

Chapter Ten

From Righteous Streams to Rivers of Blood: Martin Luther King, Enoch Powell and Race Relations on Tyneside, 1968

On April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King was shot dead in Memphis. Registrar Ernest Bettenson announced that Newcastle University “deeply deplored” the killing and that “we are flying our flag at half-mast to show our deepest regret and sympathy for Dr. King’s family, who have suffered terribly in the course of his career.”¹ The Newcastle press gave his murder remarkably full coverage. For months it closely followed the murder hunt that ended with the arrest of James Earl Ray in London and his subsequent trial and conviction. On April 6, a front page headline in the *Journal* declared “America on Brink of Race War,” while an editorial reiterated the common view that King represented sanity, reason and civility amid the nihilistic violence and anger of black power. According to the paper “Dr. King was an effective brake on the achievements of militants like Stokely Carmichael and the advocates of Black Power.” As rioting broke out across America once more, the Newcastle press joined the rest of the nation in asking again if racial conflict in the US “could swell to proportions hitherto unknown and sweep beyond the shores of the New World.” To prevent that, the *Journal* turned to King’s own words in Newcastle and called for “men of goodwill everywhere,” to “unite behind the principles of peace and social justice for which Martin Luther King stood.”²

News of King’s murder and the ensuing riots generated two distinct, though not wholly incompatible responses in Britain, both designed to avert the possibility of similar unrest. One was an intensified clamour for a new

Race Relations Act which would more effectively protect minority rights, allay racial grievances and thus undermine the growth of militancy. On April 9, 1968, the Labour government finally introduced the bill it had been promising since Roy Jenkins—who had been succeeded as Home Secretary by James Callaghan—had touted it the previous July. The same day, a supportive statement appeared in the *Journal*. Written with the shock of King’s murder still reverberating around the city, the statement again channelled King’s message in Newcastle. As the city stared uncertainly into its own racial future, the paper endorsed more stringent anti-discrimination legislation. “It can be argued, as it was against successive civil rights acts in America, that you cannot legislate against racial prejudice. This misses the point. The purpose of legislation is not to make people hold certain views, but to prevent them practicing discrimination. We cannot afford to repeat the American mistake of doing too little too late.”³

The second response was to demand an end to immigration, possibly even the repatriation of non-white Commonwealth minorities in order to reclaim Britain as a white country. In Birmingham on April 20, 1968, Enoch Powell, Shadow Minister of Defence in Edward Heath’s opposition cabinet, delivered one of the most infamous speeches in modern British politics. He denounced the proposed Race Relations Act and condemned the laxity of existing immigration controls, despite the draconian provisions of the revised Commonwealth Immigration Act passed earlier in the year. Using highly emotive language that conjured images of an impending race war in Britain, Powell insisted that to enact this bill was to “risk throwing a match onto gunpowder.” As befitted a gifted classical scholar, Powell announced, “I

am filled with foreboding. Like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood.’”⁴

Powell had been consolidating his views on the need for immigration restriction and repatriation for several years. But it was the American situation, coupled with exaggerated reports of vast numbers of East Kenyan Asians waiting to migrate to Britain that provided the catalyst for his increasingly radical public statements. In October 1967, Powell had made his first visit to the US and was deeply disturbed by the racial antagonism and violence he found in northern cities, particularly in a riot-torn Detroit. Safely back in England, he allegedly told an American friend, “Integration of races of totally disparate origins and culture is one of the great myths of our time. It has never worked throughout history. The United States lost its only real opportunity of solving its racial problems when it failed after the Civil War to partition the Old Confederacy into a South Africa and a Liberia.”⁵

In his “Rivers of Blood” speech Powell presented the American situation as a portent of what awaited Britain if it did not arrest and ideally reverse the growth of its non-white population: a population which actually constituted less than 2.3 percent of the total British population in 1968; comprised less than 10 percent in the cities where the immigrant population was most dense; and rarely accounted for more than 50 percent in any statistical unit bigger than a street. Despite the numbers, Powell spoke despairingly of replicating “that tragic and intractable phenomenon which we watch with horror on the other side of the Atlantic.” The American racial crisis, he suggested, was unavoidable, “interwoven with the history and existence of the States itself.” In Britain, however, he charged that a crisis

“is coming upon us here by our own volition and our own neglect. Indeed, it has all but come. In numerical terms, it will be of American proportions by the end of the century.”⁶

Powell was censured and dismissed from Edward Heath’s shadow cabinet for his inflammatory remarks. But it was quickly apparent that he had articulated deeply felt prejudices and genuine fears among many British whites. Polling data revealed that the percentage of British people who favoured unlimited entry for “new Commonwealth” workers had fallen from 37 percent in 1956 to 10 per cent in 1964 and plummeted further to just 1 percent in 1968.⁷ Powell received more than 110,000 letters commenting on his speech, of which barely 2,000 expressed disapproval and most were very enthusiastic. Throughout the country, workers walked off their jobs and held demonstrations to express sympathy with Powell. A Gallup Poll conducted in late April 1968 indicated a 74 percent approval rate for Powell; the Opinion Research Corporation put the proportion even higher at 82 percent.⁸

And what of Tyneside, that widely acclaimed bastion of good race relations where, on April 9, the same day that the government introduced its new Race Relations Bill, the *Journal* had also published the first in a major three-part series on local race relations by Maureen Knight under the headline “The Farther North You go the Better it is”?⁹ There, too, Powell’s speech had touched a raw nerve. Just south of the Tyne, 500 workers at the Dunlop plant on the Team Valley Industrial Estate in Gateshead walked off the job in support of Powell and raised a petition opposing any new Race Relations legislation. This happened despite the fact that Gateshead had one

of the lowest proportions of immigrants in the region and that the Dunlop works did not employ a single non-white worker. "The general feeling among the men is that they would not work with coloured staff," the *Evening Chronicle* reported; they felt that the proposed bill, with its provision against discriminatory hiring practices, might provide an opportunity for coloured workers to force their way in and deprive whites of employment.¹⁰

As nationally, letters to the local Tyneside press were overwhelmingly supportive of Powell. "At last a politician makes a bold and courageous speech on the coloured immigration problem," enthused Alan Nicholson.¹¹ "Everyone with whom I have discussed the speech agrees that no more coloured immigrants should be admitted to Britain at present, and I support this view entirely," wrote Mrs Layne of Gosforth."¹² Seven factory workers from Birtley in County Durham, co-signed a letter to the *Journal*, condemning the proposed Race Relations Bill as "the ultimate in irresponsibility" and praising Powell for speaking "down-to-earth common sense...we applaud his stand and are right behind him."¹³ Local Labour party loyalist, J. Short, wrote in strong support of the Conservative Powell on this issue, believing that "he is only expressing the views of the ordinary, and many professional, people of Britain. He simply wants to avoid serious trouble, which is inevitable if something drastic isn't done now." Short's distinction between "ordinary" and "professional" people was an awkward way of expressing an important truth: Powell's views drew white support, as well as condemnation, from across obvious class and party political lines. "I do not wish harm to any man, no matter what his colour or creed," Short continued in what was a quite familiar prelude to pejorative or ill-informed

remarks about the impact of migrants on British society, “as long as he doesn’t interfere with other nations’ way of life.” Because of their backgrounds and colour, these particular citizens were not conceived as truly part the British “way of life”; instead they were seen as opposed to, or compromising it. “This ‘open door’ policy in this country can lead to nothing but serious problems in a much shorter time than it has taken to develop in America,” Short concluded.¹⁴

Repeatedly, the American situation offered Tynesiders a crucial lens through which to view Powell’s comments. “He’s dead right about the darkies,” wrote R.T. Oxford. “It’s already too late to avoid completely the fate that is overtaking the United States, but we can try to mitigate the inevitable consequences of the folly of succeeding misguided administrations by inducing as many foreign-born members of our population as possible to return.”¹⁵ Mrs. B. Hunter was similarly forthright. “Those who were against this Race Bill will be even more so now,” she explained. “We put up with the coloured people for years when there were not many of them, but to have them taking our houses, jobs, school places etc. will be going just too far.”¹⁶

Equally upset was Mrs. R.A. Boyles, who regretted Powell’s dismissal “for expressing the worries that many ordinary people like myself feel if this Government persists in pressing Bills like the ‘Race Relations Bill’ through Parliament.” Having recently left council housing to become a proud homeowner, Mrs Boyes articulated the loss of power that many whites felt would accompany the passage of an Act that they saw as eroding their rights in order to protect and even enhance the rights of minorities. The Act would, Boyes claimed somewhat melodramatically, rob her of the “one last liberty of

selling our house to whom we wished.” Boyes subscribed to the increasingly popular—and not wholly erroneous—idea that legislating against racial discrimination would diminish white privilege and power. In the fierce battle for economic security and social mobility on Tyneside, she showed no interest in the argument that this might ultimately be a progressive step, let alone an ethically commendable one, in so far as it sought to ensure equitable treatment for all citizens, regardless of colour. In fact, Boyes had nothing but contempt for those who supported race relations legislation and warned that their misguided attempts to legislate equality would stir up even more racial resentment among whites. “The unfortunate thing about this particular Bill, and one like it,” she argued, “is that the people whom they are intended to protect will find themselves unnecessarily disliked and distrusted.”¹⁷ Tyneside’s non-white immigrants could not win: they were pilloried and demonized if they kept themselves to themselves, but many in the white community were far from ready to accept them as neighbours or co-workers, and felt aggrieved whenever local or national government intervened to protect them from racial discrimination.

Throughout Britain, Powell’s incendiary rhetoric and erudite scaremongering had thrown into sharper relief a previously amorphous, ill-defined sense of white British identity. This newly discovered British-ness was something to be celebrated and protected against all manner of foreign threats, not least by joining Powell in venerating a glorious, ethnically and racially unalloyed, if largely mythical past. As Bill Schwartz neatly summarizes, “Sizeable numbers of those caught up in the turmoil of Powellism discovered themselves, anew, to be white. These ethnic

discoveries were imaginative acts. But to work they needed historical memories in order that they might live in the imagination, for memory is not only the past recollected, but a means of becoming.”¹⁸

By no means all Tynesiders agreed with Powell. While pro-Powell correspondence dominated the letters pages of the local press immediately following his remarks on April 20, in a letter to the *Journal* on April 24 Joan Hoggard sounded a rather different note. Hoggard explicitly invoked Martin Luther King and his idea that “we are all one” and, focusing on the socio-economic coordinates of racism, saw Powell’s speech and the support it inspired as indicative of the “Hatred...that can result from leaving unsolved the problem of coloured overcrowding and racial intolerance.”¹⁹ By the end of April and start of May 1968 other, more progressive voices had come to the fore. Condemning Powell’s “demagogic” arguments, the *Journal* accused him of encouraging “unintelligent people to believe that Britain’s problems could be summed up on one word ‘colour’...He has enabled silly people to take refuge in a fairy-tale world of evil black goblins.” Tellingly, the editorial couched the factory walk-out in Gateshead and signs of significant support for Powell as a betrayal of the North East’s progressive heritage: this was a region where “a more realistic and responsible attitude to important social and political issues was thought to exist.”²⁰ Speaking at a May Day “Campaign for Equality” rally held at Rutherford College of Technology in Newcastle, Ted Fletcher, the Labour MP for Darlington, denounced Powell’s “racialist” speech as “shocking.” He added that “I can say without hesitation that if the word Jew had been substituted for the word immigrant it would

have read like a speech made by Dr. Goebbel (sic) to a Nazi party meeting in the 30s.”²¹

“It has been my privilege to know and respect many of the coloured community on Tyneside,” affirmed Will George, once a Committee Member and Chair of Tyneside’s branch of CARD, who believed that immigrants “have been most patient over serious problems of housing, education and employment.” He believed that Powell’s speech and the “spate of obvious racialism” it provoked in the region “has disturbed and created unhappy feelings among immigrants” where there were now “many frightened people.” An export salesman, George had travelled the world, including the US, and used his experience as the basis for public talks designed “to inform, educate and persuade Tyneside people in wide organisational groups that we must accept responsibility to promote harmony and understanding to and from our coloured community.”²²

In Gateshead, Peter E. Oliver was appalled that white workers should walk out in support of Powell and to protest a non-existent problem. In fact, he was incredulous that so many locals had succumbed to Powell’s racist rallying call and posed a series of facetious rhetorical questions to his fellow Tynesiders: “How far has the colour problem grown in Gateshead recently? Not very far by observations I have made. Why have men from Birtley got to complain about the rise of coloured population? Has Birtley got a coloured resident? How many people in the North-East have really got fears of their job because of coloured immigrants? Very few.” Oliver recognized, perhaps with without fully understanding, that enthusiasm for Powell on Tyneside in the absence of a sizeable minority population and with little direct threat to

white employment prospects, was basically a function of underlying racism and economic uncertainty, compounded by ignorance about the immigrants who did live in the region. His prescription to deal with a changing world and the palpable evils of racism fell back on the tried and trusted notion that knowledge was a great antidote to bigotry and a spur to action against discrimination. "I am sure that if the people of the North-East took a greater interest in the plight of other people, both Commonwealth and British, they would see that their own troubles were resolved in a better spirit and lasting effect." Despite the clumsy differentiation between "British" and "Commonwealth" people to distinguish white and non-white citizens, Oliver was groping towards an affirmation of what King had spoken of in England as the need for education and recognition of the "network of mutuality" that bound people together across racial lines. In the Poor Peoples' Campaign, King and his allies had tried to forge a multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition of the poor. Oliver seemed to be calling for similar recognition of a shared plight, maybe even a shared destiny, among working people of all colours on Tyneside.²³

Jessie M. Scott-Batey was at the forefront of more direct action efforts to combat the rise of Powellism on Tyneside. In a jointly authored letter to the *Evening Chronicle* she used words that again echoed both King's Newcastle speech and Tyneside's anti-racist heritage, imploring "People of good will everywhere," to "do all they can now to create an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding in which all races can live together harmoniously." A co-organizer of two anti-racist marches in May, she also organized a conference for Sunday May 26, 1968 "at which some of the

problems can be explored in depth by experts.” Emphasising that her campaign was “non-political and non-sectarian,” Batey-Scott arranged for a variety of “prominent people” in the region to sign a “declaration reaffirming their belief in Human Rights.” Thus Batey-Scott shifted the focus of debate, much as King was wont to do in his last years, away from minority rights, per se, towards a more capacious vision of a struggle for human rights, within which non-whites in Britain and America often faced particular problems that needed special and immediate attention. Continuing Tyneside’s strong tradition of female activism and leadership, Batey-Scott hoped “to restore some commonsense and humanity to the situation, and to assure those working in the race relations field that they are not without support.”²⁴

There were other stirrings of organized working-class, union, socialist and student opposition to Powell’s message. Since the late 1950s, the Newcastle and District Trades Council—an important coordinating body for small and new unions in the region that was founded in 1873—had demonstrated the kind of global perspective that King endorsed. In 1957, it sent a motion to the National Council for Civil Liberties calling for pressure to be put on the South African government to change its apartheid policies. It raised money for the African Trials Defence Fund to support those arrested for challenging Apartheid and later campaigned against South Africa’s ban on black unions. The Trades Council had also joined the Newcastle City Council and Newcastle University students in calling for a boycott of goods produced under apartheid, extending the tradition

established by the region's 19th Century boycott of slave-produced products.²⁵

In May 1968, the Trades Council issued a statement denouncing Powell and condemning the role of "the press and the Tories in creating and encouraging racism."²⁶ Elsewhere, a local Communist Party official described the speech as "a shocking display of ignorance and prejudice. ... It was an incitement to race hatred and violence. Made in America by a white racist, we would all have denounced it."²⁷ When Powell was invited to speak by students in the Conservative Student Society at Rutherford College, which in 1969 became part of the newly created Northumbria Polytechnic, forerunner of Northumbria University, students from Rutherford's Left Wing Society and Newcastle University's Socialist Society tried, unsuccessfully, to halt the lecture.²⁸

Despite these public expressions of opposition it was clear that there was widespread sympathy for Powell's views. This was alarming for white progressives but even more so for coloured minorities in the region. Worse was to follow. On May 9, a series of local council elections across the North East resulted in what the *Evening Chronicle* called "a disastrous election night" for the Labour Party which lost thirty-six seats to Conservative and Independent candidates.²⁹ Amid broader economic and social anxieties in the region, the relationship between these election results and anti-immigrant sentiment was far from straightforward. Yet it was surely part of the mix that accounted for this dramatic swing to the right. As the paper editorialized, thanks to "the current controversy over racialism...Even moderate opinion has been ill-influenced in recent weeks."³⁰ In Newcastle

proper there was a 5.5 per cent swing to Conservatives, but in some former labour working class strongholds, such as Scotswood and Byker (where a 13 per cent swing unseated seven year incumbent Eric Harding), the shift was far more pronounced. By the time the votes had been counted, Conservatives had won overall control of Newcastle City Council with a majority of 13.³¹

With its changed composition, fissures within the Council on the issue of race and immigration became deeper and wider. On July 3, 1968, when Labour Councillor Jeremy Beecham introduced a motion to disband the CIWG, which he believed had been rendered redundant by the creation of a local Race Relations Board and Community Relations Council under the new Race Relations Act, it opened up a rancorous debate around the wisdom of that Act and the virtues, or otherwise, of Enoch Powell's views on immigration. "It may well be that some of us agree with Enoch Powell. I can say that with confidence. I myself agree with Enoch Powell," announced Tory Councillor John Morpeth amid cries of "shame" from some of his colleagues. But Morpeth was not alone in believing that more than enough had already been done for immigrants. "Don't let us get carried away by the question of colour and the need to look after coloured people," advised Conservative Council Leader Arthur Grey. "Coloured people don't want to be integrated," he insisted. The new Community Relations Council, rather like the new Race Relations Act, was a waste of time and effort, addressing a "problem which is non-existent." Grey mocked laws and organizations that sought to promote integration. "Are we going to reach the silly and stupid position where we knock on the door and say, 'You have got to be integrated or

else’?,” he asked, drawing applause from sympathetic councillors who shared his belief that Newcastle had no racial problems, certainly none that could be addressed through laws or the formation of yet more committees. Although Beecham’s motion to end the CIWG and support the new structures passed by 38 votes to 28, there were worrying signs of a retreat from the Council’s previous commitment to trying to ensure equality of opportunity for racial minorities while actively encouraging integration and better race relations with the white community.³²

The man who eventually and somewhat improbably emerged as the region’s first Community Relations Officer was Chris Mullard. A forceful and controversial figure, Mullard was born in Hampshire but had begun his political life in earnest working in London with CARD, for whom he eventually served as national secretary. In 1967 he moved north to Tyneside, where he replaced Will George as CARD chairman. Mullard acted as a lightning rod for white racial anxieties during this period; but he was also a controversial figure among some of the region’s immigrant groups. Unflinching in his condemnation of racist whites and critiques of the racial inequalities embedded within British social, political, educational and economic structures, Mullard was barely less hostile to those he called “Prejudiced patronisers,” people of all races who talked the talk of equality but who counselled endless patience on the part of minorities and seldom acted to make racial equality a lived reality. As Mullard put it in his autobiography, he had all but given up on the goodwill of white people to secure meaningful racial progress and decided “What I had to do was work with black people rather than talk about them.”³³

Mullard's time in the North East was stormy. He faced opposition from a variety of local and national politicians, was harassed by the local Northumbria police, and had a permanently strained relationship with the national Community Relations Council. Indeed, Mullard was quite sceptical about the whole community relations approach to race relations, viewing it as a way for the establishment to contain, rather than to aid, non-white aspirations. It was, he felt, designed to mute or co-opt more militant black voices. Mullard also polarised opinion within Tyneside's diverse communities of colour. Although they often shared similar experiences, immigrant communities were far from homogenous and had their own inter- and intra-communal tensions and rivalries around class, caste, race, religion and gender that were difficult to navigate, let alone reconcile. Despite these challenges, when he resigned in September 1973, Mullard took pride in having encouraged more concerted activism on behalf of the region's immigrant communities to meet racism head-on and campaign for equal social, economic and educational opportunities. Moreover, although his relationships with white progressives could be turbulent, he never rejected alliances with anyone he felt was seriously committed to the struggle against racial injustice. As he explained to Dave Renton, at his most successful he "deconstructed notions of Geordyism and North Eastism, repackaging them in terms of anti-racism."³⁴

One of Mullard's first attempts to do just that was in May 1968 when he organized a series of protests against Powellism, the first on the Town Moor on May 11. The experience revealed just how difficult his task would be. Opposition to the march came from the Lord Mayor's office, the City

Council and from several groups representing the city's Hindu, Muslim and Sikh communities. Among them was the Indian Association of Newcastle, whose leader H.K. Narang feared that the march "would simply help to create a bad atmosphere and possibly lead to trouble."³⁵

The local press was similarly hostile, further undermining the prospects of success for a protest for that appeared to be attracting little popular support anyway. The *Evening Chronicle* called plans for the rally "at best ill-considered and at worst dangerous to the point of criminal folly." The paper used precisely the same arguments that white liberals in America had once used to urge Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement to abandon nonviolent direct action tactics and take protests off the streets lest they antagonize the very whites whose racial prejudices and commitment to white supremacy they were trying to expose and challenge. While insisting that it respected the sincerity of CARD and applauded "the views it maintains on intolerance and bigotry," the paper chastised the organization for its impatience and choice of direct action tactics. For good measure, it also accused CARD of undermining the work of the CIWG with its militancy. "Admittedly, the form of protest which [CARD] has decided on is, by definition, non-violent," the paper conceded, "but it may well be construed by rabid racialists as a serious provocation and thus invite violence."³⁶

Martin Luther King had responded to repeated white—and occasionally black—disapproval of his own "provocative" direct action tactics by reaffirming his commitment to peaceful methods of publically protesting racial injustice. As he had frequently explained, perhaps most famously in his 1963 "Letter from a Birmingham City Jail," the strategy was to "establish

such creative tension that a community that has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored.”³⁷ Similarly, Mullard and his colleagues wanted to expose “rabid racialists” for what they were while at the same time drawing attention to the discriminatory effects of their racism on Tyneside minorities. These tactics certainly promised to publicize the existence of racial prejudice and injustice on Tyneside, but they also exposed the limits of white racial liberalism. The *Evening Chronicle* warned that the march would generate “Schisms in the ranks of the integrationists,” and would be “hailed with glee by their segregationist opponents and used to discomfort reasonable and rational people.”³⁸ The editorial and the responses of many other broadly progressive elements in the area to the proposed CARD protest demonstrated that such schisms already existed.

Basil McLeod was blunt. “If they refuse to call it off, I ask the public to ignore it and treat it with the contempt it deserves,” he said, dismissively adding, “Generally speaking we have a good relationship with the immigrant community, and we don’t want people like CARD upsetting it.” McLeod also shared rumours that unidentified black power agitators from Leeds were to be involved in the protest march. “Any rumour concerning Black Power is rather worrying,” he said. “They arouse people’s feelings passionately on each side and this is a very dangerous situation.” Indeed McLeod felt that “The Black Power movement appears to be composed of fanatics, whose presence could easily lead to violence.” Although a CARD representative dismissed this as “just a stupid rumour—a ludicrous load of old codswallop,” the spectre of outside agitation and a militant, perhaps violent,

black power conspiracy, so familiar in the rhetoric of reactionary white responses to changing patterns of African American protest in the US, was becoming part of Tyneside's anxiety about the new sources and radical direction of racial protests.³⁹

In a final desperate effort to persuade Mullard and Scott-Batey to call off the march, the *Evening Chronicle* offered to print any statement provided by CARD. With Powellism on the rise Mullard refused to take the deal and, as he put it, "sell ourselves out."⁴⁰ The heart of the problem was two diametrically opposed responses to the challenges posed by Powell's remarks among those who claimed to have the best interests of immigrants and good race relations at heart. In one camp, the local press, the CIWG and the City Council urged more patience and a less confrontational mode of articulating immigrant grievances. "The feeling that was aroused after Enoch Powell's speech was enough to make anybody cautious," explained Basil McLeod.⁴¹ Even Will George, the ex-chair of CARD attempted to have the march cancelled, claiming that Mullard had effectively hijacked its original, far less militant intention, which was simply to showcase the significant part that immigrants played in the life of the city.⁴²

In the other camp, Mullard, Jessie Scott-Batey and their supporters were in no mood to delay or compromise. They insisted that Powell's comments and the worrying levels of sympathy they had attracted on Tyneside demanded an immediate and highly visible response: the campaign for racial equality and against the kind of racial bigotry and intolerance associated with Enoch Powell was not something to be deferred or diluted for fear of inciting a white backlash that already appeared to be underway. It

was an important moment to show that Tyneside had significant reserves of people of goodwill who would protest Powellism in support of the area's minorities. The organizers were to be disappointed.

Perhaps the most frustrating and dispiriting aspects of the anti-Powell protests were that Tyneside's own immigrant communities largely rejected direct action campaigning. In part, this was because of an enduring sense within minority communities that, all things considered, life on Tyneside really was not too bad. "We are quite happy living in this region," observed O.P. Bindra, general secretary of the Newcastle Hindu Temple when he explained his community's lack of interest in joining the march.⁴³ While such statements may have involved a certain amount of denial and dissembling in order to avoid controversy, there was a feeling that, while race relations were far from perfect on Tyneside, they could be much worse. Moreover, as H.K. Narang had suggested, there was a fear that participating in protests against Powellism could intensify hostility to coloured minorities.

According to the *Journal*, the Saturday May 11 march and rally on the Town Moor drew a crowd of between one and two hundred people, far less than the 2,000 the organizers had expected. Whether in a fit of pique that its advice and overtures to CARD to cancel the protest had been ignored, or simply because by the afternoon of Monday May 13, when its next edition appeared, Saturday's event was old—and, given the low turnout, not especially noteworthy—news, the *Evening Chronicle* declined to report on a protest it had done so much to discourage.⁴⁴

Later in the month, Jessie Scott-Batey hosted a rather different meeting "to stand up and be counted against Powell and racialism in the

country” at Rutherford College. Again, attendance was disappointing. On May 26, barely 100 people gathered to hear speeches by Scott-Batey, Eric Hackett, the headmaster of Slatyford Comprehensive School, John Rex, professor of social theory and institutions at Durham University, Sheffield University law professor Roy Marshall, and former Council Leader T. Dan Smith. Newcastle University’s Vice-Chancellor Charles Bosanquet was among several “influential people” invited to the meeting who declined to attend. As Scott-Batey rather ruefully explained, “Some of those we asked have said that they agree with our aims, but don’t want to be publicly associated with us.” There were no representatives from Tyneside’s immigrant communities on the programme. Schisms indeed.⁴⁵

Scott-Batey was right that not everyone who stayed away from these public protests necessarily agreed with Powell; certainly not those from the region’s own non-white communities. Nonetheless, the failure to mobilize a significant and coherent Tyneside movement against “Powellism,” coupled with the evidence of considerable white sympathy for his views, gave pause for thought among Tyneside’s white racial progressives. Even Maureen Knight’s generally flattering features on the area’s race relations warned against complacency and uncovered plenty of prejudice and discrimination. “The conclusion that no colour bar exists in the North-East is true. At least on the surface,” she wrote. “True, the Commonwealth immigrant never sees ‘No Coloreds’ advertisements in this region. But working as bus conductors and drivers are a research chemist, an accountant, a handful of engineers and teachers who cannot find jobs with their professional qualifications...Job hunting is tougher if you happen to be coloured.” One

West Indian woman told Knight that “Only one in 10 employers will take you. Now at the Employment Exchange we ask them to tell a prospective employer that we are coloured to save a wasted journey.” Several interviewees noted—and Knight agreed—that, although the additional protections of a new Race Relations Act were welcome, actually proving racial discrimination in hiring decisions was often problematic.⁴⁶

Knight also discovered a blend of misplaced envy and facile scapegoating as some poor whites blamed their economic difficulties and social deprivation on immigrants rather than on the structural economic and social problems that beset much of the region at a time when the effects of deindustrialization were biting ever deeper. “It was a nice street before They came here,” one woman told Knight, who drily noted that the woman “had lived in the same place for 30 years and did not notice its decline – until the immigrants arrived.”⁴⁷

Enoch Powell’s speech had unleashed precisely the sort of latent prejudices against which Martin Luther King had warned in Newcastle. As political analyst Arthur Aughey points out, Powell effectively narrowed the range of reasonable debate on race, making it difficult for anyone “to speak openly about concerns with immigration or multiculturalism for fear of being labelled either racist or xenophobic.”⁴⁸ In this climate, discussions about the causes and implications of major demographic, economic, social and cultural changes, discussions which certainly should have involved consideration of the nation’s changing racial, religious and cultural profile, were suppressed or distorted. Irrational fears about immigrants and the threats they supposedly posed to white economic and social status, and to

nebulous ideas of “British values,” were allowed to fester, mutate and acquire the status of truth. On Tyneside, the resurgence of these kinds of views threatened to overwhelm the sort of tentative self-scrutiny about Tyneside’s racial practices and attitudes that had been prompted first by King’s visit and then by his death. Consequently, while there remains more than a kernel of truth in Barry Carr’s generalization that the “whole ethos of Tyneside working-class culture was anathema to the bullying on which racism is built,” and that in such an environment, relatively good race relations had “evolved without laws or regulations, committees or reports,” popular white enthusiasm for Powell invites a rather more cautious conclusion.⁴⁹

Like the fugitive African American slave Sam Watkins, writing in Newcastle more than a century earlier, Martin Luther King never romanticised the white working-class, Geordie or American, as a natural repository of racial tolerance and brotherhood. No class—and, for that matter, no race—has ever had a monopoly on progressive or reactionary, tolerant or bigoted racial views. King did recognize, however, that at times and in places of acute social upheaval and economic distress, when the competition for jobs, decent housing, adequate education, and access to health care and other social services was especially intense, those whites who felt economically insecure, socially frustrated or politically impotent could be highly susceptible to the lure of racism to try to explain away their travails.

The same groups could also be very susceptible to the appeal of racial chauvinism. Glorifying whiteness, protecting its privileges, and fixating on

the spurious notion that it lay at the heart of American or British national identities offered a way for some whites to secure a measure of status and self-respect. In the 1960s, many whites on both sides of the Atlantic had regularly rallied to protect the privileges that their skin colour had historically conferred on them against the perceived threat of racial equality. Their anger and resistance was especially marked whenever efforts to promote that equality relied on government legislation and enforcement. Minority gains were invariably perceived as white losses. Government action to curtail discrimination was frequently seen as an act of political, even racial treachery, or as an example of “reverse discrimination” that extended unfair advantages to non-whites who were already widely viewed with suspicion if not outright hostility. Moreover, there were always plenty of individuals and organizations who, for a variety of political, financial and ideological reasons, were happy to encourage the search for scapegoats to blame for what were really deeply rooted economic, social and political problems. Matters were further complicated by the fact that in the late 1960s, on both sides of the Atlantic, there were minority groups who, in the face of decades, even centuries of white prejudice and discrimination, abandoned faith in interracial cooperation, rejected integration and sought a separatist path to whatever measure of freedom and opportunity they could grasp.

Martin Luther King was not among those who despaired of interracial paths to a more just, equitable and peaceful world. In King’s mind, the need to enlighten people on matters of racial and human justice transcended barriers of nationality, race, religion and class. That said, in the US during

1967 and 1968, he was undoubtedly focussed on helping the black and white poor to recognize their common interests with other exploited and dispossessed groups—not least as poor whites and African Americans were bearing a disproportionate burden of the Vietnam War, a conflict which, in honouring King four days after his death, the Rev E. Harriott of St. Andrew’s Catholic Church on Worswick Street in Newcastle, described as a “ghastly frieze hanging at the back of our minds whether we are actively involved in it or not.”⁵⁰ King saw that “evil war” as yet another manifestation of the militarism, racism and poverty that were yoked together in the service of an unfettered global capitalism that was relentless and ruthless in its quest for control over capital, raw materials, labour and markets. As King explained in his final and most radical presidential address to the SCLC annual conference in Atlanta in August 1967:

A nation that will keep people in slavery for 244 years will “thingify” them—make them things. Therefore, they will exploit them, and poor people generally economically. And a nation that will exploit economically will have to have foreign investments and everything else, and will have to use its military might to protect them. All these problems are tied together. What I am saying today is that we must go from this convention and say, “America, you must be born again.”⁵¹

The poor and working-class were imagined by King, along with the labour movement, as potentially crucial agents in the kind of peaceful

revolution he envisioned for America. They needed to be encouraged to act in concert across racial, ethnic and religious lines to address shared grievances that were rooted in the inequitable operation of unregulated capitalism. It was this task which lay at the heart of King's hopes for the Poor People's Campaign and his advocacy of democratic socialism. "We must honestly face the fact that the movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society," King insisted. "There are forty million poor people here, and one day we must ask the question, 'Why are there forty million poor people in America?' And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising a question about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth. When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy."⁵²

This was a global analysis, not one simply tailored to the American situation. Throughout his final year, as riots and violence erupted all around him and all over the world, King reaffirmed his steadfast commitment to nonviolence and his religiously anchored belief in the ultimate power of love to overcome injustice and inequality. "I have also decided to stick with love, for I know that love is ultimately the only answer to mankind's problems," he told the SCLC faithful in Atlanta in August 1967, adding "And I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go... hate is too great a burden to bear."⁵³ One of the places he talked about it was in Newcastle where, three months later, he explained so eloquently that "there can be no separate black path to power and fulfilment that does not intersect white routes and there can be no separate white path to power and fulfilment short of social disaster that does not recognise the necessity of sharing that power with coloured

aspirations for freedom and human dignity.” By cultivating this sense of common destiny and shared humanity, King devoutly believed it was still possible “to transform the jangling discords of our nation, and of all the nations of the world, into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood, and speed up the day when all over the world justice will roll down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.”⁵⁴ This was God’s ultimate plan for the world. It was a marvellous, inspirational vision, worthy of Amos, the Old Testament prophet from who he borrowed this favourite line.

Yet, the support for Powell in Britain and the “conservative backlash” of the so-called silent—and largely white—majority in America that swept Republican Richard Nixon into the White House in November 1968 on a wave of hostility to further government efforts to promote genuine equality of opportunity, suggested that King’s vision still lay somewhere in the far distant future. In the meantime, as King consistently argued, there was a lot to commend expansively conceived and robustly enforced laws that made racial discrimination illegal.

1. E.M. Bettenson, quoted in, “City Students Pay Tribute to Dr. King,” *E-Chronicle*, April 5, 1968, p.1.

2. “America on Brink of Race War,” *Journal*, April 6, 1968, p.1; “The Shame of Memphis,” *ibid.*, April 6, 1968, p.8.

3. *Ibid.*, April 9, 1968, p.6.

4. Enoch Powell, “Speech to the Annual General Meeting of the West Midland Area Conservative Political Centre,” April 20, 1968, reprinted in

Enoch Powell, *Reflections of a Statesman: The Writings and Speeches of Enoch Powell* (London: Bellew, 1991), pp.373-379.

5. This exchange and details of Powell's visit to America appear in Andrew Roth, *Enoch Powell: Tory Tribune* (London: MacDonald, 1970), pp.340-341.

See also, Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Post-Colonial Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp.208-263,

especially pp.21-24, 219 and 220 on Powell's responses to the Detroit riots.

6. Powell, *Reflections of a Statesman*, p.379. See also, Nicholas Deakin, *Colour, Citizenship and British Society* (London: Panther Books, 1970), pp.57-59; "Keep Britain Civilised," *New Statesman*, April 26, 1968, p. 533.

7. Chris Waters, "Dark Strangers' In Our Midst: Discourses of Race and Nation in Britain, 1947-1963," *Journal of British Studies*, 36 (1997), p.234.

8. For reaction to Powell's speech, see Roth, *Tory Tribune* , pp.339, 340-361; Roy Lewis, *Enoch Powell: Principle in Politics* (London: Cassell, 1979),

pp.105-127; T. E Uttley, *Enoch Powell: the Man and his Thinking* (London: William Kimber, 1968), pp.9-44; Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British: A*

History of Race Relations in Britain (c.1971. Revd. ed London: Grafton,

1991), pp.213-14, 246-50; Bill Schwartz, *The White Man's World: Memories of Empire, Vol. 1* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.33-52; Diana

Spearman, "Enoch Powell's Postbag," *New Society* 11 (May 9, 1968), pp.667-

9; Diana Spearman, "The Anti-Enoch Letters," *ibid.*, 11 (June 27, 1968),

p.945; Alan Watkins, "Enoch and After," *New Statesman* (April 26, 1968), p.533.

-
9. Maureen Knight, "The Further North You Go the Better it is," *Journal*, April 9, 1968, p.6.
 10. "Powell: 500 in Walk-out at Gateshead," *E-Chronicle*, April 25, 1968, p.1.
 11. Alan Nicholson, letter, *ibid.*, April 26, 1968, p.14.
 12. Mrs Phillip Layne, letter, *Journal*, April 24, 1968, p.6.
 13. J. Crews, P. Robinson, M. Gould, R. White, N.W.H. Wood, N. Clark and J. West, letter, *Journal*, April 25, 1968, p.6.
 14. J. Short, letter, *E-Chronicle*, April 26, 1968, p.14.
 15. R.T. Oxford, letter, *ibid.*, April 26, 1968, p.14.
 16. Mrs. B. Hunter, letter, *ibid.*, April 24, 1968, p.10.
 17. Mrs. R.A. Boyles, letter, *ibid.*, April 26, 1968, p.14.
 18. Schwartz, *The White Man's World*, p.52.
 19. Joan Hoggard, letter, *Journal*, April 24, 1968, p.6.
 20. "Blind Prejudice," *ibid.*, April 26, 1968, p.8.
 21. Ted Fletcher, quoted in "The Seeds of Hate," *ibid.*, May 6, 1968, p.5.
 22. Will George, letter, *E-Chronicle*, May 10, 1968, p.14.
 23. Peter E. Oliver, letter, *ibid.*, May 10, 1968, p.14.
 24. Jessie Scott-Batey, John Rafferty and Austin Mallet, letter, *ibid.*, May 10, 1968, p.14.
 25. J.F. Clarke and T.P. McDermott, *The Newcastle and District Trades Council, 1873-1973: A Centenary History* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Frank Graham, 1973), p.43. Minutes of Meetings, October 15, 1959 and January 21, 1960, Minute Book, Newcastle and District Trades Council, TU/TC/1/1/2, TWA. *Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of*

-
- Newcastle upon Tyne for 1959-60* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cooperative Printing Society, 1960), pp.768-775, LSC-N. Tunde Oloko, letter, *Courier*, December 11, 1959, p.2.
26. Motion, May 17, 1968, Newcastle Trades Council Minutes, 1965-9, TU/TC/1/3, TWA.
27. *E-Chronicle*, May 7, 1968.
28. "As Powell Speaks, Protests Flare," and "The Neet Afore," both *Courier*, January 22, 1969, p.1.
29. "Labour Counts the Cost of Disaster," *E-Chronicle*, May 10, 1968, p.11.
30. "Day of Decision," *ibid.*, May 9, 1968, p.8.
31. "Labour Counts the Cost of Disaster," and Hilton Cozens, "City Victory in Tribute to Young Tories," *ibid.*, May 10, 1968, p.11.
32. Council Minutes, July 3, 1968, *Proceedings of the Council of the City and County of Newcastle upon Tyne for 1968-1969* (Newcastle: Cooperative Printing Company, 1969), pp.204-219, (Morpeth quote, p.211; Grey quote, p. 212) LSC-N.
33. Chris Mullard, *Black Britain* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1973), p.32.
34. Mullard, quoted in Dave Renton, *Colour Blind?: Race and Migration in North East England Since 1945* (Sunderland: University of Sunderland Press, 2007), p.121.
35. "Lord Mayor Not to Lead Race March," *E-Chronicle*, May 8, 1968, p.1.
36. "Day of Decision," *ibid.*, May 9, 1968, p.8.

-
37. Martin Luther King, "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 1963, in James M. Washington (ed.), *I Have a Dream: Writings and Speeches that Changed the World* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), p.86.
38. "Day of Decision."
39. "Boycott City Race March - Chairman," *E-Chronicle*, May 9, 1968, p.3.
40. "Appeal to Reason," *E-Chronicle*, May 7, p.8; "Boycott Race March"; "Day of Decision."
41. "Boycott City Race March."
42. "Lord Mayor Not to Lead Race March," *E-Chronicle*, May 8, 1968, p.1.
43. Ibid.
44. "Little Support for Race March," *Journal*, May 13, 1968, p.9.
45. "100 Meet to Stand up to Racialism," *ibid.*, May 27, 1968, p.5.
46. Maureen Knight, "The Further North You Go the Better it is," *ibid.*, April 9, 1968, p.6.
47. Maureen Knight, "When You Go to School in a Strange Land," *ibid.*, April 10, 1968, p.6.
48. Arthur Aughey, *The Politics of Englishness* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p.127.
49. Barry Carr, "Black Geordies," in Robert Colls and Bill Lancaster (eds), *Geordies: Roots of Regionalism* (1992; Newcastle: Northumbria University Press, 2005), pp.142-143.
50. Rev. E. Harriott, "Unholy Things," *E-Chronicle*, April 8, 1968, p.6.
51. Martin Luther King, Jr., Speech to SCLC Annual Convention, Atlanta, August 16, 1967, KCA,

[http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documententry/where
_do_we_go_from_here_delivered_at_the_11th_annual_sclc_convention/](http://kingencyclopedia.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/documententry/where_do_we_go_from_here_delivered_at_the_11th_annual_sclc_convention/).

Accessed January 2, 2017.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Acceptance Speech on Receipt of an Honorary
Doctorate at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne," November 13, 1967,
MLK-Reg.