From West-Indian Immigrants to Caribbean Communities
Transcript

Date: Monday, 23 November 1998 - 1:00PM
Location: Barnard's Inn Hall
From West-Indian Immigrants to Caribbean Communities
Professor Harry Goulbourne

Introduction
During the second half of this century Britain, like nearly all other societies, has witnessed any number of seemingly contradictory social and political forces. In the international community, the mobilisation of hitherto dormant ethnic affinity has been accompanied by growing regionalism, and mass migration or large scale movement of people has taken place alongside a greater sense of communal belongingness to particular parts of Ruritania or even the urban jungle. In Britain, notwithstanding some discordant notes struck by those on the right and left extremes of society and politics, it is now commonplace to sing the virtues of multi-culturalism and multi-racialism, as in the BBC’s Windrush Season of programmes by the Phillips brothers and their accompanying book, Windrush: the Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain. It has also become commonplace to speak about the multiple identities people are said to carry around with them as agents of what post-modernist theorists are fond of describing as de-centring hegemonic centres. However we view these developments, it may be safe to suppose that we nearly all agree that the diverse mosaic that is contemporary Britain is a pointer to our pluralistic futures in the new millennium of the Christian or Common Era in a new global age.

In this lecture I want to suggest that a vitally significant aspect of the making of this British cultural and racial kaleidoscope has been the transformation of people of Caribbean backgrounds from West Indian immigrants to members of dynamic Caribbean communities in British, more precisely English, cities. Given the widespread exposure of the public during the summer to several important aspects of how this transformation has taken place, it is hardly necessary to chart well-trodden ground here. Nor do I intend to describe the many problems Caribbean people have faced in education, training, housing and employment, or the misunderstanding there has been about Caribbean families and community leadership which have been extensively discussed over the past three or more decades. I want instead briefly to depict how observers and commentators have variously described this historic change in Britain from what was generally regarded as a homogeneous, mono-cultural and mono-racial society into a pluralist social order. We should, however, first take a glance at the transformation itself.

The transformation from Immigrants to Communities
The size, distribution, age, gender composition and marriage patterns are strong indicators of how Caribbean communities have become recognisable parts of a wider British society. The 1991 census is generally considered to have provided the most reliable figures about the British population, because for the first time in the country’s history there was what is called ‘the ethnic question’, asking individuals to identify the group they considered to best describe their ethnicity. The categories offered a choice between White, Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-Other (with an option to describe ‘Other’), Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Chinese, Any Other ethnic group (with an option to describe this). In the end, 10 categories were constructed from the returns. Whilst there was much heated debate over the pro and contra of including ‘the ethnic question’ in the census, once the returns became available they proved invaluable in gaining a more precise knowledge of the size, structure, distribution and so forth of the majority ethnic population as well as the new minority groups with backgrounds in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. The total new minority ethnic population was found to be just over 3 million or 5.5 per cent of the British population of just under 55 million. People of Caribbean backgrounds accounted for 0.9 per cent of the British population, or a total of 499,964 persons. These included both those born in the Caribbean and those born in Britain, with the latter continuing to be in the majority. Caribbeans therefore constituted the second largest new minority ethnic group after people of Indian backgrounds (840,000 or 2.7 per cent) and just ahead of those of Pakistani backgrounds (476,555). Asian communities (including Chinese, Vietnamese, Bangladeshis, East African Asians, etc.) account for the overwhelming majority of new minority ethnic populations, making a considerable shift from the situation in the 1950s to the mid 1960s, when Caribbeans (particularly Jamaicans) formed a majority. Although people who identified themselves as ‘Black-Caribbean’ are the single largest group of the 890,727 (1.6 per cent) people identified as ‘black ethnic groups’, it must be remembered that this total black population includes over 212,000 ‘Black-Africans’ and over 178,000 ‘Black-Others’.

It must always be borne in mind that the breakdown of minority ethnic representation that the census offers does not give a perfect reflection of the ethnic (and cultural) kaleidoscope that is post-imperial British society. For example, people of Sri Lankan, Filipino and Vietnamese backgrounds are not included in the larger Asian categories. David Owen’s work on the census, which I am drawing upon in this discussion, points out that North Africans, Arabs and Iranians ‘cannot be separately distinguished’ (p 89) even although they constitute 22.5 per cent of the Other-Other category in the census. More significant for the purposes of this lecture is the fact that many Indo-Caribbeans may have been encouraged or forced to identify themselves as Indians or Black-Caribbeans whilst African Americans serving in Suffolk and Argyll appear to have identified themselves as Black-Other (ibid.). I wish to register yet again my strong view that unfortunately the construction of Caribbean identities in Britain has resulted in the loss of much that is valuable about Caribbean societies: in Britain Caribbean takes on a mono-racial characteristic, whereas in the region it is...
The 1991 census confirmed what earlier censuses and intervening Labour Force Surveys had consistently surmised from answers given about individual place of birth (UK, Ireland, New Commonwealth, etc.), namely that the vast majority of people of Caribbean backgrounds lived in the urban areas of Greater London and the West Midlands. Whilst Black-Others, that is mixed black people, are more widely distributed in the country, people who identify themselves as Black-Caribbeans have long been significantly concentrated in the South East (just under 60 per cent), constitute 1.9 per cent of the population of the South East region of the country, 4.4 per cent of greater London, 1.5 per cent of the West Midlands and 2.8 per cent of the population of the Metropolitan Area around the country’s second city, Birmingham. In sharp contrast, the numbers of Caribbean people in Scotland (with a total population of about 6 million) and Tyne & Wear in Northern England are statistically insignificant with scores of 0.0 per cent. In the Principality of Wales, Caribbeans account for a mere 0.1 per cent in a population of around 3 million. To be sure, there are pockets of Caribbeans distributed throughout most of England, but outside the South East and the West Midlands their presence accounts for less than one per cent. One conclusion to be drawn here is that the Caribbean population in Britain has moved outward from the areas of original settlement, but has not significantly spread out across the country.

The gender and age distributions of the Caribbean population reflect its relatively longer settlement, its pattern of migration and family characteristics when compared to other new minority ethnic communities. Whilst migration from the Caribbean was at first led by men, it soon became common for women to find their own way and establish their families. This is in sharp contrast to the male-led migration pattern that characterise migration from South Asia. In terms of age, there are significant variations between the indigenous white population and the new minorities, with the Caribbean population being closest to the white population at the 55-60 age group, reflecting their earlier migration history. The age pyramid is wide at the base (5-14 years) amongst South Asians, less wide for black communities but wider than for the white population; at the top of the pyramid (from around 56 to 85+ years) the majority white population is significantly wider than is the case with either South Asians or black people.

But the bare demographic outline does not tell us a great deal about the emergence of Caribbean communities in Britain. Like other new minority and indeed the indigenous majority ethnic groups in Britain, people of Caribbean backgrounds do not constitute a homogenous entity. But the diversity of the Caribbean derived communities are often hidden or subsumed under the common banner of blackness, being Caribbeans or being Jamaican. Nonetheless, the Caribbean community in Britain comprises of people from a wide range of islands and territories stretching well over a thousand miles along the Atlantic, and separated by the other (Spanish-speaking and French-speaking) Caribbeans, and extends both north and south beyond the geographical Caribbean into the wider Atlantic and the South American continent. The Commonwealth Caribbean includes Antigua, Anguilla, the Bahamas and Barbados (both in the Atlantic proper), Belize (on the Central American Isthmus), the British Virgin Islands, the Caymans, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana (on the South American continent), Jamaica, Montserrat, St Kitts & Nevis, St Lucia, St Vincent & the Grenadines, and Trinidad & Tobago. Moreover, both the land mass and population of this sub-region are comparatively small: Jamaica, the largest single island (4,244 sq miles) is also the largest population with about 2.5 million people; Guyana, the largest country (83,000 sq miles) has a far smaller population than Trinidad & Tobago with around 1.5 million people and under 2,000 sq miles in size. Some of the islands are even smaller than Barbados with her 166 sq miles; for example, Anguilla is a mere 35 sq miles. In total, the population of the Commonwealth Caribbean is only roughly the same as neighbouring Haiti’s or Scotland’s (about 6 million), and migration to Britain and North America since the 1950s therefore marked a significant shift of population, and some would say resource, from the English-speaking Caribbean.

At the broadly social level, groups of Barbadians, Antiguans, Jamaicans and others retain much of their distinctiveness in English cities, even where they live cheek by jowl with others from the majority ethnic as well as other new minority ethnic communities. These differences are to be seen in such non-confrontational or non-divisive artefacts as cuisine, music and language. Moreover, Caribbeans are the most likely individuals to marry into, or co-habit with, individuals from the majority white population. And people change as a result of their proximity to others, or, as the anthropologist Malinowski would have argued, as a result of culture-contact. In the first place, they change in relation to each other as Caribbean groups, because in the main they meet for the first time in Britain, not in the Caribbean where, for example, a Jamaican was not likely to meet a Guyanese or a Barbadian person outside the charmed circles of literature, cricket, the regional University of the West Indies and within the confluence of trades union and party political leaderships.

But, second, groups are not only self-defined; they are also partly defined by others, and as far as wider British society is concerned it often appears that all Caribbean groups are blacks or Jamaicans, who constitute a simple majority of the overall population of people of Caribbean backgrounds. This demographic majority may have also helped to establish a British Jamaican cultural dominance as expressed through music, sports and popular styles, but these are themselves strongly influenced by black America. However, it should not be supposed that this Jamaican dominance is comprehensive and is therefore a situation of established hegemony. For example, it may be thought that Guyanese professionals have been strongly represented in what has been disparagingly called ‘the race relations industry’ and this may reflect the
middle-class flight from Guyana in the late 1950s and early 1960s as a result of racial and political turmoil in that country. Similarly, it may be noted that in the theatre and the media Trinidadians and other East Caribbean and Guyanese participants are to be found where there may be a relative absence of Jamaicans. In creative literature, on the other hand, there appears to be a spread of individuals from the region as a whole.

This meeting in Britain of people from different Caribbean countries has unexpected and powerful consequences. It is here that people from the Caribbean islands have discovered much of their commonalities and differences from each other. It is also in Britain that they have created and developed ethnic bonds which do not exist in the same way in the Caribbean region. This fact is reflected in several peculiarly British practices which have come to define Caribbean communities and contributions in Britain: the participation of Jamaicans in the (essentially Trinidadian) Notting Hill Carnival several decades before Jamaicans at home discovered that Trinidadian-inspired carnival is good business, particularly for a tourist-oriented country; the popularity of reggae and Rastafarian life style beyond their narrow following in Jamaican communities; and the use of terms such as 'Afro-Caribbean' or 'African Caribbean' that have little or no meaning within the Caribbean region itself. This creation of new ethnic identities in Britain has been consolidated by such factors as cross-island marriage or partnership and households, leading to offspring who feel that they have common links with more than one country in the Caribbean and are therefore migrating to the region in a reverse process to that followed by their parents in the 1950s and 1960s, as the works of several scholars show.

Paradoxically, therefore, perhaps apart from the regional University of the West Indies (which also celebrates its half century this year) migration to the UK has been a more powerful factor in the promotion of Commonwealth Caribbean social integration than any other single initiative within the region, including the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM), which is about to expand and embrace some non-English speaking states in the region, such as the Dominican Republic. Migration to the UK has, therefore, been more of a success than is often supposed but, as suggested, often in unexpected ways.

Another aspect of Caribbean community development in Britain is the general cultural proximity between the indigenous European and Caribbean-derived cultural artefacts. Perhaps not surprisingly, this proximity - reinforced by the presence of other more distinctive groups - tends to hide the major contribution and achievements of Caribbean people in Britain. It is hardly necessary to detail the obvious cultural presence of Caribbean people in Britain, but it is important to note that this presence continues to have a significant impact in various areas of British national life, as reflected in phrases in the day-to-day use of language, popular music, life style, fashion and major sports. Popular phrases (to have 'street cred', or to be 'cool', which even the Leader of the Opposition, William Hague and Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, feel that it is important to be in tune with), youth dress style (the turned-around basketball cap, ever larger unlaced trainers and big soft-looking boots, hanging T-shirts), DJs and loud music in clubs and remodelled cars are examples of the visible and audible creativity of the powerless. This is an important aspect of the communal life of Caribbeans in Britain to which John LaRose - perhaps the most significant intellectual within the Caribbean community in Britain - has consistently pointed. These are also features of the African/Caribbean Diaspora which cannot be easily marked off along the boundaries and contours that are characteristic of historical or traditional nationalism, because these features are in constant interplay in an almost nomadic fashion, which goes beyond what one migration scholar calls 'circulatory migration' and may be a way of life across juridical and political borders, astride the Atlantic.

Thus, in each of these areas, membership of a cross-Atlantic, broadly African but more specifically Caribbean Diaspora, importantly embracing the USA and, of course, the Commonwealth Caribbean region, strengthens the presence and cultural impact of Caribbeans in Britain. What is observed of popular music, language and dress styles may also be observed with respect to the active participation in sports, entertainment and a presence in the advertisements of consumer goods in recent years.

These general remarks about the dynamic situation of adaptation and change call for explanation. Obviously, at one level it is easy enough to say that the description of the situation is itself an explanation and we can leave matters there. But precisely because the transformation of British society and the Caribbean contribution has been of such profound importance, it is necessary to go beyond this bald description to a more refined understanding of how a relatively homogeneous British society has moved to one of such rich diversity.

Some Explanations of the Transformation

Indeed, several explanations have been offered over the years. In general, however, these may be grouped for convenience as well as for analytical purposes into the following: an immigrant situation, a race relations situation, a cultural situation and a situation of differential incorporation. Time does not permit justice to be done to the voluminous literature that has grown up around these different perspectives. I want, therefore, to confine myself to making a few brief remarks about the genre that existed during the period of migration and the genre that characterised much of the thinking about communities and identities during the last ten or fifteen years. I will want to conclude the discussion by turning to a relatively old notion about society which I believe best describes the extant situation of Caribbean communities in Britain; this is what the late M G Smith called ‘differential incorporation’. I do not, therefore, propose to spend any time with John Rex’s
notion of ‘a race relations situation’, as I have done in a recently published book.

**An Immigrant Situation**

What is generally regarded as the Windrush or immigrant generation from the West Indies first attracted the attention of social analysts who saw the West Indian presence as a situation involving immigrants and hosts. This view was informed by the ignorance of - or the unwillingness to acknowledge - the presence of Africans and Asians in Britain since the age of European discovery from the late fifteenth century. Nonetheless, this earlier presence has been well documented by historians such as F O Shyllon, James Walvin, Peter Fryer, Merika Sherwood, and others; earlier, Eldred Jones had conducted important and relevant work on the black presence in Elizabethan drama; and then there were autobiographies, such as that of Oluudah Equiano, published in London in 1789, the year of the French Revolution. But by and large this longstanding black presence was not always taken into account in what was to become a new wisdom or orthodoxy of the black presence and British society from the 1950s. To be sure, there were some attempts to acknowledge the presence of blacks in sea ports such as Liverpool and Cardiff, as the work of Kenneth Little, Anthony Richmond and Michael Banton reflect. In the main, however, the first generation of analysts of West Indians in post-imperial Britain sought to explore the newness of this presence, including its social, economic and psychological implications for the immigrants and the host community. Adjustment and accommodation, individual prejudice and strangeness were key variables in their accounts of what they - partly correctly - saw as a new kind of encounter.

The essential characterisation was of the immigrant-host dichotomy, and the corollary was the problematic of integration or absorption of the former into the latter society. In other words, it was generally assumed that British society was homogeneous (mainly through the agencies of colour, culture and a shared history and myths of nationhood). It was also assumed that this supposedly homogeneous culture had the capacity to integrate and absorb whatever differences might appear this side of the white cliffs of Dover. It was, therefore, a rather static model, which underplayed social conflict as well as the history of earlier encounters between different racial and cultural groups in the first and second British empire.

This perspective may be illustrated by reference to the work of Sheila Patterson, whose *Dark Strangers: A Study of West Indians in London* was published in 1963. A classics scholar turned social anthropologist, Patterson had conducted research in South Africa as well as on Polish immigration to Canada. She was also a product of what was to become by the 1960s, and particularly the 1970s, the disparaged ‘race relations industry’ started by Kenneth Little at Edinburgh University in the 1950s and included such figures as Michael Banton and Anthony Richmond. Her work on Brixton reflected a wide concern about the apparently sudden West Indian entry into the English body social. Although a work rightly subjected to much justified criticisms, it is fair to say that, revisiting the text today, Patterson approached her subject with a greater degree of objectivity and commitment than is to be found in a good many works of the social analysis that followed. Based on years of close field research, she concluded that the meeting of black and white people on British island soil was not as in South Africa where she saw a race relations situation between different groups. Nonetheless, the difference of people’s colour (black, brown and white) marked off West Indians and Asians from Europeans such as the Poles, Italians, Latvians and Cypriots. The problem was not one of numbers (for example, the Poles outnumbered West Indians at the time) but one of colour distinction.

The titles of books in the same decade were clear reflections of the concern with what Patterson called ‘immigrant-host relations’ within the context of ‘an immigrant situation’. It was envisaged that the encounter between black and white, or between stranger and host, would eventually result in the absorption of the minority by the majority homogeneous and indigenous culture. Consider, for example, such titles as Ruth Glass’s *Newcomers: The West Indians in London*, published in 1960, three years before Patterson’s *Dark Strangers*; or, Davison’s *West Indian Migrants*, published two years before Patterson’s work. My point here is that Sheila Patterson’s work was already part of a genre of social analysis on the apparently new presence of West Indians. The genre was to continue in works such as the American Nancy Foner’s *Jamaica Farewell: Jamaican Migrants in London* and Philpott’s *West Indian Migration: The Montserrat Case* in the 1970s, as well as Collins’ earlier personal account of being a migrant in *Jamaican Migrant*.

Underlying the assumption that newcomers would be absorbed by the host society was the view that the international social order was fairly fixed, firmly up by history and consistency of cultural norms. What was therefore required was for the newcomers, the migrants, to adjust to their new lot, the new situation into which they had voluntarily entered or the poverty of the neglected West Indies had pushed them. But there was also a certainty about structures and social practices which came from the imperial experience. This imperial certainty suggested that there was a cultural norm to which all variants could strive to adjust. Thus, the values and norms of the class system extant in Britain was such that newcomers should seek to accommodate themselves. Of course, there were those such as the late J Enoch Powell, MP for Wolverhampton, who believed that no amount of cultural adjustment would make a West Indian or an Asian an English person.

Patterson and her contemporaries were writing in a period charged by debates about the direction of a post-war, de-imperialising Britain: the recognition of American paramountcy, the end of empire, a ruined but reviving post-war economy, the emergence of a new European order within the framework of the European Community led by Germany and France. In Britain itself there were the passing of the Commonwealth
Immigration Act (1962), Harold Wilson’s Labour Government’s White Paper on immigration (1965), the ‘Rivers of blood’ speech by Enoch (as many West Indians, fond of their Old Testament narratives and imageries, liked to call this wayward son from the English tradition of tolerance) in Birmingham in 1968 depicting racial violence between black, brown and white peoples, the heating-up of racial tension in such places as South Africa and Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) with the declaration of UDI by the racist Ian Smith and his gang of thugs, the Kenyan Asian crisis, the first two Race Relations Acts, and so forth. The 1960s was not just about Beatlemania, Rolling Stones, rock and roll and Chubby Checker’s ‘Let’s Twist Again’: it was a decade and an age characterised by much that would frighten a generation living in the shadows of a catastrophic war and threats of world nuclear catastrophe and race wars prophesied by Ronald Segal in his 1967 book, *The Race War*.

But these are not our concerns today. Our theme for the moment is the immigrant-host situation. And in this regard, my suggestion is simply that the entry of West Indians marked the end of a period of innocence on the part of all concerned: immigrants (who thought that they would be in Britain for three to five years before returning to the lands of their births); hosts (who thought the newcomers exotic, temporary and initially unthreatening because of their social and economic weakness). Of course, there were those who saw the newcomers as the fulfilment of their worst nightmares about the retribution for the excesses of empire and colony - nightmares in which white certainty and dominance would be replaced by a situation in which, as J Enoch saw it, the black man would have the upper hand over the white man: taking the white man’s job, and worst, taking the white man’s woman with that style and panache the black man was thought to have. These matters also lay on the grid of what W E B Du Bois called the colour-line, which he saw as the major division between human communities in this century. Arthur Lovejoy’s analysis of the ‘great chain of being’ at the end of the medieval world and the beginning of the modern age (a historical point at which the founder and benefactor of these lectures stood) had, after all, been further transformed following the Darwinian Revolution in biology in the last century from a divine to a biological cosmology. This is, of course, part of the paradox of the European contribution to the globalisation of the modern age: the essential core of the inspiration of Gresham and his colleagues in the Renaissance, encompassing the Reformation and the scientific revolution, pointing to the turning-over of the limitations imposed by traditions and beliefs with their essential particularisms. The participants in these epoch-making events would not themselves have necessarily envisaged this logical outcome whereby the sons and daughters of Africa and Asia are engaged in the construction of a culture and social order in what Morris was later to describe as England’s green and pleasant land. A land, which despite the nature of the black immigrants’ reception many have come to have a strong love-hate relationship that Sigmund Freud, a man much given to interpreting dreams, may have had a way of explaining to us.

**A Cultural Situation**

But let me turn briefly here to what I have suggested we call ‘a cultural situation’, which juxtaposes with the ‘immigrant situation’. The cultural situation has a two-fold expression which at first sight appears to be contradictory, but on closer inspection forms different aspects of a unified perspective on post-imperial Britain. First, Roy (now Lord) Jenkins, speaking as Home Secretary on 23 May 1966 to the then National Committee for Commonwealth Immigrants declared that he would ‘... define integration not as a flattening process of assimilation but as equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance’ (Jenkins, 1967, p. 267). This declaration marked the end of the attempts to achieve absorption of the immigrants into the host community; this was a shift of gigantic proportions that would inform nearly if not all forthcoming thinking, research and policy on the integration and adaptation of West Indians in British society. Jenkins’ view was later re-stated by the Swann Committee Report of 1985. Swann advocated a preference for a society characterised by a pluralism that ... enables, expects and encourages members of all ethnic groups, both minority and majority, to participate fully in shaping the society as a whole within a framework of commonly accepted values, practices and procedures, whilst also allowing and, where necessary, assisting the ethnic minority communities in maintaining their identities within this common framework (Swann, 1985, p. 5).

This was to take Jenkins one step further by suggesting, or at least hinting, that it would be sound policy for there to be public support for the maintenance of minority ethnic communities. It goes without saying that, as ideology and as policy, the philosophy of multi-culturalism has several flaws. For one, and as must be clear from this statement, the philosophy of multi-culturalism is self-contradictory. In my *Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain* in 1991, I raised this problem and asked how different cultures, where they are lodged within different and conflicting value systems, are to live within the same juridic-political framework that is also democratic and avoids major conflict. By and large my question has been ignored. Perhaps this is because the virtues of multi-culturalism, such peace between groups and the celebration of difference, need to be promoted in contemporary societies and the drawbacks can be set aside for another time. Also, the rapidity with which the ideology of multi-culturalism was adopted, reflected the fact that it was a response to the growing demands on the part of black militants in the late 1960s and the early 1970s to avoid the ‘flattening process of assimilation’ into the then English culture which West Indians looked on with dread.

The second aspect of the cultural perspective is to be found in cultural studies which highlight cultural heterogeneity, a constant process of change and multiple identities of individuals as social agency. With the collapse of Leninism and the accompanying Stalinist statism in the late 1980s, this perspective of culture has...
not only claimed a radical pedigree, but has also become the maypole around which revolves a range of culturalist persuasions within a post-modernist paradigm accompanied by a kind of nihilistic view of the world in which empirical evidence is eschewed and replaced by broad, unverifiable and mystical assertions based on individual feelings. The most that can be said for this neo-Romanticism is that it refuses to let us forget that social analysis has limitations in understanding social life. But social analysts practising their professions within traditions established by Marx or Durkheim or Weber need to be reminded of the weaknesses of social science as a mode of understanding social reality, because deeply ingrained in their work, particularly Weber’s, is the awareness of such drawbacks as well as the strengths of this approach to constructing understandings of social life. This is not the place to pursue the naïve relativism of culturalism and its adherents’ innocent jubilation over what is for them ‘discoverers’ syndrome’ of what is already known.

Suffice it to stress that, in my view, the culturalist persuasion has had a deleterious effect on the study and understanding of the growth of new communities in Britain. Its dependence on uncontrolled speculation about social life leaves it bereft of empirically grounded data which may be subjected to dispassionate analyses. Yet, this is the preferred approach adopted by a generation of commentators about the growth of Caribbean communities in Britain. Instead of empirically verifiable work about the lived lives of people and communities, adherents of the culturalist perspective asserts that it is enough that a person is of Caribbean background to be able to speak about these communities. This is helped along if such persons happen to have access to the media. The authority for their work is access to the media; the legitimacy for what they say is their ethnicity. Thus, to employ some of their vocabulary, it is not the contents of analysis that matters but the medium through which pure thoughts are communicated. Thus, whilst there is a considerable body of words uttered about the Caribbean communities in Britain, there is a dearth of verifiable data about these communities from those who proffer this culturalist perspective. Thus, social historians and other commentators in the middle of the next century will have an abundance of state papers about the Caribbean communities, newspaper coverage of particular events, but relatively little actual contrary data about these communities from the social analyst, outside the research conducted by the assimilationists of the ‘immigrant-host’ syndrome and the work of sociologists such as Rex and his associates who stressed what he called the race relations situation. The importance of social structures, social action and different ways of incorporating groups into larger national entities have been largely ignored by culturalists of the second kind.

A Differential Incorporation Situation

In this context I want to suggest that M G Smith’s much abused concept of differential incorporation remains useful to regard the presence and development of Caribbean communities in Britain. A product of the once well known Jamaica College in Kingston, which one colonial administrator at the turn of the century said rivalled the best that England and the empire could offer in education, Mike Smith developed to become a distinguished social anthropologist responsible for one of the most vigorous debates in post-war Caribbean studies. Not only did he stimulate the debate over social and cultural pluralism, but he was also responsible for restating the notion of incorporation derived from European and American founding figures in social anthropology and sociology. Smith argued, correctly in my view, that memberships of societies or social orders involve forms or patterns of incorporation. This incorporation can be uniform or universal, in which case all members of the society enjoy equal rights of a democratic kind (to vote, assemble, publish, worship, etc.) as well as what T H Marshall would call citizenship rights such as work, where to live, whom to marry or live with, and so forth. Smith’s view of British and American societies was that whilst formal incorporation may invest individuals irrespective of such distinguishing features as colour, race and ethnicity (and we may add gender here) with citizenship rights, these may be done differentially. In other words, different groups of people enjoy different rights. Thus, whilst Caribbean people in Britain have enjoyed the rights of all citizens, these have not been equally or uniformly enjoyed by all groups in society. There have, of course, been important attempts to correct this. The Race Relations Act of 1976 and the Commission for Racial Equality are examples. But, as Sir Herman Ouseley, Chairman of the CRE would probably say, the fact that the body exists is itself testimony that citizenship rights and participation are not equally enjoyed. And this inequality has been well documented in the vital areas of life such as education and training, housing, employment and the justice system.

No doubt, the proximity of Commonwealth Caribbean culture (language and literature, sports and entertainment, values and religion) to the dominant majority culture, must be a factor in the visible and audible presence of Caribbeans in these areas in Britain. The differential incorporation, however, that M G Smith spoke about, based on what he would see as racial characteristics has also powerfully restricted the choice and nature of social and economic participation in British life by people of African Caribbean backgrounds in post-imperial Britain. This helps to explain the fact that, despite high levels of participation in the creative spheres of cultural life, Caribbean people have little or no participation in the control or ownership of cultural production. For example, it is noticeable that whilst most English football teams have black players only Ruud Gulliet from the Netherlands has so far been manager of prominent football clubs (Chelsea and Newcastle), and there are few if any black trainers at national level in athletics, football or cricket. There is a conspicuous absence of individuals of Caribbean backgrounds who own football and athletics clubs or music companies. Nonetheless, their presence as performers and image agents in the display of commodities is glaringly obvious. The sprinter Linford Christie’s active participation in the athletics training fraternity is a welcome initiative which needs to be emulated and encouraged if Caribbean participation in British life is to be more than mere image in the public sphere. The direct participation of
individuals from Caribbean communities in the public life of the country - as elected politicians, church leaders, and so forth - remains far short of a healthy situation for a democratic society confident of its future.

Conclusion
West Indians in England have never fully immersed themselves in the dream that they would be participants in an American-like ‘melting pot’. England, the Mother Country, was not conceived of in quite this way, although there was the hope that fair play and opportunity would be greater than in a colonial order. What occurred over the last half century, I submit, has been the sad vindication of M G Smith’s differential incorporation - membership in a society in which the practical enjoyment of rights have been unequally invested. But this is not a new experience for Caribbean people. And their response has been to transform themselves from West Indians into Caribbeans, which, perhaps unavoidably, creates its own divisions. But the new century, the new millennium, will probably be a new opportunity for addressing some of the injustices of the colour-line not only between the majority and minority ethnic populations, but also between minorities themselves. This should make for a truly rich British mosaic.

© Harry Goulbourne

Bibliographical note
The following is a partial list of the published works that I found useful in preparing this lecture, but as indicated throughout the discussion, there is a considerable social science and history literature on a range of problems that Caribbean communities in Britain have faced.


Goulbourne, H 1998a Race Relations in Britain since 1945, London: Macmillan


Goulbourne, H 1991 Ethnicity and Nationalism in Post-Imperial Britain, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press


Jenkins, R  1967 ‘Racial Equality in Britain’ in, Anthony Lester (ed), Essays and Speeches by Roy Jenkins, London: Collins


Patterson, S 1963 Dark Strangers: a Study of West Indians in London, Harmondsworth: Penguin


Smith, M G 1974 Corporations and Society, London: Duckworth
