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COMMISSION ON INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

BIRMINGHAM QUALITY CONTROL CONFERENCE

PRELIMINARY REPORT TO MANAGEMENT
AND THE MANUFACTURING TRADE UNIONS

CONFIDENTIAL

**RACE AND RACISM IN BIRMINGHAM:
RESEARCHING POST-WAR ARCHIVES**

'Race' and Racism in Birmingham: Researching Post-war Archives

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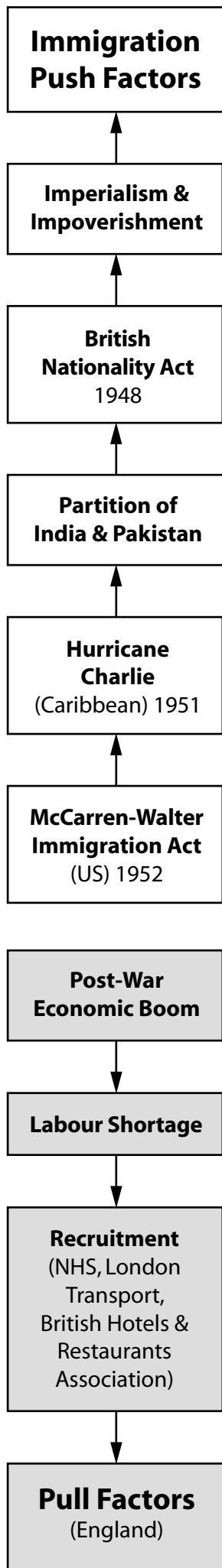
Summary of key themes

Sources from Birmingham Archives and Heritage Collections

General Sources

Written by Dr Kevin Searle, 2008.

www.connectinghistories.org.uk/birminghamstories.asp



Introduction: 'Race' and Racism in Birmingham

Most of the black and Asian population in Birmingham today are the children and grandchildren of migrants who came to Britain in the post-war period. Centuries of colonial rule had made the Caribbean and South Asia dependent on the export of cheaply produced raw materials to the West. Most migrants were fleeing poorly-paid lives of hardship on farms and plantations which supplied goods to Western markets.



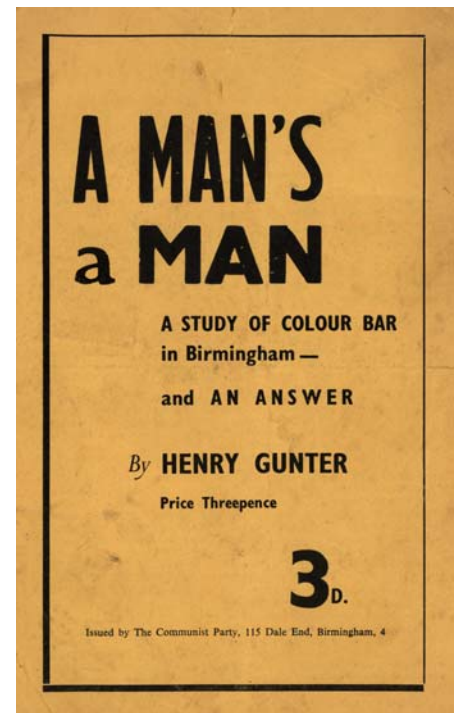
Birmingham Mail, 14 September 1964.

In Birmingham, and in Britain more generally, they found work that was unpopular with the indigenous working class. They also faced a great deal of prejudice in the housing market, where most could only find accommodation in overcrowded bed-sits in urban areas that had become neglected, such as Sparkbrook and Handsworth.

Henry Gunter: *A Man's A Man*

Henry Gunter was a Jamaican migrant who came to Britain in 1949 and settled in Birmingham. Despite his accountancy skills, he was sent to work at a brass rolling mill in Deritend until his experiences of racism forced him to move to another factory, Moss Gear Ltd., in Erdington. Whilst working here Gunter became involved in the labour movement and later became the first black delegate to be elected to the Birmingham Trades Council.

Gunter co-founded the Birmingham branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress in 1951, and would also become chairman of the Birmingham Afro-Caribbean Association. He was actively involved in campaigning against the colour bar, which as well as discriminating against blacks and Asians in the workplace, operated in hotels, dance halls, social clubs and lodging houses. This booklet (right), published in 1954, was one of many ways in which Gunter contributed to the campaign to abolish the colour bar.

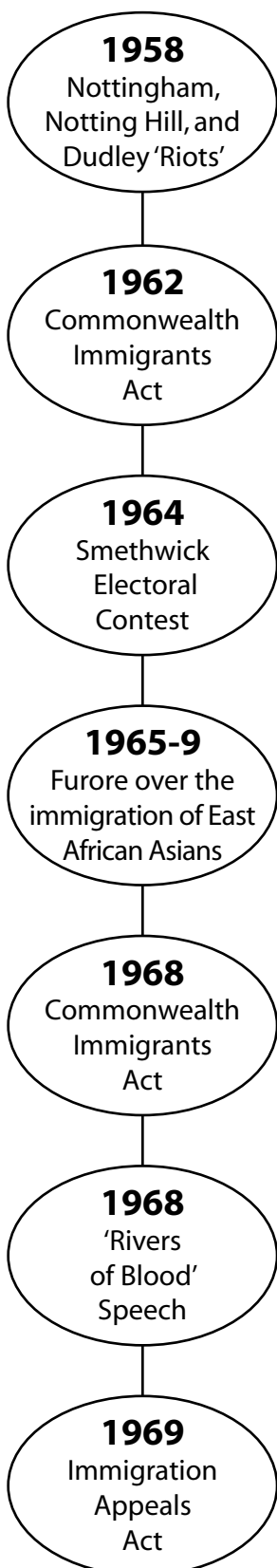


A Man's A Man, 1954. [MS 2165]

Key Debate:
 what does A. Sivanandan's statement
 "We're here because you were there" tell us about post-war migration?

The Politics of 'Race' and Immigration in the 1960s

'Race' and immigration were particularly volatile national issues in the 1960s. The decade was marked by a number of key political events, some of which are noted in the timeline. Two of these were in Birmingham.



Birmingham Post, 19 September 1964.

Peter Griffiths and the Electoral Contest in Smethwick

The electoral contest between Labour candidate, Gordon Walker and Conservative candidate, Peter Griffiths, in 1964, had a profound impact in both local and national politics. Griffiths, ran on an anti-immigration platform. The slogan: 'If you want a nigger for a neighbour, vote liberal or labour,' which Griffiths refused to condemn, was often heard during the campaign. Griffiths defeated Walker, but only held the seat until 1966. Nevertheless, popular and media interest in the contest led both parties to increase their support for more stringent immigration controls.

Enoch Powell and the 'Rivers of Blood' Speech

The Tory MP for Wolverhampton South West, Enoch Powell, had once welcomed Caribbean nurses to Britain when the NHS was recruiting staff in Barbados. However, in 1968 Powell delivered his famous 'Rivers of Blood' speech in Birmingham. He warned of immigration causing a 'total transformation to which there is no parallel in a thousand years of British history', and made a call for the 're-emigration' or repatriation of migrants. It caused a huge furore and Powell was sacked from the shadow cabinet the following day. In the wake of his dismissal Powell received almost 120,000 letters, which were predominantly supportive, and an 'I'm backing Enoch' campaign spread across a number of factories in Birmingham.



Enoch Powell. [B'ham Portraits Collection]



GEC factory, Witton. B'ham Evening Mail, 25 April 1968.

Key Debate:

to what extent did Griffiths' campaign and Powell's intervention into the debates about immigration exacerbate racism in Britain?

Industrial Struggles in the 1960s and 1970s

Workplace Resistance

The increase in the politicisation of 'race' and immigration, and demonisation of black and Asian communities, was met with a growth in resistance. The string of increasingly stringent immigration legislation was challenged with protest. The picket lines were a key site where a number of struggles against racism, particularly in the workplace, were waged. The late 1960s and 70s were punctuated with strikes at factories with large black and Asian workforces. These men and women were typically concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid menial jobs. In many disputes the strikers received little help from their unions and had to rely on the support of their communities and community organisations. A. Sivanandan (1982) writes of temples which gave free food to strikers, grocers who gave limitless credit, and landlords who waived their tenants' rent.



Flyer from the Indian Workers Association Collection [MS 1591]

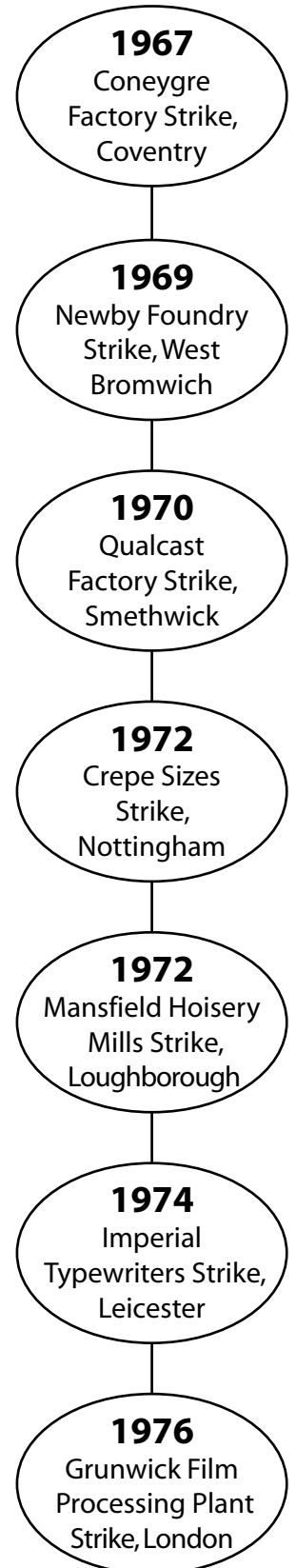


Some of the thousands of Sikhs marching along Cannock Road, Wolverhampton, yesterday, on their way to present their protest at the town hall.

Thousands of Sikhs protest against the refusal of Wolverhampton Transport Committee to allow Sikh bus crews to wear beards and turbans on duty. *The Times*, 5 February 1968.

Colour Bar

Three key strikes which took place in the West Midlands were at the Coneygre Factory in Coventry in 1967, at the Newby Foundry in West Bromwich in 1969, and at the Qualcast factory in Smethwick in 1970. The records of the Indian Workers Association show that one issue that the workers were rebelling against in the latter, were the segregated washroom facilities which existed for white and black workers.



Key Debate:
to what extent did the struggles of the 1960s and 1970s unite disparate ethnic groups into a common black and/or working class identity?

The Handsworth Uprisings in the 1980s

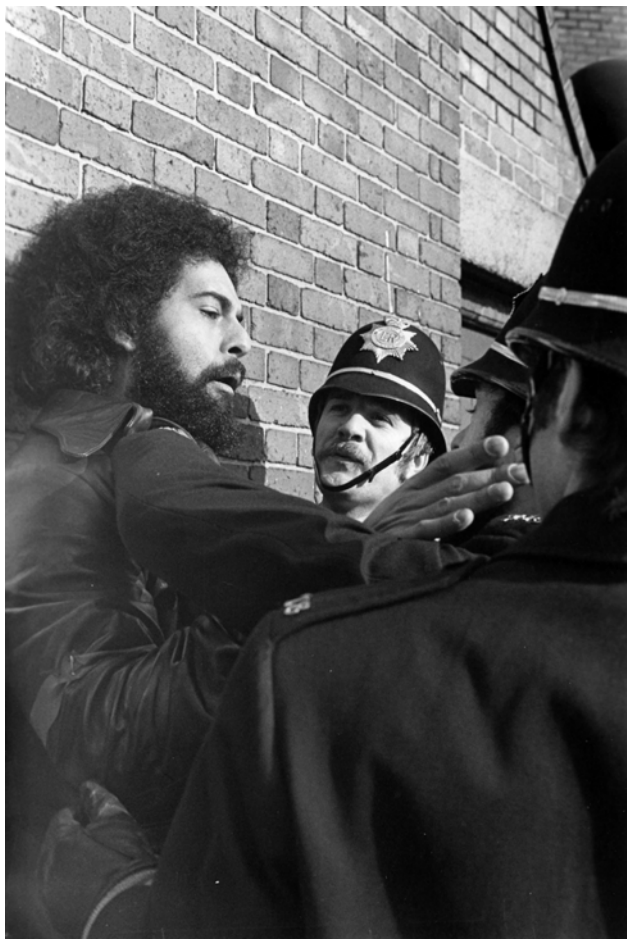


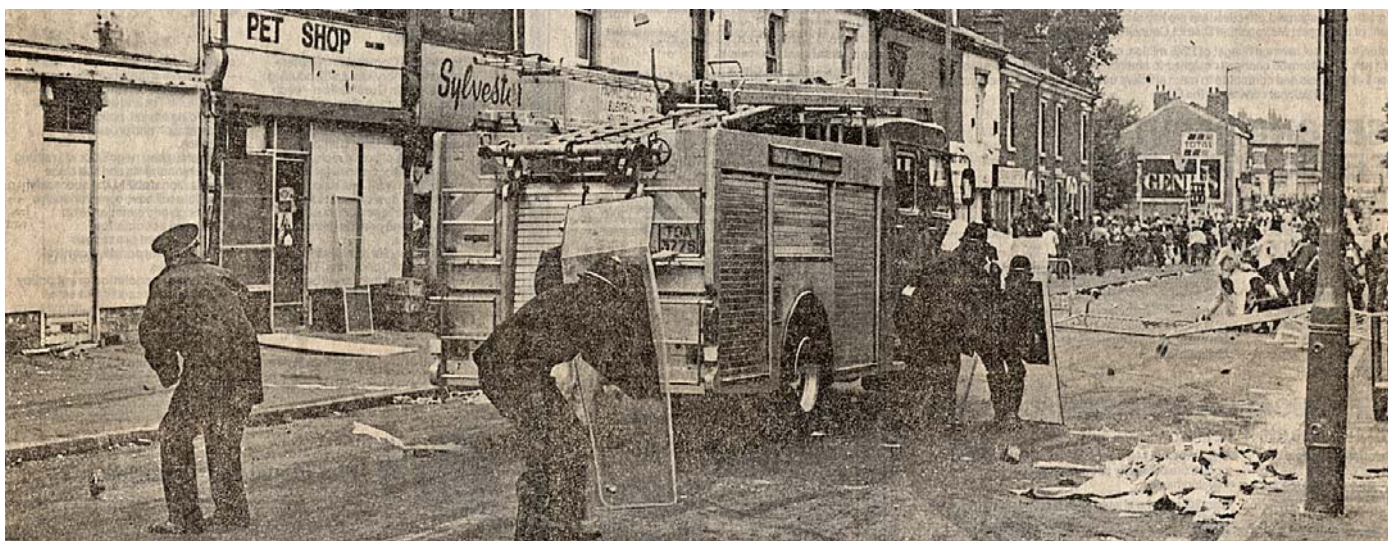
Photo: Vanley Burke. [MS 2192]

**"I don't want to steal. I can't get no job.
Your job you offer I is what you offer dogs.
The law treat us like animals. I have been to jail.
I know what it is like. It is disgrace."**

(David in Talking Blues, AFFOR, 1978, L21.85)

In the context of recession in the 1980s, many struggles moved away from the workplace. The 1980s saw two uprisings in the Handsworth area of Birmingham. The first occurrence happened shortly after the disturbances in the St. Pauls district of Bristol, and the unrest in Brixton, in 1981. A larger protest occurred on the 9th and 10th of September 1985, where two Asian shopkeepers lost their lives. Two key factors in each of these disturbances were social deprivation and police harassment. In parts of Handsworth male unemployment was over 50%. This, and the stop and search tactics of the police, affected young black and Asian people in disproportionately high numbers. The unrest however, involved disadvantaged black, Asian and white youth, protesting against their condition.

The disturbances were labelled as 'race riots' by the establishment press, whose journalists described scenes of 'prowling West Indians' in their reports. They blamed, what they saw, as the pathological cultures of black and Asian people. The newspapers also made attempts to drive a wedge between Afro-Caribbean and Asian communities through blaming rivalry between minority ethnic groups. These explanations were opposed by many writers such as Stuart Hall, who co-authored the 'Policing the Crisis' critical text, and many grassroots organisations who were active in the area, such as the Asian Youth Movement and the Indian Workers Association.



Newscutting from the Derek Bishton and Ten.8 Archive, 1985. [MS 2478/C/10/9]

Key Debate:

what does the expression 'last in, first out' tell us about the condition of the black working, or underclass in Britain?

The Lozells Disturbances in the New Millennium

Over two decades after the disturbances in Handsworth, the North of Birmingham was witness again to more unrest.

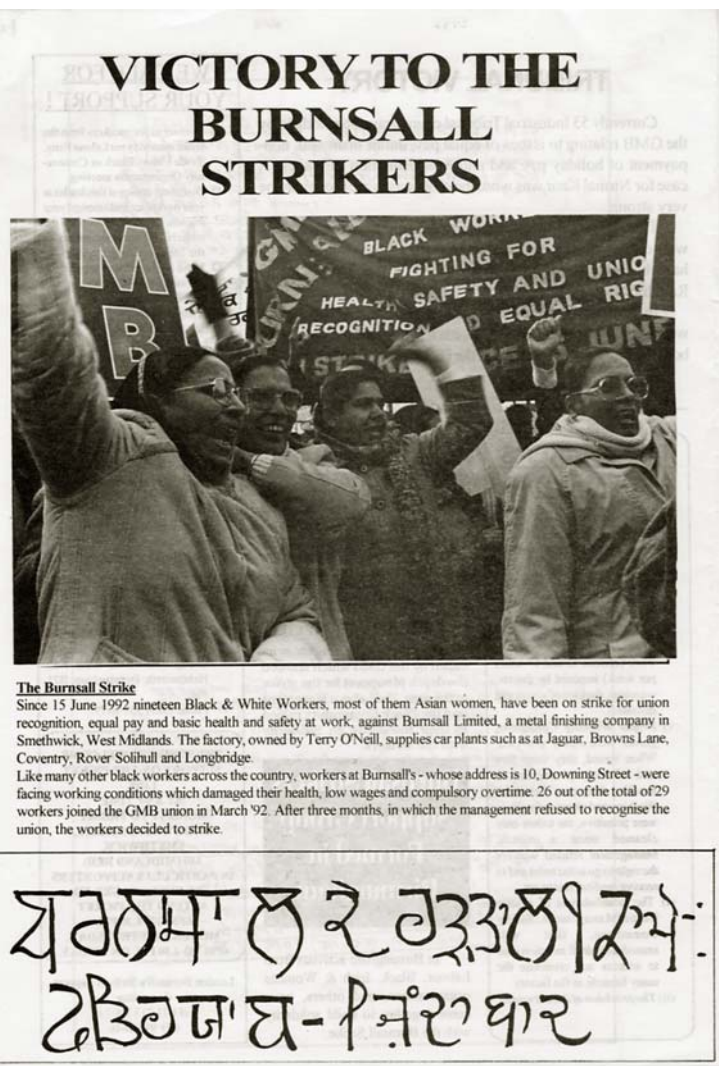
The disturbances in Lozells took place on Saturday the 22nd and Sunday the 23rd of October 2005. In the disorder, two men, one aged 18, and one aged 23, lost their lives.

The riots were triggered by unsubstantiated allegations of a serious sexual assault of a black girl in an Asian-owned black cosmetics store. Much of the ensuing trouble, took place between young people of Afro-Caribbean and South Asian descent. A decade earlier, solidarity between black, Asian and working class communities was powerfully expressed during the Burnsall Strike in Birmingham. Now, for some commentators, the unrest in Lozells symbolised a watershed moment in the breakdown of solidarity between black and Asian communities, which had been fostered in shared struggles against racism and class in the post-war years.

'Race' and Racism in the New Millennium

The disturbances demonstrate the complexity of 'race' and racism in modern day Britain. They illustrate how the issues of 'race,' class and gender interweave. Although the rape-claims remain unsubstantiated, they raised issues of the attitudes of men towards women of different ethnic groups. They also brought to the surface deeper concerns over the competition between different, but, similarly disadvantaged, ethnic groups over scarce resources. In the area, unemployment ran at 22%. The disorder demonstrated too, that the issues of 'race' and racism transcend black and white. Against a grim socio-economic backdrop, the disturbances in Lozells, highlighted the multidirectional flows of inter-ethnic tension.

This flyer uses the language of political blackness and class solidarity prevalent in the 1970s. [MS 2141/12/5]



A call for peace and reconciliation in Lozells. B'ham Post, 7 January 2006.



Key Debate:
 what do the Lozells disturbances tell us about the complexity of the issues of 'race' and racism, and their connection to broader socio-economic issues in the new millennium?

SMETHWICK - Integration or racialism?

A CCARD Publication Price 1s.

CCARD publication. [LP 21.85]

REDUNDANCY & UNEMPLOYMENT



(Photo John Stenock, 1989)

Taking redundancy? Think again!

THE WEST MIDLANDS IS NOW A JOBS DISASTER AREA. More than one in six workers are now officially out of work and in some areas over one in three are without a job.

Despite this, many people still don't realise how serious the situation has become for those on the dole.

- locally over two out of every five people unemployed have been out of work for over one year.
- 58 workers are seeking work for each advertised vacancy and the chances of the unskilled, the over-45's, women, black people and the disabled are actually worse than the figures suggest.
- every job lost or sold increases the number of school leavers that remain unemployed. 19,754 school leavers were out of work in September 1982. In 1981, only 12% of them from school leavers in Birmingham found jobs. This year the situation will be worse.
- the rules on unemployment entitlement and supplementary benefits have become so severe that widespread poverty is becoming inevitable in Britain and unemployment payments provide little protection.
- those without work and income suffer increasing physical and mental ill health.

Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre 1982

Anyone facing redundancy - voluntary or compulsory - needs to know exactly what will meet them on the dole. Fewer people would accept redundancy readily if they had experienced unemployment

Flyer, Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre. [MS 2009]

Black people against state brutality

National demonstration against police brutality and immigration harassment

Assemble at Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park
1.00 p.m. Sunday 3 June

- Police and immigration officers' violence has become an everyday occurrence
- Our youth are facing constant brutality
- Our families are terrorised by passport-raids
- Our homes are busted up by the police
- Our men and women are harassed and sexually humiliated when they enter the country
- Black people are imprisoned without trial as 'suspected illegal immigrants'

THE NEW CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT PLANS TO INTENSIFY THE ATTACK!

Black people are fighting back Come and show your solidarity

Organised by Awar, Brixton Black Women's Group and Indian Worker's Association GB
346 Soho Road, Handsworth, Birmingham 21

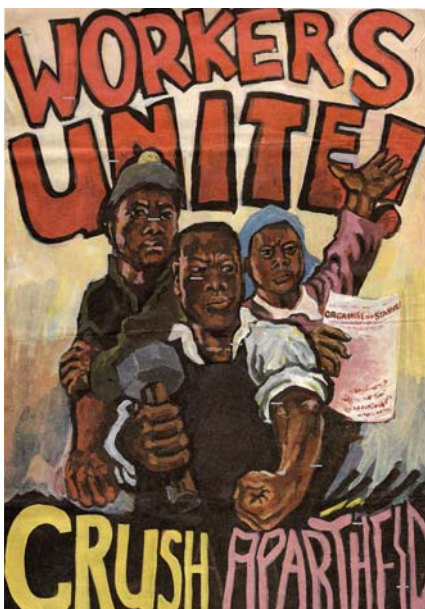
Flyer, Indian Workers Association, 1979. [MS 2141]

'We're here because you were there' (A. Sivanandan). The impact of British imperialism was crucial in creating the 'push' factors of migration in the Caribbean and South Asia.

'Rivers of Blood' (Enoch Powell). Birmingham and Birmingham-based politicians played a crucial role in the racialisation of national political debate.

'Black people against state brutality' Birmingham was a key site in the struggle against racism, and particularly, in the 1980s, police harassment.

Summary: of some of the issues encountered in 'race' and racism.



Poster, Banner Theatre Archive. [MS 1611]

NUJ SAYS SOM RAJ MUST STAY



(N.U.J. member, Som Raj, and his family)

Stop the Deportations!

JOIN THE NATIONAL MARCH


WOLVERHAMPTON
SATURDAY 6TH JUNE 1987

ASSEMBLE 12.00 NOON WEST PARK WOLVERHAMPTON
MARCH TO CIVIC CENTRE FOR RALLIES

Organised by: N.U.J. Contact: RAY INGSIDE 735295 OR 54163 41204
& SOM RAJ DEFENCE CAMPAIGN

Flyer, Birmingham Trade Union Resource Centre. [MS 2009]

30 YEARS SINCE THE GRUNWICK STRIKE



COMMEMORATIVE EVENT WITH SPEAKERS, EXHIBITION & FILMS

Sunday 17th September 2006 - 11am-5pm
Tricycle Theatre, 269 High Road, Kilburn London NW6 7JR

Tube: Kilburn, Jubilee Line Rail: Brondesbury, Silverlink
Tickets must be bought in advance: £7.00 which includes lunch (Indian food - meat and vegetarian), Cash Bar
The Tricycle Theatre is fully accessible

BRENT TRADES UNION COUNCIL

Poster.

'They want our labour not presence.' The migrants found a glut of low-skilled jobs in the labour market, and 'no blacks, no dogs, no Irish' signs in the housing market.

'Last in, first out.' Black and Asian people found themselves the 'last in' in times of boom, and the 'first out' in times of recession.

'Black, Asian & White, Unite & Fight.' The unrest in Lozells arguably marked a disturbing rise in inter-ethnic tension in the new millennium.

'Race' and Racism in Birmingham: Researching Post-war Archives

Sources from Birmingham Archives and Heritage Collections

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The Council of Sikh Gurdwaras [MS 2303]
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'Race' and Racism in Birmingham: Researching Post-war Archives

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