under attack by ‘dismal fanatics’31) and like the ‘affectionate description’32 “Nig Nog.”

If the press was determined to defeat anti-racist attacks on the ideological manifestations of racism, it was equally concerned to expose the “favoritism” practised by those councils which encouraged black people to apply for certain jobs or training schemes, and funded various “ethnic” projects. Inflammatory headlines in the local and popular press informed white people that they were being “victimized” by “positive discrimination,” and that black people (like women and gays) were fattening off the rates. The Mail referred to the council practice of “anti-whites’ racism”33 and was quick to point out that it hadn’t worked in America.34 Something as seemingly insignificant as a council leaflet advertising evening science courses for “mature students from black ethnic groups” was thought deserving of the full Mail treatment—a black person was trotted out to denounce it on the grounds that “positive discrimination and enforced segregation cause bitterness between people.”35

This “enforced segregation” had another name—apartheid. With easy cynicism, New Right ideologues denounced black organization and the black fight against racism as a move towards apartheid, while considering South Africa—in Roger Scruton’s words—as Britain’s “natural friend.” “It is probably true that blacks enjoy greater freedom, greater prosperity, greater opportunity and greater peace in South Africa than in most neighboring countries.”36 Roy Kerridge’s attack on proposals that black children be fostered, if possible, by black families is a good example of the inversion of terms and meanings employed by the right:

Why do black people demand apartheid? The answer is that the new guerilla fighters are . . . the black equivalent of those Trotskyites who falsely claim to represent the working man . . . Anti-Racist Year, an encouragement to those whose interests lie in a racial power structure, seems to have set the seal of officialdom on a black movement that is essentially no different from the National Front.”

Here, Kerridge has conflated anti-racism with the revolutionary Left, and—in the next
breath—with the fascist Right. Anti-racism has nothing to do with justice—it is all about power. Blacks ("the new guerilla fighters") were plotting to use totalitarian methods to dominate and oppress the white population. The implication is that in this "New Apartheid" (as he called it), they would be at the top, and the white ethnic group firmly submerged.

It was in the second phase of the campaign against anti-racism—with the targets subversion in schools and sedition in the streets—that the press has relied less on ridicule to make its point, and more on this type of insolent casuistry. Roger Scruton, perhaps the most artful of the new right pretenders to profundity, has used his *Times* columns to try out his historical and philosophical sleights of hand, comparing anti-racism with the Nazi movement in its methods and goal—a final solution. The anti-racists were "the real racists" who were terrorizing the white population. Such gerrymandering with words—blurring their meaning, and drawing up new definitions and political boundaries—was to become the stock-in-trade of the New Right. For Paul Johnson, for instance, the "race fanatics" formed a sinister inquisition in 'unconscious alliance' with the National Front: "each is parasitical on the other ... each needs the other to survive."

The decent majority were caught between these two extremes, but had more to fear from the new anti-racist "real racists" than from the old-style fascist racists. Totalitarian in intent, the anti-racists were medieval in method, hunting witches to burn and hauling heretics before their New Inquisition. Underlining this increasingly shrill press motif is an undeniable contempt for the people. Passive and unthinking, possessing only brute "instincts," the people can be mesmerized by the anti-racist indoctrinators. But if the bogey of the anti-racism is made menacing enough, they will, so the ideologues seem to believe, take fright, and allow themselves to be led back to the fastness of their national and cultural identity, the Tory Party.

**Taking the Offensive against Cultural Pluralism**

The danger was that the anti-racists (like the peace campaigners and women's movement) would get them young, in the schools. In the wake of the 1981 urban uprisings, Ronald Butt had drawn attention to the way dangerous pressure groups were at work in the classroom, peddling "black hatred of white society" in the
guise of anti-racism: it was this, and not racism and unemployment, which lay behind the burning of Brixton.41

Since the first Brixton uprising and the second in 1985, the subject of indoctrination in schools has been endowed with an almost McCarthyite fervor. Scruton (who has recently devoted no fewer than eight of his Times columns to politicisation in education42), former Tory whip Baroness Cox (advisor on education to Margaret Thatcher and the Mail), Worsthorne, Butt and Alexander, among others, have advanced "indoctrination" as a general explanation for deteriorating morale and standards in schools, leaving Tory policy blameless. By making the schools their chosen field of battle, right-wing journalists have been able to take on a number of the "enemies within" at once--permissive parents, feckless teachers reared on 1960s' pap, outright subversives--"an estimated minimum of 25,000 of our teachers are Marxists," according to one Mail writer43--and the pressure groups--black, gay, anti-sexist, peace, ecology--all with a "hidden curriculum" to get their political message across.

The Labour-controlled Inner London Education Authority had meanwhile imposed "anti-racist" guidelines on its schools, which--in the view of the Right--forced children to see racism where none existed, and taught them to despise their own history and heritage. And in London and elsewhere, schools had adopted "multicultural programmes" (or the trimmings of such programmes) which the right feared would lead to the indigenous "culture" being reduced to one of many, all getting equal treatment in the classroom.

It wasn't just the practice of multiculturalism, with its assumption of cultural pluralism, but the idea of it which was anathema to the Right. The press made certain that the much-reviled Swann Committee on the education of minority groups would in no way threaten the status quo; "leaks" of its proposals concerning "mother tongue" teaching in schools were savaged even before its report was released. Alfred Sherman feared the report would recommend "a procrustean pidgin culture to be imposed on majority and minorities alike." and deemed this a recipe for "cultural genocide," which "in effect outlawed the concept of the English nation."44 Mary Kenny thought the proposals would turn "mild British people into resentful misanthropes ... as they see everything native to their own tradition scuttled."45 Leader writers concurred, even when it became apparent that the Swann Committee had no intention of revolutionizing education, but instead proposed nothing more far-reaching than making morning assembly in schools more relevant to children from different backgrounds, and giving "minority languages" equal status with European. According to the Express, this meant that "British culture and value should no longer come first in the classroom,"46 while the Telegraph the previous day feared it would "lead only to great racial bitterness among the white population."

The Telegraph had to look no further than its own Honor Tracy to find that bitterness personified. Back in 1976 Tracy had announced that she was ready to go to jail in order to defy the Race Relations Board and defend the right of English people to live in their own country as they chose.47 Her response to Swann was to call for a white uprising against non-white domination--"our own new role will have to be that of native freedom fighters. We are not merely the people of the land, but trustees for those who come after us."48

It may seem tempting to consider Tracy as marginal, and of little importance--she did, after all, once use her Telegraph column to defend a fringe far-right organization.49 But this would be ignoring the increasing convergence in outlook between sections of the mainstream press and the far Right during the six years of Thatcherism. As far as the attack on anti-racism is concerned, there is not much to choose between the right-wing press and the far Right's Choice (motto: "racialism is patriotism"), the publication sponsored by Lady Birdwood (who marched with both the National Front and the British Movement in the 1970s, and spoke on a British National Party platform in 1983). In the spring 1985 edition of Choice, for instance, which is subtitled "For race and nation," there is an editorial proclaiming the anti-racists to be anti-British, as well as extracts from Scruton's Times column and various other national papers.
But a heroic native freedom-fighter was at hand—an exemplar for both the mainstream press and the fringes beyond—Ray Honeyford, the Bradford headmaster. Well over a thousand articles have appeared in the regional and national press about the man who defied the race inquisition, and dared to speak his mind, since Honeyford first publicly displayed his prejudices in the *Times Educational Supplement* and the *Salisbury Review.* Since then, parents at the Drummond Middle School have campaigned to have him sacked, while the press, by and large, has absolved him of racist sin, and pronounced him instead a martyr.

For Honeyford, it is whites who are at a disadvantage in schools like his which have a majority of black children, white children who are the victims of “racism.” They are forced to learn alongside children for whom English is a second language (“true of all Asian children”) and others “from homes where educational ambition and the values to support it are conspicuously absent (i.e., the vast majority of West Indian homes . . . ).” They were being taught “to denigrate the British Empire” and forced to read “Inglan is a Bitch” alongside Wordsworth and Shakespeare.

Their classes were constantly being interrupted when Asian parents took their children to India—“wildly and implacably” resenting “simple British requirements” of keeping attendance during the term. White victims endured all of this in silence until, that is, Ray Honeyford, the man on the spot, the former Labour supporter who at last saw the light, dared to say enough is enough.

If the first phase of the campaign against anti-racism was an attempt to exonerate British culture from the charges of racism, the second phase, fuelled by the Swann and Honeyford controversies, has sought to ensure British culture its “rightful” primacy of place in schools and society generally: this should not become a multicultural country. Over the past year there has been a steady flow of editorials and articles relating to the Honeyford case. The

**“Inglan is a Bitch”** is a poem/song by Reggae Dub poet and political activist Linton Kwesi Johnson.
victimization of Honeyford for his truth-telling, the plight of white children (and white values) in cities like Bradford, the threat to Britain’s cherished institutions, like freedom of speech and democracy, now under attack from the “hysterical political temperament of the Indian sub-continent” and home-grown extremism are some of the themes which the press has taken up, while denying finding “the remotest indications of racism” in Honeyford’s articles. Honeyford was, in this same Telegraph editorial, being persecuted for “the unpardonable sin of referring in public to racial problems where whites are the victims.” The Mail has taken a leaf from Scruton’s book, and characterized the campaign against Honeyford as the work of extremists who “prate of the evils of racism” and themselves “personify Fascism.” So successful has the media been in turning an obscure headmaster into a national hero and sage that the Prime Minister recently beckoned Honeyford to London, to give her the benefit of his advice on education.

For Tories swept into office by rekindled faith in “the nation that had built an Empire and ruled a quarter of the world,” Honeyford’s stand, and the ideological mileage which the press has got out of the campaign to oust him, could not be more timely. For since the election of 1983 the spirit of patriotism has seemed increasingly empty and directionless, and racism has moved in to fill the Falklands void. And so, editorials, features and letters to the press have warned the “indigenous” inhabitants of the threat to their history and traditions posed by anti-racism and other cultures—it might not be too late for that “Tory-led programme of positive assimilation based on a fervent faith in British superiority” which Peregrine Worsthorne had urged in the Sunday Telegraph in April 1981. Cultures were not all equal, and British people should not be cheated of their birthright. Why should they be expected to tolerate the fact that “ethnic groups” are “encouraged to maintain the selfsame culture, religion and lifestyles, etc, which failed to produce mass material prosperity back home while at the same time enjoying all the material benefits available here . . .” By 1985 the right-wing press was putting Britain’s black population, still called “immigrants,” on notice: assimilate, before the patience of the white majority runs out.

‘Black racists’ in the streets

It was within this context of a resurgent white culturalism that the press descended on Handsworth, Brixton and Tottenham, during the “riots” of 1985, and emerged to give that notice the force of an ultimatum:

Either they obey the laws of this land where they have taken up residence and accepted both the full rights and responsibilities of citizenship, or they must expect the fascist street agitators to call ever more boldly and with ever louder approval for them to ‘go back from whence they came.’

The press has (like the government) been reluctant to endorse Powell’s “solution” of repatriation—though happy to give it a blaze of publicity. By 1985 repatriation was both too late (too many blacks knew no other country) and impractical—impossible for a “law and order” government to set in motion without incurring an unacceptable level of disorder. But if repatriation was not publicly embraced, neither was it altogether shunned. Powell won praise in the Express for saying that the Handsworth

West Indian immigrants arrive, 1950s. Press Association.
“riot” showed repatriation was the only solution—he was, as ever, “doing the nation a service” by refusing to allow “the race problem” to be swept under the carpet. Shortly afterwards, the press made much of the statement by Tory MP Nicholas Fairbairn that “West Indians” were “lazy” and that they should either get to work or get out. (Within two weeks of the furor aroused by his remark, Fairbairn was writing a column in The Times; in defense of South Africa, the only country in Africa “where prosperity reigns.”)\(^{62}\)

When they were not paying heed to Powell or the likes of Fairbairn, the tabloids indulged in the most florid sort of Powellite—unsubstantiated anecdotes about what white people have endured from their black neighbors, all passed off as “fact.” Listen, for instance, to how Lynda Lee-Potter of the Mail described the white victims of “racism” in terms appropriated from the black experience:

> Elderly white people on the estates are abused, spat on, terrorised, called pigs and scum and every single authority has let them down. Politicians don’t make stirring speeches about them, police do little to protect them. Journalists don’t write about them . . .”\(^{64}\)

A week later she wrote another feature under the headline “Thank God you have written what we think”—again, reproducing scare stories, including one from a policeman complaining about “racial crime and law breaking.” Her message was that white people must speak up now—and overcome the “powerfully effective censorial campaign that’s brainwashed us all.”\(^{65}\)

What is most disturbing about the bulk of the press coverage of the 1985 “riots” and their aftermath—perhaps even more unsettling than the chronic misreporting, vicious stereotyping and refusal to give serious consideration to their causes—is the malignant animosity it reveals. Since September 1985 the yellow press has been indulging in its own form of racial violence, which complements (and encourages) the growing racial violence on the streets—about which has, with one temporary lapse, maintained a fairly steady indifference.\(^{66}\) From one end of the press spectrum to the other, racism has been redefined as something black aggressors practice against their white victims, with even the in, which rarely runs a leader which is more than a few column inches long, devoting its entire leader page to “the high price of telling the truth . . . We have tyranny and racism now . . . black racism.”\(^{67}\)

There are racists on the streets—black racists:

> Either they forgo (sic) the anarchic luxury of these orgies of arson, looting and murderous assaults against the men and women whose task it is to uphold the laws of this land or they will provoke a paramilitary reaction unknown to mainland Britain.”\(^{68}\)

Such is the Mail’s solution to black racism—a French-style riot control force to protect property and responsible citizens from the chronically lawless, outside the pale of assimilation.\(^{69}\) Whether or not the Mail’s recommendations are taken up, there is no doubting their appeal for a government which senses in the inner-city revolts the makings of a new Falklands factor—wherever the next trouble spot, the police Task Force will be sent to show the necessary resolution and keep the flag flying, while Labour opponents, portrayed as soft on law and order, are written off as not fit to govern. The national sense of purpose—that “new confidence born of economic battles at home and tested and found true 8,000 miles away”\(^{70}\)—will be kept alive at the expense of Britain’s black population, scapegoats for the monetarist blight. And meanwhile, the Thatcherite cadres of the press will keep up the pressure—assimilate, or else.

But what does assimilation mean in Thatcher’s Britain? What can it mean for black people, Asian and Afro-Caribbean, who have been confined by racism and monetarism to the inner-city armies of the forever jobless, and whose culture of resistance to racism has itself been deemed racist? Can it mean much more for the relative few who have escaped from the ghettoes, and can assimilate in their class (the press loves ‘success stories’ of upward mobility) but not in their culture? Or the still fewer who have assimilated in their class and culture—like the Mail’s model family, the Pereiras—only to find themselves still the target of racist attacks in the streets, housing estates and the suburbs, violence which is becoming an habitual, everyday expression of the British way of life?

With anti-racism excrated by the press, assimilation means acquiescence in the racist
status quo; it means the acceptance of an ideology which stresses British tolerance and decency, however much at odds these are with the reality of daily experience. It means the embrace of a backward-looking patriotism and nostalgia for Empire, and respect for the "homogeneity" which, in new right doctrine, gives the nation its coherence and meaning, and which makes black people—however hard they try to "assimilate"—outsiders.

FOOTNOTES

1. "People are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. So, if you want good race relations, you have got to allay people's fears on numbers." Quoted in The Times, February 1, 1978.

2. The only daily papers which have not participated in the campaign against anti-racism are the Guardian, the Financial Times, and, to a certain extent, the Daily Mirror. Alone of all the press, the Communist Party's Morning Star has taken a consistently anti-racist line, but its circulation is tiny.

3. Speech delivered April 20, 1968 which concluded: "As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'"


6. Margaret Thatcher reportedly used the term in relation to the striking miners when she told the Tory backbench 1922 Committee that we had fought the enemy without in the Falklands and now we had to fight the enemy within (Guardian, July 20, 1984).

7. These views range from libertarian beliefs in a laissez-faire economy and individual freedoms to the social authoritarian emphasis on the maintenance of order and the strong state. For the leading figures and pressure groups of the new Right, see David Edgar, Kenneth Leech and Paul Weiler, The New Right and the Church (London 1985).


9. Daily Mail, October 19, 1981, a fire broke out during a party in New Cross, London, which eventually resulted in the death of 13 black teenagers. Almost immediately the Daily Mail ruled out a racist attack ("there's not a shred of evidence"), saying left wing militants were out to exploit a racial motive (January 30, 1981). Three years later it found the "mystery man" who it claimed started the fire: a black partygoer (May 7-8, 1984). The case has since then been closed without anyone being charged.

10. The Times first took up the Pereira case in September, 1983. Its support of the Pereiras intensified in May 1984 when these "overstayers" were given permission to reside permanently in Britain. During this same month a 20 year old sari-clad widow, Afia Begum, was with her small daughter, ambushed and deported from the country, without the Mail showing any concern. Her case for permanent residence was a strong one, but she did not have an English village behind her.


13. Sunday Express, September 15, 1985. In the same issue, the paper's editor, John Junor, chimed in with some positive words about Powell: "But isn't everything he said then coming to pass now?"


16. For the infiltration of the Tory Party by the National Front, see "Draft report of the National Advisory Committee of the Young Conservatives," 1983.

17. The Thatcher government has passed legislation abolishing the Greater London Council and six other Labour-led metropolitan councils on April 1, 1986 and has set limits ('rate-capping') on how much other councils can spend.


19. Johnson writing in the Daily Mail (July 1, 1985), and Sun (July 2, 1985).


21. Daily Mail (September 7, 1985). For Peregrine Worthorne of the Sunday Telegraph: "The presence in Britain's capital and other major cities of such a large proportion of citizens whose allegiances may lie with the enemies of the West could be a real and growing danger . . . our new ethnic minorities do not sound as if they were at all proud or grateful to have become British. Indeed, their community leaders give the impression that they hate Britain for her past imperial sins." (September 29, 1985)


25. Sunday Telegraph, May 27, 1984. According to The Times (June 22, 1984) "Nig Nog" was a term all British used. Several papers were critical of the firing of the Police Federation's expert on race relations for referring to black people as "Nig Nogs" in his address to the Federation's annual conference in 1984.


41. The Times, July 10, 1981.
42. See also Roger Scruton, Angela Ellis-Jones and Dennis O'Keeffe, Education and Indoctrination: An attempt at definition and a review of social and political implications, (London, 1985).
43. Rodney Tyler, “This battle for your child’s mind,” Daily Mail, October 11, 1983.
47. Daily Telegraph (May 29 and June 26, 1976). Tracy was defending Robert Relf, who had violated the Race Relations Act by putting up a sign outside his house saying it would be sold “to an English family.”
49. Daily Telegraph, November 19, 1983, about the virtues of WISE (Welsh, Irish, Scots, English), an organization which has brought together members of the Tory Party right and neo-fascist groups.
51. Honeyford has written that “their educational ‘disadvantage’ is now confirmed”—by common sense. Hard evidence to the contrary has been provided by the Keighley primary study, conducted by Geoffrey Pollard (see Times Education Supplement, October 11, 1985).
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
58. The Daily Mail lead of April 3, 1985. Scruton and his colleagues at The Times have rallied around Honeyford. Andrew Brown defended Honeyford in The Times (September 3, 1985) and the Spectator (June 22, 1985) and is the author of Centre for Policy Studies Pamphlet, “Trials of Honeyford: problems in multicultural education (November 1985), one theme of which, according to pre-publication publicity, is that ‘the slogan ‘no culture is superior to any other’ would, if taken seriously, make all education unthinkable.’ The Salisbury Review has risen to the defense of its contributor on several occasions: see Jonathan Savery, “Anti-racism as Witchcraft” (July 1985), and David Dale, “The new Ideology of Race: (October 1985).
61. Daily Mail lead of October 8, 1985. Some members of the new Right support repatriation, voluntary if possible, forced if necessary. See John Casey, “One nation: the politics of race” in the Salisbury Review (Autumn 1982), and Scruton’s editorial in support of Casey, in Salisbury Review (Summer 1983). Scruton wrote: “While we may disagree with the policy of compulsory repatriation . . . there is no doubt that merely to arrest the flow of immigrants cannot solve the social problem. Constructive efforts are required, both to encourage those who wish to return, and to ensure the integration of those who do not.”
64. Daily Mail, October 9, 1985.
65. Daily Mail, October 16, 1985. Her article was accompanied by a lead story on Britain in “a grip of inquisition.”
66. Racist attacks had been largely ignored by the press during the past two years until the Kassam family was murdered by arson in London on July 13, 1985. That, and the rash of arson attacks which rapidly followed, received considerable press comment, with the Daily Mail lead (August 13, 1985) fearing the attacks on Asians may lead “their own angry young men” to take the law into their own hands, and the Evening Standard (August 12, 1985) fearing much the same thing. Since the “riots” of September and October 1985, the press emphasis shifted to the “racial attacks” perpetrated by Afro-Caribbean against Asian, or by black against white. See “UK commentary” in Race & Class XXVII, 3 (1986).

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