In this chapter, I will analyse some of the effects on the political culture in the UK of social movements, since the 1970s, which have taken ‘race’ as their problematic. ‘Race’ has been a burning issue in recent British history arguably ever since the anti-black ‘riots’ in Liverpool in 1919, and certainly since those in Notting Hill and Nottingham in 1958 (Fryer, 1984). However, this chapter focuses on the new social movements that were formed at the start of the 1970s, which engaged in political action in support of social and racial equality. This is not to minimise the importance of the activities of liberals working in opposition to racism, which resulted in Race Relations Acts passed from 1966 to 2000, but it is intended to move our attention away from reformist politics. This chapter focuses the extra-parliamentary movements of black and white Britons in which the status of racial categories is at stake. This emphasis is chosen for two reasons. Firstly because their vigorous protests have had such widespread effects on political and social life in the UK, and secondly because they have been largely ignored in the sociological and political literature on ‘race’. Despite Paul Gilroy’s comment many years ago that the social movement around ‘race’ in the 1980s ‘has passed largely unacknowledged by left writers’ (Gilroy, 1987a: 134), much work remains to be done in this field. One chapter of Alistair Bonnett’s Anti-Racism (2000) is devoted to ‘practising anti-racism’, but this contains only the barest mention of the Anti-Nazi League, and makes no other reference to British social movements on ‘race’. Mairtin Mac an Ghaill’s (1999) examination of ‘anti-racism and ethnic minority community mobilization’ is based on categorical distinctions (derived from Bonnett, 1993), between ‘racial rejectionists’ (i.e. racists), ‘multi-culturalists’ and ‘anti-racists’. These distinctions run against the line taken in this chapter. Further, Mac an Ghaill is concerned with the theoretical underpinnings of the analysis of anti-racism, rather than with providing the much-needed empirical material on actual mobilizations. The concept ‘power’ appears in the title of another useful book on racism by Bhattacharyya, Gabriel and Small (2002), but, again, the focus is conceptual and not on those movements in Britain which have campaigned for power. Fortunately, there are some exceptions. A. Sivanandan (1982, 2000) has consistently applied the theory of class struggle Marxism to black British social movements and trade union struggles over ‘race’. Cathie Lloyd (1998, 2001, 2002) has offered valuable analytical and empirical material on social movements around ‘race’ in the UK and in Europe. But, surprisingly perhaps, books that take ‘race’ and British politics as their focus (Miles and Phizacklea (eds) (1979), Goulbourne (ed.) (1990), Saggar (1992), Solomos and Back (1995)) make almost no mention of the relevant social movements. This chapter begins to redress this. Because ‘race’ is a contested concept and social movements are also the subject of theoretical dispute, the chapter starts with a brief discussion of the relevant theories. It sets the framework for the argument put forward here: that the most significant of these social movements have undermined the viability of the concept of ‘race’; have fundamentally dislocated the assumption that British culture is coloured white; and thus that they have forced a reconfiguration of the notion of British identity. These changes are currently being worked out in the new literature on British citizenship (Parekh, 2000;
Perspectives on Democracy and Protest

Parekh Report 2000; Stevenson 2002); an important discussion, which, for reasons of space, is not entered into here.

One other introductory point needs to be made, concerning the method employed in researching this chapter. I was actively involved in several movements, which focused on ‘race’ issues in the 1970s and 1980s, and some of the material used here comes from my own documents, notes, and memories. Perhaps because of the lack of academic attention on these movements, there is very little accessible documentation, even in specialist libraries, despite the proliferation of leaflets, pamphlets and newspapers issued within these movements. Some material is available on the worldwide web. While I have started interviewing key figures in these movements, much more careful ‘oral history’ needs to be done (a start has been made; see Harris and White (eds) (1999)), and librarians should be encouraged to acquire materials held in personal collections by activists, so that they can be collated, stored and indexed. One major gap in this chapter, for instance, is any analysis of the role played by the various branches and tendencies within the Indian Workers Association. De Witt John (1969) is the authoritative source for the origins of this important Association, and Ramdin (1987) provides extensive information on its activities in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps because of their commitments to either the Soviet or Chines styles of Communist Party, these associations were not always organic to the movements described here. But their continual presence in the struggle to eradicate racial discrimination should be properly analysed in the future. This chapter should therefore be considered to be ‘work in progress’.

‘Race’ and social movement theory

‘Race’ is a bogus concept. Committees of experts assembled by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) have, since their first statement in 1950, systematically undermined notion that it is a valid scientific concept (Montagu, 1972). In 1970, the sociologist John Rex inserted these expert statements into the broader academic culture in this form:

Race is a taxonomic concept of limited usefulness as a means of classifying human beings . . . human population groups constitute a continuum . . . the genetic diversity within groups is probably as great as that between groups . . . “All men [sic] living today belong to a single species and are derived from a common stock”. (Rex, 1983: 4-5)

Building on his writings since the 1960s, Michael Banton (1998) explained the genealogy of the concept of ‘race’ in European social thought. He noted that ‘race’ was set out and widely circulated in popular and intellectual circles from the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Racial categorisation replaced an earlier Christian account that all humans (of whatever skin colour) are the children of God with a spurious ‘science’ of fundamental biological difference. Supposedly different types (such as Caucasian, Negroid, Mongoloid, Asiatic and so on) were identified and labelled by the leading social and scientific thinkers of the day. Robert Miles (1982; 1989) argued that the concept ‘race’ has no validity whatsoever, placing it in inverted commas to signify its utterly dubious status. His argument is that white societies, since their first colonies in South America

1 When established, the National Museum and Archives of Black British History and Culture will be a major asset.
Perspectives on Democracy and Protest

and the Caribbean, engage in a process of racialization of non-white ‘others’. This process takes skin colour, hair type, shape of eye and such like as indicators of essential biological difference. Racist ideology claimed that the non-‘Caucasian’ types of eye, nose, skin colour etc. are also signifiers of cultural inferiority, and thus provided justification for the economic exploitation and social exclusion of non-whites. Stuart Hall (1992), in an essay written specifically written for students, enlarged this work with a synthesis of Foucauldian and Marxist theory applied to a reading of European colonialism. Writing about the historical experience of dark-skinned people of African origin, Paul Gilroy (1993; 1997; 2000) has made the case for a replacement of racial categories with a notion of diasporic social identities. Such identities are mobile, hybrid, and continually changing, constructed from the huge variety of cultural and economic positions in which non-whites are placed throughout the globe. A similar argument should be made for white-skinned people. Gilroy (1987b; 1992) has also argued that the concept of ‘anti-racism’ is now a hindrance to political progress in this field because it fetishises the concept of ‘race’ and colludes in the reduction of ‘race’ to culture. Yet, the concept of ‘race’ lives on in sections of popular and political culture, seemingly undamaged by this intellectual assault. One reason for this is the continued publications of academics that persist in arguing that ‘races’ are essentially different (Carlton Coon (1982) claims to have identified 68 of them). Another reason for this persistence will emerge later in this chapter: the continued activities of social movements of black people, and of whites, who reject the rejection of ‘race’.

As a further preliminary to analysing actual social movements on ‘race’, we need to examine some of the literature on social movements. The published theoretical and empirical work has so far failed to turn its attention to movements of black people, or whites with an interest in ‘race’, in the UK. First, what are social movements? Paul Byrne argues that: ‘social movements . . . are amorphous entities . . . hard to delineate in organisational, tactical or ideological terms’. There are some common features, however: social movements have an ‘expressive’ politics, non-negotiable basic values, and collective identities; they operate in networks outside the orthodox channels of representative democracy, and they make a fundamental challenge to the existing order (Byrne, 1997: 11-23).

Analysts of social movements are somewhat split between the ‘resource mobilization’ theories and the ‘new social movement’ theories. The former provide useful purchase on the methods used by, and the material achievements of social movements, while the latter focus more on the concepts of identity and networks. Della Porta and Diani (1999) attempt to reconcile the two camps, but Melucci has argued that, since the late 1990s, there has been a tendency to abandon new social movement theory in favour of the rational choice models adopted by the resource mobilisation theorists (Lentin, 1999). Because ‘race’, and its abolition, is inextricably linked to questions of identity, and the ‘race’ movements have been concerned with fundamental change, the discussion here draws mainly from the sociology of new social movements.

The theory advanced by Manuel Castells (1983) is the most nearly relevant to the ‘race’ social movements. His more recent work provides a rather limited set of conceptual tools than are required. This work suggests that social movements can be separated from other forms of political action by the primary importance they give to the creation and enactment of a distinctive social identity, by the type of adversary they choose to attack, and by their ‘societal goals’ – the ‘vision of a new kind of social order, or social organization’ which they are trying to achieve (Castells, 1997: 71). These are familiar characteristic features of social movements. However, in the case studies that he offers in the 1997 book, Castells is too eager to reduce each to an identity held in common, a single enemy and an agreed goal. In his brief discussion of ‘African American identity’,
he even appears to accept the validity of the concept of ‘race’ (1997: 53-9). In the ‘race’ movements, as we shall see, while some accept Castells’ assumption about the concept of ‘race’, there is little agreement on identity, adversary or goals. Alberto Melucci (1996) also emphasises ‘identity’ as a focal concern for social movements, but stresses their organisational method as another distinctive feature. Movements form fluid non-hierarchical networks and reject the fixed structures established by political parties and pressure groups. Again, while this applies to some ‘race’ movements, it certainly does not apply to the field as a whole, which has witnessed the rise and fall of several groups which have claimed the status and form of political parties, as well as the operation of quite tightly organised core groups within the networked movement.

Castells’ earlier theory of urban social movements directs our attention to each of these important issues, but to several others besides. Having reviewed a wide range of city-based campaigns in Europe and America, from gay movements to tenants associations, Castells distinguished three types of movement defined principally by what he later called their ‘societal goals’:

1. Those, which are organised around ‘collective consumption demands’ – those that seek to de-commodify the services, provided by the city, to transform them from exchange values into use values.

2. Those which are engaged in ‘the search for cultural identity, for the maintenance or creation of autonomous local cultures, ethnically-based or historically originated’; these ‘community’ movements seek to defend people’s face-to-face communication, their ‘autonomously defined social meaning’ against the invasion from above of media messages and its standardised culture. He called these ‘community movements’.

3. Those that aim for neighbourhood self-management, local participation and autonomy, against centralised power structures; these are the characteristic goals of what Castells calls ‘citizen movements’. (Castell, 1983: 319-21)

This approach enables us to capture important features of some black social movements – their search for cultural identity, their campaigns for adequate welfare and social provision (preferably de-commodified, or free), and, particularly in those that based themselves in specific inner-areas of the major UK cities, the demand for local control of neighbourhood facilities and a recognition of their rights as British citizens. Castells’ category of ‘citizen movements’ might also stretch to the anti-deportation campaigns that have been a feature of British political life since the late 1970s, and those of the early twenty-first century that defend refugees and asylum-seekers. The question of whether these movements are revolutionary in intent was answered by Jean Cohen (1985), who argued that their emphasis was on structural reform; they adopted a type of ‘self-limiting radicalism’. Again, this is hardly true of the militant black movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, which saw itself as spearheading revolutionary change.

However, there are several gaps in this approach. One is a consideration of the embodied and expressive elements of ‘race’ social movements, issues which are effectively addressed in Hetherington’s (1998) study of ‘new age’ movements and which Gilroy (1987a) briefly attempted to include in his comments on black urban politics in the 1980s. I shall address this in my examination below of movements such as Rock Against Racism.

A second problem lies in Castells’ thin approach to the issue of ‘community’. In my own study of black and white social movements I have emphasised goals which Castells underplays, such as the search for emotional intimacy, social solidarity and social justice, captured in what I call the social imaginary of ‘community’, which is characteristic
of the movements operating over the past thirty years in the multi-cultural inner city area of Chapeltown, Leeds (Farrar, 2002a). The utopianism, which underpins this imaginary, is observable in the anti-capitalist social movements of the late 1990s and early 2000s; sometimes they acknowledge the inspiration they gained from radical black movements and earlier carnivalesque movements. A less optimistic feature of my own study, which has been analysed rather differently by Gilroy (1987a), is the use of the tactics of violence and fire in the so-called ‘riots’, which punctuated the 1970s, the 1980s, and 2001.

Thirdly, Castells, in common with most of the social movement theorists, pays too little attention to the international dimensions of social movements. While this will be redressed by studies of the anti-capitalist movements that emerged in the late 1990s, the movements around ‘race’ in the UK had from the start a keen focus on the global dimensions of the issues they addressed.

In summary, then, this chapter will analyse ‘race’ social movements in terms which problematizes the notion of ‘race’; will suggest limitations, as well as applications of Castells’ urban social movement theory; and will focus on the bodily and artistic aspects, as well as the violence, contained within an extremely diverse set of movements linked only by their common interest in the question of ‘race’. The global aspects of these movements will be mentioned in passing.

Early ‘race’ movements

A defining moment for the black social movements in the 1970s was the trial of what became known as the Mangrove Nine. Nine black (British Caribbean) people were arrested during a demonstration in August 1971 against police harassment of Frank Critchlow, the owner of the Mangrove restaurant in Notting Hill, London. Demonstrations, occupations, sit-downs and so on are the stock-in-trade of social movements, and the intensity of the bodily experience in these activities is rarely commented upon. Yet, demonstrators are often turning their bodies into the targets of physical aggression by police officers and counter-demonstrators. Both on these occasions and on those where there is joyful, exuberant non-violent action, the rush of adrenaline is experienced physically by many of the participants. One of the leaders of the Mangrove demonstration, Darcus Howe, had already been campaigning against police malpractice, and when members of the British Black Panthers arrived to support the demonstration the police took the opportunity to arrest radicals who, according to a report in the Guardian newspaper, they had already had under surveillance for a year (Fryer, 1984: 394). Violence was exerted here and arrests were made. Charges included incitement to riot, attempted murder of police officers and assault. The fact that an all-white jury acquitted the nine proved, according to Darcus Howe, that ‘This race thing, you have to be very careful how you deal with it because you can win people over’ (Interview 6.8.2002).

Howe was already familiar with the theory advanced by his uncle, the Trinidadian Marxist CLR James. As he puts it, ‘Facing Reality [1958] was my text’; it is a refined mix of theory and studies of working class practice which stresses the need for autonomous organisation of the black working class, within an overall strategy of unity with militants in the white working class as revolutionary forces develop. Howe briefly joined the Black Panthers, which included Althea Jones and Barbara Beese, but from 1974 until the mid-1980s was the editor of the monthly journal Race Today. He subsequently became a leading figure in the Race Today Alliance, which included the Black Parents Movement
and the Black Students Movement. Although there were differences of emphasis within the Alliance, with John La Rose in particular having a greater regard for the legacy of George Padmore (Interview with John La Rose 13.9.2001, Alleyne, 2002), it was committed to the view that ‘race’ is inextricable from ‘class’.

The Mangrove trial, and the many other campaigns against police harassment documented in the pages of Race Today throughout the 1970s, exemplified the confidence of this tendency within the black social movements that racism is not an inevitable and insurmountable feature of white society. White working class people were, in this analysis, capable of recognising what they had in common with black workers. In that sense, they were undermining the salience of the category ‘race’, while campaigning vigorously against racism. Private and public meetings, press releases and leaflets, the filling of the court-room galleries with family and supporters, pickets of court houses and demonstrations—all these tactics were frequently utilised in most cities throughout the 1970s. Black militants formed a social movement with ‘justice’ as its immediate goal. This movement emphasised the central role of the arrested youth and their families, a legal defence team led by black lawyers and/or anti-racist whites who showed no deference to the police or the judges, and the mobilisation in demonstrations and court-room pickets of supporters of the accused. The Alliance was, however, as committed to workplace struggles as it was to neighbourhood-based actions, and as interested in political militancy within the Asian population as in the Caribbean groups. Race Today covered political events anywhere in the world with a significant black population, taking a Marxist-internationalist perspective. The Alliance was a tightly organised and disciplined group which saw itself at the centre of a wider social movement of black people and those of their white supporters who adopted Jamesian politics. It had members in Bradford (publishing Bradford Black magazine between 1977 and 1980) and supporters in other cities. Nevertheless, the Alliance always adopted what was then called a ‘mass politics’ and is now more often seen as ‘movement’ politics.

Its rejection of the Leninist theory of a revolutionary party functioning as the leadership of the working class distinguished the Alliance from two other black organisations in the 1970s, the Black Unity and Freedom Party (BUFP) and Samaj-in’a Babylon. The BUFP published a newspaper, Black Voice. Samaj was formed by a group of British Asians who left the Socialist Workers Party, issuing its first newspaper in September 1976. Soonu Engineer was a leading member, and most, but not all, of its correspondents were Asian. In March 1977, it added ‘in’a Babylon’ to its title, indicating its willingness to cover the struggles of British Caribbeans as well as Asians. It included articles on Rastafarianism, and it reported on arrested Caribbean youth known as the Islington 18 and the Lewisham 21 in its August-September 1977 issue. Just as Black Voice indicated its solidarity with the republican movement in the north of Ireland, the Samaj group was not ideologically hostile to white people as a whole. It described itself as ‘a socialist paper for black people and those involved in the fight against racism’, that is, whites who identified with black struggle. However, it was clear about its principal focus: ‘the struggles of black workers here and internationally’ (Samaj-in’a Babylon, March 1977).

There was much evidence available in this period to justify the argument that black workers, particularly British Asians, would engage in sharp confrontations with their

---

2 Leila Hassan, John La Rose, Gus John and Linton Kwesi Johnson were among the other key members.
3 Moore (1975) effectively utilises Race Today to summarise the struggles of the early 1970s.
4 My 1988 issue is Volume 19 so it was presumably founded in 1969.
employers. A social movement emerged with ‘workers’ rights’ as its central theme. The
three month strike by the predominantly Asian workforce at Imperial Typewriters in
Leicester which began in May 1974, championed by Race Today, may have resulted in
the closure of the factory, but it demonstrated not only the militancy of the Asian
workers, but the willingness of Asian women to play a central role in the organisation of
the strike (Ramdin, 1987: 271-280). The epic strike at the Grunwick photographic
factory in north London, from August 1976 to July 1978, also ended in defeat for the
workers, but witnessed an intensity of struggle rarely seen in British trade union history
(Ramdin, 1987: 280-309). Mrs Jayaben Desai, a central figure throughout the strike paid
tribute to the massive support offered to the Asian strikers, mainly women, by white
trade unionists. She also understood the contradictions within white racism: ‘Ordinary
trade union members . . . who come to our picket line . . . support us because I think
they understand how we suffer. Some may have racialist attitudes, but there is also
genuine sympathy’ (Samaj-in’a Babylon, April-May 1977).
It is clear that all three of these black organisations emphasised their ideological and
organisational autonomy from the parties and campaigns of the predominantly white far
left, but never excluded alliances with whites that supported their political position.
Further, the division between people of African and Asian origin was seen as a product
of colonialism and racism, and was expected to be eradicated over time. For them,
‘race’ was a significant, but not the only, source of oppression and alienation in white
society. In this they were quite distinct from the other important formation within the
black social movements of the 1970s, the group based in Notting Hill, London, which
published a newspaper called Grassroots. Issues of this newspaper published in 1976
and 1978 cover similar issues to those included in the Marxist-oriented papers – racist
attacks, police harassment, unjust deportations – but the paper indicates its commitment
to what has been described as ‘cultural nationalism’ by its exclusive emphasis on issues
relating to people of African origin. The significance it placed on education, family life,
and ‘black heroes’ (where black is the code for African), and the stress it gave to Africa
Liberation Day (celebrated in May 1978 with a march and a week-end of cultural and
educational events) indicated its aspiration for a social and cultural life in the UK which is
quite separate from that of white citizens. In this it has close links with those in the
Rastafarian movement, also prominent in this period, which, following Marcus Garvey,
advocated a physical return to Africa by black Britons (Owens, 1979; Jones, 1987).
While this formation rarely imposed its organisation on white society, since it had little or
no interest in the demonstrations, conferences and so on organised by the wider
movements around ‘race’, its influence among young black people was significant,
because it expressed the deep alienation many felt within white society.
Brief reference has been made to the role of whites within the ‘race’ movements, and
this must now be addressed. White racists have also organised in a form that fits within
the parameters of social movements. The National Front (NF), the predominant
organisation of British Nazis in the 1970s, adopted a populist approach to politics,
campaigning vigorously against immigration and against British Caribbean youths’
alleged proclivity to crime. A membership organisation, it continually sought to expand
its influence by recruiting among white football supporters and by spectacular (and
provocative) actions, such as demonstrating against the Imperial Typewriters’ strikers,
and marching through neighbourhoods where black British people lived (e.g. Bradford
on 24th April 1976, deliberately provoking a violent confrontation with Asian youth and
their white supporters (Webster, 1977: 173, 195). Like most social movements, it
advocated symbolic action as a key tactic for increasing its influence in British politics:
‘What is it that touches off a chord in the instincts of the people. . . ? It can often be the
most simple and primitive thing . . . a flag . . . a marching column . . . the sound of
Perspectives on Democracy and Protest

a drum’ (NF leader John Tyndall, quoted in Walker, 1977: 145). This symbolic, embodied, performative approach to politics is characteristic of social movements of both the left and the right. Unlike the left social movements, however, the NF sought Parliamentary representation. Eighty of its 176 candidates obtained more than 10 per cent of the vote in the local government elections of 1976 in the wake of hostile tabloid reaction the arrival in the UK of British Asians expelled from Malawi. In Leicester, it fielded 48 candidates, gaining 43,733 votes (averaging 18.5 per cent of the total votes cast) (Webster, 1977: 195-8). These indicators of entrenched racism alarmed the left. The end of the 1970s was therefore a very difficult time for Britain’s black population. Surveyed in 1982, 53 per cent of British Caribbean’s and 51 per cent of British Asians, said ‘things had got worse’ for them over the previous five years. While the economic recession was the main reason for this for the majority of these, 41 per cent of Caribbeans and 49 per cent of Asians said racism was the reason (Brown, 1984: 277-8). The rise in support for the National Front, the catalogue of reported violence exerted against black Britons, and racist remarks by pop icons stimulated one of the major social movements of the 1970s and early 1980s, Rock Against Racism (RAR) and the Anti Nazi League (ANL). The former was established in 1976 by members and sympathisers of the Socialist Workers Party whose understanding of the importance of popular culture matched, perhaps overshadowed, their Party’s focus of workplace struggle. Rooted in the iconoclastic underground newspapers, theatre groups and youth music cultures of the 1960s, the founders of RAR (including Red Saunders, Roger Huddle, Syd Shelton and David Widgery) were a world apart from the dead men on leave (Lenin’s apt phrase) who populated the revolutionary left. They formed RAR in specific response to David Bowie’s comment to Playboy magazine that he sympathised with fascism, and his dressing in Nazi regalia at Victoria station (Widgery, 1986: 41), and to Eric Clapton’s shout to the crowd at a gig that they should “Vote for Enoch Powell . . . Stop Britain becoming a black colony . . . get the foreigners out” (Samaj-in’ a Babylon, March 1977).

David Widgery’s book Beating Time (1986), subtitled ‘riot ’n’ race ’n’ ‘n’ rock and roll’ provides marvellous commentary and photographs of this period and the movement he did so much to form. Ruth Gregory, who, unusually for a newspaper editor, was a painter and graphic designer, ran RAR’s magazine Temporary Hoarding. It has never been matched in political journalism for its creative layout, its serious content (Widgery accurately describes it as ‘dub Marxism’), accessible style, and for its sheer energy and commitment. Nazi iconography was creeping into the body-displays adopted by some early supporters of Punk rock bands like the Sex Pistols, Sham 69 and Angelic Upstarts, and around the second-wave Ska band, Madness. Temporary Hoarding gave prominence to Pistols’ singer Johnny Rotten’s condemnation of racism in general and Nazism in particular. The explosion all over the country of RAR reggae/punk gigs, where dreadlocked blacks and safety-pinned whites enthusiastically shared the same space for the first time effectively expelled both the nazi regalia and the actual Nazis from the movement. Pogo-ing was perhaps the most dramatic example of the embodiment of this new culture for white youths. The cool, rhythmic, intimate dance style of early reggae was equally expressive among black youths, but it was beginning to be replaced by more energetic forms of black dance in which the body was bent and arms were outstretched. Personal styles of clothing and hair at RAR gigs and carnivals eschewed all mainstream pop conventions, creating new modes with bewildering rapidity. All these performances involved the creation of a personal symbolic order by

---

5 A dance form that consisted of young people, mainly men, leaping up in the air and crashing into the people packed into the space nearby.
bricolage (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdige, 1979) to match the non-racial order they aimed for in society.

RAR’s innovation – mass cultural politics – came at a time when small groups of whites in all the major cities had been organising anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigns since the early 1970s, often distributing the anti-fascist magazine Searchlight. Many, such as the Leeds Coalition Against Racism and Fascism, set up in 1974 by members of Big Flame, a mainly white far left group which supported political autonomy, had disputed Searchlight’s one-sided emphasis on nazi groups, arguing that racism in the wider society was in many respects the more significant issue. Big Flame’s pamphlet ‘The Past Against Our Future’ (1978) went further, arguing that the sexual and gender oppression that underlay Nazism was almost as important as its racism. Despite these sorts of commitments, local groups mainly agreed to join the single-focused Anti Nazi League when it was formed in late 1977, since, with the SWP’s organizational flair and its wide backing from trade unions, left MPs and other worthies, and with RAR as its creative vanguard, the ANL was clearly able to mobilize a much larger movement than the could the small anti-racist, anti-fascist groups. A combination of RAR Carnivals and massive anti-nazi demonstrations successfully marginalized the National Front and considerably reduced its vote at the 1979 election. Eighty thousand people attended the first RAR/ANL Carnival, rocking politically to The Clash, The Tom Robinson Band, Steel Pulse, X-Ray Specs and others (30th April 1978, Victoria Park, London). One hundred thousand attended the second (24th September 1978, Brockwell Park, London), while 35,000 carnivalled in Manchester in the autumn of 1978, 5,000 in Cardiff, 8,000 in Edinburgh, 2,000 in Harwich and 5,000 in Southampton (Renton, 2002). Widgery puts the total figure even higher, claiming that 400,000 people took part in the carnivals of 1978. At its height there were 52 RAR groups organising around the UK (Widgery, 1986: 91, 95). Between 1977 and 1979, nine million ANL leaflets were distributed and 750,000 badges were sold. Large numbers of Labour Party and Trade Union branches affiliated (Renton, 2002).

The predominantly white left, aided by RAR but as yet unsupported by the ANL, mobilised thousands, including many young blacks, to stop the National Front marching through Lewisham (an area of black settlement in London) in August 1977; 7,000 young Bengalis demonstrated after the racist murder of Altab Ali in East London, joined the following month by 4,000 ANL supporters (Renton, 2002). On 23rd April 1979, the police killed Blair Peach during a huge demonstration in Southall (an the area of London with a high proportion of British Punjabi residents), initiated by the Southall Asian Youth Movement and supported by the ANL, against the decision to allow the National Front to hold a meeting at Ealing Town Hall. Ten thousand people joined the mourning procession (CARF, 1981). One of the significant consequences of this upsurge of self-organisation amongst British Asians was the formation of Southall Black Sisters in November 1979, a group that has campaigned ever since both for women’s rights in general and against all forms of religious fundamentalism in particular (SBS, 1990; Patel, 2002).

Throughout this period, a social movement of unprecedented proportions was created. Although Gilroy (1987a) correctly criticises the ANL for its implicit reinforcement of British nationalism (with its argument that the Nazis were sham patriots) and its narrowing-
down of the complex agenda of RAR, his is the only academic work, which provides a proper appreciation of this movement’s achievements. Its last Carnival, in Leeds in 1983, show-cased the tendency in youth culture which most explicitly took up the challenge of the abolition of ‘race’: Two-Tone, the revival of Jamaica Ska played by bands such as The Specials, The Beat and The Selecter composed equally of black and white British musicians (listen to ‘The Best of Two Tone’ CD, Chrysalis (1993)). The important part played by the Asian Youth Movements (AYMs), which formed in most towns and cities with a sizeable population of British Asians during the late 1970s, is even less well documented. Yet the AYMs initiated their own demonstrations, issued their own propaganda and functioned as a thorn in the flesh of the newly emerging Asian establishment in the towns in which they were based. Every anti-fascist demonstration had a large contingent of Asian youth; if anyone still held any doubts about the status of young British Asians as active and politically aware members of British society, the AYMs forcibly ejected those illusions and defeated the ‘between two cultures’ argument (Anwar, 1981) at the same time. CARF (1981: 54-7) discusses the Southall AYM and highlights one its other achievements: bridging the gap between young Asians and young Caribbeans in Southall. It made good links with the organisation that mobilized Caribbean youth in that area, the significantly named People’s Unite Education and Creative Arts Centre. The police at the demonstration in 1979 at which Blair Peach was killed smashed this centre up.

The turning of a decade is an arbitrary point at which we take stock of the recent past, and in terms of the impact of these social movements on the political culture of the UK, it is reasonable to assert that the 1970s was the time in which a new social actor made its presence decisively felt in British society: black citizens found their militant voice, and the establishment was forced to make ad-hoc responses. Its main efforts were in Parliamentary legislation. The Race Relations Act of 1976 strengthened the provisions of the 1965 and 1968 Acts by outlawing both indirect and direct discrimination, and the Race Relations Board was replaced by the Commission for Racial Equality, charged with the duty to ‘work towards eliminating racial discrimination; to promote equality of opportunity; to influence policy, and promote and encourage research in race relations; and to keep the functioning of the Act under constant review’, as well as helping people with their complaints and acting against institutions found to have exerted indirect discrimination (Hiro, 1992: 226). With 86 branches throughout the UK, some were optimistic for the CRE. The radical movements held no illusions, and even Lionel Morrison argued that CRE offices did black organisations a disservice by claiming to represent black opinion in their neighbourhoods (Walker, 1977: 219). Nevertheless, the UK has legislation and enforcement mechanisms, which are the envy of anti-racists among our European partners (Forbes, 1995).

Aside from this legislative response, there were four important consequences for the shape of British politics as a whole. One was the ability to secure a principle that is as clear today as it became then: the right to autonomous self-organisation based on a particular source of oppression (in this case, racism). This principle is secure only in the sense that it is widely acknowledged to be the operative principle in all social movements; it remains bitterly disputed by the predominantly white parties of the far left and the Labour Party.8

8 On the former, the exemplary story of the fateful clash between the leadership of Socialist Workers Party and its black members organised around its paper Flame remains to be told. In brief, Flame was extinguished. On the latter, see the demise of Labour Party Black Sections, which had been organised by Labour Party members influenced by black social movements but who remained, nevertheless committed to the reformist politics of Labour (Shukra, 1990).
Secondly, these movements created a new form of politics: the cultural politics of everyday life. Although RAR deserves the credit for translating this into mass politics, Caribbean reggae musicians such as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh and the poet Linton Kwesi Johnson initially established the fusion of cultural activity and political commitment in the early 1970s. It was, and is, expressed most vigorously within the Caribbean neighbourhoods of the UK by the annual West Indian-style Carnivals held each year (Connor and Farrar, 2003). The theorist of this fusion was CLR James, and Creation for Liberation, an arm of the Race Today Alliance headed by Johnson, promoted political culture in black neighbourhoods for some time after RAR and dissolved. This understanding, which was so clearly manifested by Reclaim the Streets in the 1990s, owes as much to the cultural politics of the 1970s ‘race’ movements as it does to the Situationists to whom it most often referred (Jordan, 1998).

Thirdly, a generation of white youth was formed which admired black culture, hated racism and began to mix comfortably with British Asians and British Caribbeans. It was in this period that it began to be possible to use the term ‘black’ generically, in recognition of what people of Asian (South and East) and African (UK, Caribbean and US) descent had in common in predominantly white societies. Despite the impact of cultural nationalism behind the scenes, in the public sphere, especially among young people, the foundations were being laid for ‘race’ to be understood as phenotypical, not genotypical, as constructed, not essential. So long as racism existed, the concept of ‘race’ would not disappear, but for the major black radical movements at least, it was not to be taken as the essential feature of their social existence.

The fourth and perhaps most important consequence arose from these three developments. Both multi-culturalism and anti-racism were losing their relevance in the everyday lives of young people living in the ethnically diverse cities of the UK. ‘Race’ was becoming less personally divisive issue for them than it had been for their black and their white parents. This is not for a moment to suggest that racist atrocities ceased, but it is to suggest that, in the neighbourhoods, clubs, colleges and schools in which black and white young people grew up and worked together, an ease of association developed across the cultures. Although it took another few years for ‘whiteness’ studies to enter the academic domain, key thinkers in this field (e.g. Ware, 1992; Ware and Back, 2002) formed their politics and their ideas in the 1970s cultural politics milieu, alongside radical blacks. ‘Being white’ is now the focus of critical interrogation, but it is no longer taken as the automatic signifier of indissoluble difference, any more than ‘being black’ had been for the radical black movements of this period. As we shall see below, this development was uneven – contrary forces emerged during the 1980s. Nor were the deeper, socio-psychological layers of white racism eliminated. Nevertheless, from this period onwards, the claim that the UK was simply white or universally racist held diminishing credibility.

**Later movements**

Events took place in the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, which the mass media called ‘riots’ and which radicals, black and white, called ‘rebellions’ or ‘insurrections’. I seek to replace all these terms with ‘violent urban protest’ (Farrar, 2002b). The following briefly summarises the major protests:

- On 5th November 1975 British-Caribbean youth in Chapeltown, Leeds, stoned police cars, severely injuring two officers, and fought pitched battles with the police who arrived to rescue their colleagues (Race Today, December 1975).
Over the August Bank Holiday weekend in 1976, much larger groups of British Caribbean youth fought with the police at the Notting Hill Carnival in London (Race Today, September 1976).

Five years later violent protest broke out in the St Paul's area of Bristol (2nd April 1981, 100 arrests), in Brixton, London (9th-13th April, 244 arrests), Finsbury Park, London (20th April, 91 arrests), Southall, London (3rd July, 23 arrests), Toxteth, Liverpool (3rd-8th July, 200 arrests).

On the night of 10th July 1981, violence took place in Moss Side (Manchester, with 53 arrests), throughout London (385 arrests), Birmingham (42 arrests), Wolverhampton (22 arrests), Liverpool (65 arrests), Preston (24 arrests), Hull (27 arrests) and Luton (one arrest).

Over the week-end of 10th-11th July 1981 there was further disorder in Manchester, London and Birmingham, and in another 25 cities and towns, including Leeds, Bradford and Tunbridge Wells, with a further 1,065 arrests. Too little emphasis has been placed on the fact that thousands of white youths were involved in the July 1981 events. (For further details, see Benyon and Solomos, 1987: 3-15; Farrar, 1982: 7; Gilroy, 1987: 237-40; Hiro, 1992: 85; Kettle and Hodges, 1982.)

Gilroy (1987a) argues that these activities exhibit many of the features associated with social movements, and he emphasises their normative, moral and purposeful aspects (particularly the demand for social justice), as well as the exuberance and joyfulness exhibited by many participants. All these are important observations; particularly in view of the unthinking condemnation, they receive from mainstream politicians and the mass media. But one other feature must also be stressed: the terrible fear they provoke among most inner city residents, the shame experienced by families afterwards, and the acute disruption they cause in the local political process. In Chapeltown, for instance, most of the key activists in the urban movements of the 1970s, which had campaigned so successfully over educational issues in the 1970s (Farrar, 1992), refused to participate in the defence committee set up for those arrested in 1981. Instead, they turned all their attention to an institution created by the city council, the Harehills and Chapeltown Liaison Committee, which tied them ever more closely to the local state as the 1980s progressed. While a new generation of activists did emerge in the mid-1980s, who, significantly, were willing to campaign successfully as mixed groups of whites, British Asians and British Caribbeans, the council was able to accelerate the process of ethnic segmentation, professionalization and individualization which was developing in the UK as a whole, stimulated by Mrs Thatcher's brand of Conservatism (Farrar, 1999). Employing Castells' terms, the movements of the 1970s were effective on all three dimensions – in their ‘collective consumption’ demands, over their ‘identity’ issues, and as ‘citizens’ movements’, even including revolutionary elements within the movement. But, apart from the new radicals demonstrating over police and council racism, the movements of the 1970s largely collapsed in the subsequent decade into reformist pressure activity. In particular, they demanded (and largely obtained) equal opportunity policies in public sector bodies. Cain and Yuval-Davis (1990) describe the emergence of salaried, ‘professional’ spokespeople, the separation of Asians and Caribbeans, an

---

9 Protest against the police by black British youth has been a persistent stimulus for political activity throughout the period considered in this chapter. Injustices are catalogued in Policing Against Black People (IRR, 1987) and this phenomenon is analysed sociologically in Cashmore and McLauhglin (eds.) (1991).
increasing focus of welfare issues instead of political rights, and the dependence of local organisations on public funding (and thus the restraint of their radicalism). Those committed to the probably out-dated revolution/reform binary opposition critique these developments as 'mere reformism', but it is important to recall that these activities – of what we might call ethnically segmented local pressure groups – delivered significant improvement to the material fabric of the multi-cultural inner city area known as Chapeltown (Farrar, 2002a), and other similar areas also witnessed these developments in housing, local community centres, environmental improvement and the like. These reforms may have arrived anyway, but they were certainly kick-started by the violent urban protest of 1981. It is an irony that few of the youths who fought and flamed throughout the first seven months of that year benefited from the reforms they precipitated.

Only one major campaign arose out the violent urban protests in 1981: the defence of twelve members of the United Black Youth League (UBYL). These young British Asians living in Bradford had made petrol bombs in preparation for a rumoured attack by fascists in the wake of the 'riots' in July of that year. Two of the defendants, Tarlochan Gata-Aura and Tariq Mehmood Ali, had been members of the Bradford Asian Youth Movement. Gata-Aura had also had long experience of trying to work within the mainly white organisations of the far left, and of Samaj-in'a Babylon, finally forming the UBYL, a radical local organisation which aspired to black unity. The defence campaign fractured several times in the lead-up to their month-long trial in Leeds Crown Court in April 1982, but it finally succeeded in distributing thousands of leaflets and posters and mobilising huge numbers of British Asians and their white and British Caribbean supporters. Radical barristers, experienced in trials in which racism is the key issue, combined with massive public support succeeded in persuading a jury of seven white and five black people that the UBYL members were justified in making these preparations. The jury accepted the slogan raised by militants throughout the 1970s that 'self defence is no offence'.

One other event in the early 1980s provoked a mass demonstration, mainly of British Caribbeans. The fire at a party in New Cross, London, on 18th January 1981, at which thirteen black youths died, provoked outrage within the black community when it became clear to them that it had been started by a petrol bomb thrown by racists. ‘Thirteen dead and nothing said’ was shouted at meetings and at the New Cross Massacre Black People’s Day of Action on 2nd March; no member of the white establishment had even bothered to send condolences to the bereaved families. One thousand people attended a meeting immediately after the fire and 20,000, mainly but not exclusively British Caribbeans, joined the Day of Action, marching for eight hours from New Cross to Hyde Park (in London). Another of the marchers’ slogans, ‘Blood ah go run is justice nah come’ was particularly prescient, since the Day of Action took place just a month before violent urban protest in Brixton, London, in the wake of the mass arrests in the police’s ‘Swamp ’81’ campaign. Skilfully co-ordinated by members of the Race Today Alliance, this was the largest demonstration of black Britons ever seen in this country and showed every sign of turning itself into a mass social movement. It seems probable that the outbreak of urban protest over the following four months undermined that possibility, and while the legal challenges to the official response to the fire (that it was an accident) continued until July 1982, no conclusion was reached which satisfied the families or the campaigners.

\[10\] See Race Today August/September 1982 for an analysis of the campaign and the trial.

It might be possible to fit mass campaigns such as those for the UBYL defendants or the New Cross victims within Castells’ category of a citizen movement, since they are fiercely opposed to centralised power structures. Their equal emphasis, however, on ‘autonomously defined social meaning’ and self-identity places them within Castells’ ‘community movement’. What Castells’ typology fails to capture is the intense concentration within these movements on justice and equal rights, regardless of ethnicity. While these movements are rooted in everyday life and utterly practical in their demands, a longing for a world in which skin colour is irrelevant and justice and solidarity will prevail is at the heart of these events. Thus the concept ‘utopian’, with positive connotations, should be attached to these movements.

Another social movement – against deportations – developed during the 1980s, which also hardly fits within the classic movements paradigm. As practical and rooted as the ones just described, but less utopian, protests and demonstrations took place throughout the 1980s against the operation of immigration laws. (Several of these have been documented by Steve Cohen (1981; 1986; 2001; 2002); see also Bhattacharyya and Gabriel (2002), Wilson and Lal (1983), Gordon (1984).) Cohen joined the revolutionary left in the late 1960s, became a barrister, worked as a play leader and then took a job in the South Manchester Law Centre (SMLC) in 1977 (Interview 16.9.02). Nasira Begum went to the SMLC in 1978 requesting help with threatened deportation. Her visit led to three years of legal actions linked to public campaigning before she was given leave to stay in the UK. It established principles which are replicated in all effective social movements around racial justice. Regular, open, democratic meetings – at which Nasira always played a key part – directed the campaign, which emphasised the importance of making links with all those facing a similar plight (Cohen, 2002). The most public of these, for Anwar Ditta’s right to bring her children to join her in Rochdale, in which Tarlochan Gata-Aura played a leading part, lasted from 1977 to 1981. It had generated such momentum that a television company paid for blood tests to be done to refute the government’s claim that the children were not Anwar’s; it filmed the results being announced (World in Action, 16.3.1981). Three days after the programme was broadcast, entry clearance certificates were issued (Cohen, 2002). Of the many other campaigns of the 1980s, detailed in the radical publications of that decade and sometimes getting coverage in the mainstream media, that for Viraj Mendis produced the most publicity. Mendis was granted sanctuary in the Church of the Ascension in Hume, Manchester, for 671 days before it was smashed into by police and Mendis was arrested, on 18th January 1989. He was put on a plane to Sri Lanka two days later (Cohen, 2002).

As Cohen points out, the 1990s saw very few campaigns around immigration/deportation issues in Greater Manchester, and nor were there many elsewhere. At the start of the twenty first century, however, there are signs of renewed militancy over the related issue of asylum seekers and refugees. Formed in 1995, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC, 20002) had issued 27 Newsletters by September 2002, detailing the dozens of cases and campaigns that have taken place in recent years. None, however, have achieved the kind of support that was witnessed in the 1980s, and it would be hard to claim that a mass social movement was still in operation. This is partly because successive Labour Home Secretaries’ pronouncements on ‘bogus asylum seekers’ and ‘clearly unfounded’ anti-deportation campaigns (Dunstan, 2002) have narrowed the space in the dominant political discourse

12 Nevertheless, around 5,000 people demonstrated in support of asylum seekers and against deportations of migrant workers in London in the summer of 2002.
for a resurgence of anti-racist campaigning. ‘Race’, under Labour, seems to have been pushed into a strange new shape: if you are a citizen of the Commonwealth or the European Union (white or not) your rights are more or less respected; if you are not, you are irredeemably ‘Other’. Despite the rhetoric of equal opportunity and the celebration of ethnic difference, some non-white British citizens argue that their status will never be fully respected, and another factor has come into play that has depleted political militancy around ‘race’.

Ethnic particularism (Paul Gilroy’s useful concept) was present in the cultural nationalism of the 1970s, but the movements described above dwarfed it. It gained ground in the 1980s as ethnically-specific jobs were created under the ‘race equality’ programmes promoted by Labour councils, assisted by those aspects of Conservative government policy which were seeking to ameliorate the effects in the inner cities of its economic policy. The mass demonstrations by British Muslims against Salman Rushdie’s novel The Satanic Verses (1988) (Appignanesi and Maitland (1989)) announced not simply that this religious group could form itself into a social movement of remarkable size and force, but that Muslims felt compelled to assert the particularity of their identity and needs. Avtar Brah (1996: 168) has argued that during and after the Verses protests the UK witnessed the ‘focus on cultural difference as the primary signifier of a supposedly immutable boundary: a view of the Asian as “alien” par excellence; the ultimate Other’. In response, a significant section of British Muslims became more strongly committed to Islam than they had before; the effect on young Muslims was particularly marked. Tariq Modood (1988) put the theoretical seal on what was already emerging in the social movements – Asians were not ‘black’, he argued. It was from this point onwards that ‘the inclusive notion of blackness’ emphasised by the 1970s and 1980s movements came under threat (Solomos and Back 1996: 134). The resurgence of religious divisions in India during the 1990s as the avowedly secular the Congress Party lost power, as Sikhs grew more militant in their demand for a separate state called Khalistan, as Indian Hindus became increasingly violent in their hostility to Indian Muslims, and the rise in tension between India and Pakistan (culminating in the threat of war in 2002) all contributed to an increased focus among significant sections of the British Asian population on the particular beliefs and practices of their various religions. All this was embodied in everyday life by the proliferation of types of clothing and headwear that symbolically announced the devotees’ allegiances. The parallel move among some British Caribbeans was towards Afrocentrism (Asante, 1988, 1993). Afrocentricity is defined as ‘a perspective which allows Africans to be subjects of historical experiences rather than objects on the fringes of Europe . . . [it] is the Afrocentric study of African phenomena’ (Asante, 1993: 2).

This academic aim translates for its adherents into the view that whites are incapable of overcoming their racism, a growing commitment to living, as far as possible, separate lives from whites, combined with an immersion into whatever aspects of African culture they can acquire. Symbolically manifested in the wearing of African clothing and artefacts, or in the uniforms of the Black Muslims, in UK academic circles it is expressed in studies such as Hylton (1999) and The African Centred Review. While it might be expected that these types of ethnic particularism would lead their followers into militant campaigns on behalf of putative members who are victims of injustice, this rarely takes place. There might be several reasons for this: their intensely cultural focus might distance them from ‘politics’; joining social movements would draw them into unwelcome contact with other cultures; victims of injustice might be thought of as of lower status. For whatever reason, the ethnic particularists only promote the interests of their own group. While, as we have seen in the anti-Rushdie protests, they are capable of creating a social movement of their own, normally they restrict themselves to pressure group activity, on a limited range of issues specific to their ethnic group. In so doing,
they reinsert the category of ‘race’ into political and popular discourse, staking the claim that there really is something essentially different and untranslatable about their biology and/or their culture.

Such groups rarely make the headlines, whereas at least one campaign, with deep roots in the radical black movements of the previous three decades, did so throughout the second half of the 1990s. The murder of Stephen Lawrence, a young British Caribbean Londoner, on 22nd April 1993, the dogged insistence of his parents that racism was its motive and that the police had failed properly to investigate, the eventual emergence of a co-ordinated alliance of lawyers and protesters, culminating in the MacPherson report in 1999, ruptured yet again the fabric of British ‘race’ relations. Cathcart (1999) provides full details of the case and its legal ramifications, but minimises the role of the campaign. Initially supported by the now-defunct Anti Racist Alliance, the public only became fully aware of the case when Imran Khan, a socialist solicitor who had worked in one of the radical police monitoring groups set up the Greater London Council in the 1980s, contacted Southall Rights in 1995 for support. Suresh Grover, one of the founders of Southall Rights, which had been doing case work and campaign work throughout the 1980s and 1990s, had long experience of building political movements in which racist and class oppression is the key focus, but ‘race’ is not understood in essentialist terms. He had learned inside these movements that a persistent legal challenge by radical lawyers had to be combined with public meetings and sophisticated use of the press if Doreen and Neville Lawrence’s wishes were to be fulfilled. The alleged perpetrators were acquitted when they were finally brought by private prosecution to the criminal court in April 1996. However, the agreement by the 1997 Labour government to set up a public enquiry was to provide some comfort when Lord MacPherson pronounced, after taking evidence from March to September 1998, that there was institutional racism in the Metropolitan police force. The explosion of discussion that greeted this finding baffled ‘race’ movement’s activists, since this had been their experience for so many years. The finding, however, was placed in the context of Lord Scarman’s (1982) report into the Brixton protests of 1981, which had found that racist practices took place, but that racism was not institutionalised in the Metropolitan force. Officially sanctioning this condemnation of the structure of London’s policing meant that not only police forces nationally, but public bodies in general were forced yet again to examine themselves. It led directly to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act of 2000, which placed a duty on public bodies to take active steps to ensure that discrimination was not taking place in their institutions. From a social movements point of view, Suresh Grover was then able to initiate the National Civil Rights Movement (NCRM) in 1999. At the time of writing (September 2002) this is publicising and assisting eighteen separate campaigns against police malpractice. The NCRM is another example of the tendency we might identify as the ‘movement against “race”’. While the majority of these campaigns are for black people (Asian and Caribbean), and almost all of its Executive Committee members are black, the Movement supports the 96 victims of the Hillsborough football stadium disaster, most of whom were white, and a white Irish Catholic killed by a mob of Loyalists (NCRM, 2002).

**Conclusion**

13 Television coverage of these events produced a spectacle that delighted anti-essentialists – a British Caribbean family represented and supported by British Asians, British Caribbeanans, and their white friends.
This chapter has attempted to chart the major radical and revolutionary movements, which took ‘race’ as their focus during the three decades from 1970 onwards. It has risked over-simplifying a complex history by creating a narrative line around the idea that this period has witnessed a sharp divergence between movements which have fetishized and reified ‘race’, and those which have de-essentialized the concept, understanding it as socially constructed within capitalist societies, holding no greater significance than other sources of oppression such as class and gender. Again risking over-simplification, and without intending to under-estimate the weight of feeling of real distinction, it has suggested that those movements which seek to reinstate ‘race’ as a valid biological or cultural concept have been systematically undermined not only by the activities of their opponents in the other social movements but by profound changes in the culture of everyday life. Exemplified most clearly in popular music and fashion, ‘racial anti-essentialism’ seems to be the dominant force in the UK of the twenty-first century. This was summed up for me during an interview in research for this chapter with Pal Luthra. Mr Luthra, whose origins are Indian, had been active in the black socialist movements in the UK of the late 1970s and 1980s. When I asked him how he would define his identity today, he said: ‘It has to be as a Londoner, rather than anything else . . . I am more of a foreigner there [India] than here . . . London residents have a multitude of family identities, relationships which don’t make sense in a traditional way: trying to put labels on people is quite difficult’ (Interview 22.7.02). Increasingly, as a cause and an effect of the movements against ‘race’, this comment applies to more and more UK citizens, whatever their skin colour.
References


Farrar, M. (2002b) ‘The Northern ‘race riots’ of the summer of 2001 – were they riots, were they racial? A case-study of the events in Harehills, Leeds’ paper presented to the BSA ‘Race’ and Ethnicity Study Group Seminar, City University, London, 18th May 2002.


