

Race Relations in Britain

'81 riots expose racial discrimination

The first of a three-part series.

By Randy G. Vestal

Packed with the choking cinders of burning buildings and the sickening remnants of tear gas, the air would lay heavy through many hot summer days.

The whining of the ambulance siren, the clanking of the fire brigade bell, the wailing of the police cars, and the screaming of the rioters provided a confused and unexpected cacophony of embarrassment and shame, engulfed by an area of urban blight.

Trickles of blood lay upon the broken pavement amidst the debris — the crumbling bricks and shattered bottles (used to pelt the police and firemen), the discarded tear gas canisters, the overturned automobiles, the looted businesses, the burned out buildings, the smoke filled sky.

These are not remembrances of the civil rights riots of the 1960s. They are scenes from massive riots that erupted in sections of Liverpool, Manchester and London in the summer of 1981 and revealed to the world that Great Britain had a race problem. And although the British are making some gains to solve this problem, they have far to go.

Historical Causes

Britain's racial minority, according to Dr. A. H. Halsey, director of the Department of Social and Administrative Studies, University of Oxford, consists primarily of West Indian blacks (the largest single racial minority), Asians, and East Indians. Minorities constitute only 3 percent of the population.

"The Asians and East Indians do better economically than the Caribbeans," said Halsey. They come to Britain with their families; the entire family works together to save the money necessary to set up small shops. Most of the West Indians come to Britain alone, work in low paying, unskilled positions and send much of their income back to the West Indies to the families they have left behind; thus, they cannot save the money necessary to establish their own small businesses to gain an economic foothold.

After World War II, according to Halsey, Britain experienced a period of high employment. To fill the low paying positions available, Britain revised its immigration policies and allowed many persons of poorer nations to immigrate into Britain. The British assumed that the number of immigrants would not be large and that these persons would easily assimilate into British society. They were wrong. Many immigrants retained much of their own culture and language and refused to assimilate.

According to Dr. Muriel Mellow, professor of English at NCCU and both a British and an American citizen, in the 1950s the British people were proud that Britain was "free of racial discrimination." Britain did not have the problem of racial discrimination that was prevalent in the United States and, to a greater extent, in South Africa. At that time, Britain had a very small population of racial minorities.

However, by 1962, continued Mellow, Britain, a nation that had primarily remained homogeneous for hundreds of years, was receiving a large flow of emigrants from newly independent commonwealth countries. These emigrants clustered themselves into separate racial groups and settled in the poor and working class areas of major cities. A "clash of cultures" began to develop and the British found themselves "not so different from America and South Africa.... no longer so self-righteous" in terms of racial discrimination.

Said Halsey, "The British belief that they are historically superior to any other nationality and the British fear of other cultures which they do not understand combined to formulate the widespread racial discrimination which exists today."

Ironically, notes Halsey, the racial minorities were expected to produce children who would compete successfully with Britains for jobs in British society. Although the children of Asians and East Indians tended to advance economically in society, black children remained in the lower class — oppressed by poverty, poor education and failed political opportunities.

Thus, in the summer of 1981, these factors came to a head. The result: riots.

Widespread Racial Discrimination

A poor black from London, Martin Ford, 23, a senior undergraduate law student, Lincoln College, University of Oxford, is working to improve his place in society and the place of other racial minorities.

Ford said that his parents always encouraged him to do well academically and to strive for a goal. After being accepted by Lincoln College, he received some financial assistance from government sources but must work in the kitchen at the college to fully pay his tuition. Over the years, Ford gained the respect and popularity of the Lincoln College students and was elected to the high post of president of the Junior Commons Rooms (similar to a student government association).

"Racial discrimination is widespread in Britain," said Ford. "In industrial areas, such as Liverpool and Manchester, discrimination is more pronounced than in academic areas, such as Oxford and Cambridge. No matter where you go, racial discrimination is just under the surface."

According to Ford, the British government has instituted some policies (similar to affirmative action), but these policies have been virtually ineffective. Some British blacks, feeling totally rejected by British society, have



LIVERPOOL, England: Smoke rises from burned out cars and debris in the streets after a night of fierce rioting during the summer of 1981. As they sought to restore order, some 210 policemen were reported injured. (UPI photo)

turned to the West Indian culture, particularly the Rastafarian movement, for acceptance, which further disfranchises them from British society.

Ford said that a major problem is that many blacks do not want to talk or do anything openly about racial discrimination; many blacks just hope that discrimination will "go away" someday on its own accord. This attitude has prevented the formation of a powerful national minority rights organization.

When Ford applied for graduate law studies at Oxford in order to become a barrister (a courtroom lawyer), he did not mention that he wanted to become a minority rights barrister. Since the Rudy Narayan case, minority rights barristers have been looked upon by members of the legal profession as troublemakers, "...and you don't become a barrister by being a troublemaker," said Ford.

"Inherent Racist Philosophy"

In September 1978, Narayan, 40, a Guyanese-born barrister active in minority rights, wrote to the president of the Birmingham Law Society that two black prisoners in Winston Green Prison had not been properly defended by their counsels and accused the attorneys of racial discrimination. One of the counselors named by Narayan was G. S. Jonas, the vice-president of the Birmingham Law Society.

In his letter, Narayan said, "...such discrimination clearly springs from the inherent racist philosophy of your members and this letter is to be taken as a declaration of war against those of your members who feel that they can discriminate against me or anybody else on grounds of race or colour."

Narayan demanded an investigation into the matter. R. J. Garratt, president of the Birmingham Law Society replied that Narayan's allegations had been noted but did not state that an investigation would occur.

Narayan continued writing to the law society on this matter and sent to the Birmingham Post and the Birmingham Mail copies of correspondence between him and the law society for publication. The correspondence continued until March 1979.

On April 8, 1980, instead of an investigation into Narayan's allegations, Narayan was brought before the Disciplinary Tribunal of the Senate of the Inns of Court and the Bar, the headquarters of the British legal hierarchy, and charged with three counts of conduct unbecoming to a barrister and one count of professional misconduct for sending copies of the correspondence to the Birmingham newspapers.

Before the hearing, press reports had turned the case into a national story. A number of organizations and concerned citizens staged rallies in support of Narayan. Even Tony Benn, a leading Labour Party member of Parliament, publicly stated his support for Narayan.

On April 9, 1980, Narayan was cleared of all four charges but was reprimanded on two counts unrelated to racial issues for misbehaving towards a judge.

Narayan is currently being considered as a Labour Party candidate for a seat in the Parliament and thus may become the first black member of the House of Commons. The House of Lords currently has only one black

The NCCU soccer team is alive and kicking. They are registered in the Triangle Division of the North Carolina Soccer League.

They welcome anyone interested in playing soccer to come out to the NCCU track field on Friday and Saturday evenings at six for practice. For more information contact the Coach, Keith Wilson, or faculty advisor Dr. Robert Ballard, in room 328 of the Library of Science building. Presently, the club consists of undergraduates and Law students. Even the coach is a 2nd year Law student.

Thier next home game will be on Sunday October 17 at 2 on the track feild. Please turn out in your large numbers and give them your support.

member, Lord Pitt, formerly David Pitt, an unsuccessful candidate for a seat in the House of Commons.

A Doubtful Future

According to Halsey, Britain is making some improvements in race relations, and attitudes are beginning to change. The British class structure, of which racial minorities are on the very bottom, is beginning to be infiltrated by upwardly mobile minorities, and some minorities are beginning to enter fields not previously open to them. But with the advent of recent economic problems in Britain, continued improvement in race relations in the near future is doubtful.

As Lord Crowther-Hunt, rector of Exeter College, University of Oxford, remarked, "Until (the British people) openly recognize the various racial minorities as free and equal members of British society, racial discrimination shall continue to fester."

Next issue: British court decisions involving race discrimination, the intervention of an international court in cases of discrimination, and the possibility of a future British bill of rights.

Randy G. Vestal conducted most of the interviews and research for this series of articles while spending six weeks last summer in England studying modern British government at the International Graduate Summer School held at Exeter College, University of Oxford.

Instructors returning to the classrooms

By Fredrika Whitted

Today's college campuses are filled with people of every age. Not only are students obtaining their first degree but many are obtaining higher degrees. The growing number of N.C. Central University faculty members have returned to school for higher degrees because of the newly enacted consent decree.

The consent decree states that the university has to hire and grant tenure to only those instructors who have obtained a Ph.D. or an appropriate degree required of the department. The university cannot hire any instructor on a full-time basis without such a degree nor can anyone be promoted or re-hired. However, the decree does not apply to instructors who have tenure.

Mary Francis Vogler, a French instructor, and Tom Evans, an English instructor, are two NCCU instructors who have decided to return to the classroom.

Vogler, a Ph.D candidate at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, chose to return to school not because of the consent decree but because she felt the time was right for her to finish her long awaited degree. Vogler was not affected by the consent decree because she is a tenured member of the faculty.

Years earlier Vogler started her Ph.D studies in the area of Romance Languages and finished a great deal of course work. However, she decided to work rather than go back to study. Having taught for more than 10 years and not teaching any literature courses, she decided to work in the School of Education towards a degree that would emphasize pedagogy and curriculum development.

"Just because you have courses in a certain area doesn't mean you are a good teacher".

Because no university in the area has a doctoral program in the department of Foreign Language Education, Vogler was allowed to combine an instructional design and concern for foreign language education.

Vogler feels that the consent decree may or may not make better instructors available. "Just because you have courses in a certain area doesn't mean you are a good teacher."

Vogler has already done all of the course work and written exams and now she must find a research topic. Tom Evans, a Ph.D candidate at UNC at Chapel Hill also, is obtaining a degree in English, with a minor in journalism.

Evans does not know what the effect of the consent decree will be on the university. He feels that if a school such as NCCU loses the school's heritage as a result of the decree then the decree would have a negative effect. He also feels that the decree may change the effects of certain grants and other funds that the university now receives.

"The committee is looking for credentials and experience in certain areas, only degrees," Evans said.

Evans previously enjoyed going back to school on an off and on basis while obtaining additional courses in the journalism field. Because of the consent decree he had to return on a more regular basis and work on a Ph.D in english. "It seems like a round about way of doing things but anytime you learn something then it's not a wasted experience," said Evans.

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