Abstract

This joint-authored essay concludes the thematic issue ‘Marking Race’. Drawing on the authors’ individual essays and reviewing the wider literatures in the field of race and immigration, imperialism and decolonization, social democracy and the welfare state, and deindustrialization, the essay makes a series of proposals about what an analytical focus on race adds to our understanding of modern British history.

Post-war British history is one of the fastest growing areas of modern British studies. The historiography, as David Edgerton recently noted (though with a different purpose in mind), typically centres on the familiar themes of Keynesianism, the welfare state, social democracy and consensus, decline, Thatcherism, and neoliberalism.¹ In this concluding essay, we turn to three of the most durable themes—decolonization and Commonwealth migration, social democracy, and deindustrialization—and recent historiographical approaches to them to draw out how our individual essays and the work of other scholars might provide a basis for intervening in and recasting the metanarratives of post-war British history.

¹ David Edgerton, The Rise and Fall of the British Nation: A Twentieth Century History (London, 2019), xxx. In Edgerton’s formulation, the historiography can be summarized as driven by the conviction, among historians of modern Britain, ‘that New Liberalism, Labour and New Labour have been the main creative forces in British history’; or, most starkly, he proposes that ‘Welfare has been too visible in histories’ (xxv).
Centring racial formation requires grappling with how social, political, and economic forces shape racial categories and hierarchies and how those, in turn, are instantiated in practices, relations and institutions that maintain and reproduce them. An expanded view of the histories of racialization, citizenship, and the state in late-twentieth century Britain takes us beyond the rising hegemony of the New Right, the emergent forces of Black liberation, or the recalibrations of national identity and immigration law that have so far dominated the historiography. We suggest that, when it comes to discussing the politics of race, the sites, institutions, geographies, and social and economic processes that focus our attention as historians of modern Britain need rethinking. We might question, indeed, how useful the familiar chronologies of Britain’s national history, from liberalism to social democracy to neoliberalism, remain.

Decolonization and Commonwealth Migration

We cannot tell the history of race in Britain without attending to the history of empire. As Black intellectuals from Claudia Jones to Beverley Bryan, Stella Dadzie, and Suzanne Scafe, C.L.R. James and Eric Williams to Stuart Hall, have demonstrated in their analysis of modern British history, racial formation in Britain must be understood as embedded in (post-)imperial and transnational geographies. It is easily forgotten that the essay in which Hall famously writes that race is ‘the modality in which class is “lived”, the medium through which class relations are experienced, the form in which it is appropriated and “fought through”, draws predominately on the literature on race relations and the debate over racism and racial capitalism in South Africa and, to a lesser extent,

---


the USA. For over thirty years, the transnational turn in imperial history has sought to make visible and analyse what Mrinalini Sinha characterizes as a global imperial social formation. This includes the movement of colonial subjects to and through ‘the very heart of the British Empire before the twentieth century’. The work of Antoinette Burton and other imperial historians contributed to the project of recovering the Black and Asian presence in Britain. What came to be known as ‘new’ imperial history connected the recovery of Britain’s multiracial past ‘to conversations about the empire’s impact on metropolitan society’ and ‘to mapping a new critical geography of “national” history in imperial Britain’. Applying the insights of ‘new’ imperial histories to post-war Britain, we take for granted that imperialism and decolonization affected metropolitan Britain, and situate the ‘bordering’ of Britain within longer colonial histories of migration control, surveillance, and


6 ‘New’ Imperial Histories revealed the impact of events such as the 1857 Indian Rebellion and the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion on political development within Britain itself. Indeed, the key claim of the new imperial history is that metropolitan Britain was not only framed by its deep connections with its colonial peripheries, but the idea of the nation as a discrete unit was created through its difference from colonial spaces and that political rights for the (white) working class arose through their difference from racialized colonial subjects. John Mackenzie, Imperialism and Popular Culture (Manchester, 1986); Antoinette Burton, Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and Imperial Culture, 1865–1913 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1994), and Empire in Question: Reading, Writing, and Teaching British Imperialism (Durham, NC, 2011); Mrinalini Sinha, Colonial Masculinity: The “Manly Englishman” and the “Effeminate Bengali” in the Late Nineteenth Century (Manchester, 1995); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds, At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World (Cambridge, 2006); Catherine Hall et al., Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867 (Cambridge, 2000). On the longstanding boundary between British and imperial history, see Amanda Behm, Imperial History and the Global Politics of Exclusion: Britain, 1880–1940 (Basingstoke, 2018).
incarceration. We consider the post-war reworking of connected but uneven racial formations in Britain and the colonies as part of an ongoing history of colonial extraction and the restructuring of an imperial labour market, not the denouement of empire and the emergence of a post-imperial nation with a ‘new’ race relations problem.

The newness of a ‘race problem’ after the Second World War can be seen across European histories. Common-sense narratives of post-war Western European history posit a ‘break’ produced by the recent arrival of migrants that creates a clear division between a homogenous and harmonious before and a diverse and chaotic after, between imperial strife ‘out there’ and racial strife ‘at home’. In Britain, the popular symbolism associated with the Empire Windrush serves this purpose, severing post-war migration and racialization from imperial geographies and chronologies. In the post-war period, migration appeared as a new phenomenon, but from its origins, Britain was embedded in a global labour market that created routes of transfer and differentiated degrees of ease in navigating them. Emigration to settler colonies has been a much more pronounced and significant feature of modern British history than immigration. Britain was the largest ‘emigration state’ in Europe by far, sending many more people to an expanding settler frontier than, say, France, despite the sizable settler population in Algeria. In the century after the Napoleonic wars, twenty-five million Britons emigrated from Britain to the settler colonies and the United States. In addition to those leaving Britain, in the post-emancipation era, Britain created a system of indentured labour that facilitated the movement of Chinese and Indian labourers to work in sugar-cane fields, gold mines, and building railroads across and beyond

7 Rather than see borders as settled objects, scholars who study ‘bordering’ as a process attend to how citizenship, identity, and belonging are produced through technologies of exclusion. Border control occurs not only at the edges of state-space but also through internal processes of surveillance that seek to demarcate between those deserving of the rights bestowed by nation-states and those undeserving of access. As Nadine El-Enany argues, Britain’s immigration regime has been shaped by its colonial history. Indeed, immigration law is a mechanism through which colonialism and its racial hierarchies are reproduced. Nira Yuval-Davis et al., Bordering (Cambridge, 2019); Nadine El-Enany, (B)ordering Britain: Law, Race and Empire (Manchester, 2020).


the formal empire. With the rise of steamships, workers from India, Aden, Somalia, and West Africa stoked fires in boiler rooms, and some settled in Britain. The nineteenth-century part of this story is well known, but scholarship on emigration in the twentieth century remains limited. With the exception of the 1930s, in every decade between 1850 and 1972, when government subsidies to emigrants finally ended, the UK experienced net emigration. Not only did migration from Britain to the former Dominions continue to outpace migration to Britain following the Second World War, but emigration also became markedly more imperial after the war, with more than 70 per cent of outwards migrants moving to colonial and Commonwealth territories. At the same time, poverty and governmental neglect in the British Caribbean necessitated the circular migration of Black British subjects to Cuba, Central America, Venezuela, and the USA. In southern and central Africa, the Middle East, and across the global extractive frontier, a combination of white settler and immigrant managers and workers and itinerant colonial labourers from neighbouring regions provided the backbone of mining, petroleum, and other extractive industries. Britain, and white Britons at ‘home’ and in the settler colonies, benefitted from a global division of labour that generated hierarchies of status and rights.

The post-war period was not different in the movement of individuals seeking a better position in an imperial labour market. Rather, Britain


13 Laura Tabili, *‘We Ask for British Justice’*: Workers and Racial Difference in Late Imperial Britain (Ithaca, NY, 1994).


received increased migration due to restrictive nationality and migration laws in the circum-Caribbean, the white dominions and the USA, population displacement caused by the partition of India and Pakistan, and because of the violence of decolonization in Cyprus, East Africa, and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{17} Situating Britain in imperial and global labour markets and migratory patterns shows that class formation in Britain has always already been a racial formation in which white British subjects moved across the empire with relative ease—and frequently, with government assistance—while Jim Crow-style colonial labour systems, spatial segregation, and migration controls restricted and channelled the mobility of racialized colonial subjects.\textsuperscript{18} As Jean Smith’s recent work shows, the British post-war experience of ‘affluence’ and social mobility was, for many, made possible via (white) freedom of movement to Australia, South Africa, and Rhodesia.\textsuperscript{19} These governments—as well as post-independence South Asian and Caribbean governments—shaped post-imperial migration with distinct yet complementary interests to those of the British state.\textsuperscript{20} An expanded geography helps us more clearly see how post-war migration to Britain was informed by the material realities of late colonialism, decolonization, and the global emergence of social democratic settlements.

Britain’s social democratic settlement relied upon imperial economic relations that were remade during decolonization, and the roots of the ascendant neoliberal challenge of the late twentieth century can be found in the reworking of those economic relationships.\textsuperscript{21} The state managed post-war migration with an eye to both domestic labour concerns and development in colonies and newly independent countries.\textsuperscript{22} Within Britain,


\textsuperscript{19} Smith, \textit{Settlers}.


the welfare state created new ways of thinking of belonging through distinctions between who was and was not deserving of social rights. Decolonization necessitated new projects of bordering Britain, both in terms of new restrictions on migration and in terms of restrictions—formalized and informal, legalized and illegal—on access to jobs, services, and welfare.

The essays by Marc Matera and Radhika Natarajan in this issue highlight persistent colonial ways of seeing and managing difference. As Matera demonstrates, it was decolonization struggles in Africa, not Commonwealth migration to Britain, that first placed ‘race relations’ on the political agenda in Britain. The intensification of the experience of race did not begin in the 1960s with the rise of Powellism or Black Power; rather, we can see these political phenomena as an outgrowth of a longer history of struggle that occurred not only within the British Isles, but throughout the empire as racialized colonial subjects contested racist migration policies and demanded self-determination in political and economic terms. This raises fundamental questions regarding the timing, form, and extent of the oft-cited ‘re-racialization’ of Britain.

The politicization of race through decolonization and its increasing codification to surveil and restrict the ‘New Commonwealth immigrant’ had paradoxical effects for other racialized groups in Britain. Paul Gilroy suggests that the ‘infrahuman political body of the immigrant’ has come ‘to represent all the discomforting ambiguities of the empire’s painful and shameful but apparently nonetheless exhilarating history’. Though more recent arrivals may not ‘be connected with the history of empire and colony in any way’, ‘they experience the misfortune of being caught up in a pattern of hostility and conflict that belongs emphatically to its lingering aftermath’. Eastern European Jewish, Irish, and Romany and Irish Traveller communities attained a level of precarious whiteness in the eyes of the post-war developmental state (again, working retrospectively to homogenize a past before Windrush in the public imagination). Becky Taylor tracks the material impact of the de-racialization of Gypsies.

25 Ian Sanjay Patel, We’re Here Because You Were There: Immigration and the End of Empire (London, 2021), 2.
27 For instance, for a discussion of the Irish as a ‘suspect community’ in the 1970s, see Mary J. Hickman et al., ‘Social Cohesion and the Notion of “suspect communities”: A Study of the Experiences and Impact of Being “suspect” for Irish and Muslim Communities in Britain’, Critical Studies on Terrorism, 5 (2012), 89–106. See also Bailkin Afterlife, 202–34. Focusing on the how immigration policy shaped the racialized ‘politics of exit’ in the postwar period, strikingly, Bailkin notes that under the provisions of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1962, between 1962 and 1969 Irish migrants represented the majority of deportees.
and Travellers in British social policies, when racial definitions of ‘true Gypsies’ as hereditary nomads began to compete with modern developmental discourses that categorized Gypsies and Travellers as above all else a social problem, as itinerant, delinquent populations in need of various forms of social intervention and support (but less worthy of it than other whites). This was part of a pan-European trend of containment and forced settlement of Romany populations. Critically, expanding government management of land, settlement and standards of living produced its own racializing effects. The 1968 Caravans Act attempted to address the shortage of stopping places for Gypsies and Travellers by providing permanent official sites on isolated rural and peri-urban land. Gypsies and Travellers were pushed out of Britain’s metropolitan centres, often cut off by high perimeter fences, by barbed wire; they were, in this sense, literally cut off from the story that Britain tells itself of multiculturalism—centred so much around the ‘inner city’—from the municipal multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s and from Britain’s celebrated urban convivial multicultures. Even more, the resultant isolated ‘ghettos’ came to be vilified and feared by settled society, both as sites of antisocial behaviour and as a threat to local property prices. As Taylor notes, Gypsies and Travellers were left to suffer extreme local antipathy and escalating police harassment while being denied the ability to claim community-based rights and resources via new state multicultural programmes. The (b)ordering of British populations happened in rural Britain too. And as the history of Travellers makes clear, we must look beyond and indeed reimagine the archives of ‘race relations’ to see all of its effects.

An expanded view of racial formation demands rejecting the Windrush as a break with a homogeneous past, looking beyond the experience (or overt politicization) of race to make visible the mechanisms of racial formation in a wide variety of racial projects, and connecting struggles against racial hierarchy to the imperial past and contemporaneous struggles in various postcolonial sites. However, recognition that ‘the world made Britain’—recognition of the global, (post)colonial forces at work in forging Britain’s political, cultural and economic institutions and norms—does not necessarily signal any fundamental reckoning with historical struggles surrounding racial formation. We are not the first to

---

29 Becky Taylor, ‘No Place To Be: Inserting Gypsies and Travellers into 1990s Britain’, *Rethinking Britain in the 1990s Workshop*, St John’s College, Cambridge University (September 2021).
be concerned that various recent strategies of worlding British history ‘reek’, as James Vernon puts it, of a ‘reconstituted Anglophonic imperialism in which white people, and an Anglo-orientated political and economic culture, once again take centre stage’.32 Even as imperial historians offered interpretations of the 2016 referendum on Britain’s membership in the European Union, few confronted directly the deep investment in whiteness behind fantasies of ‘Global Britain’ (the Australian historian of British decolonization, Stuart Ward, has probably done the most to fill that gap).33 Similarly, while the last decade has seen a burst of new research within British history on international development, human rights, British NGOs and popular humanitarian campaigns situated in empire and its loss,34 remarkably little of this scholarship engages with how the history of liberal paternalism and internationalism is itself a history of whiteness—one preoccupied by fears of ‘race war’ and a resuscitation of white moral authority in the era of decolonization.35 Even more, while ‘empire’ has become shorthand for morally dubious forms of universalism and governmentality, it is has often been left to anthropologists, sociologists or area studies specialists to do the work of seeing its material, social effects and contestations at the point of the humanitarian or developmental encounter, though a new generation of historians, it should be noted, have begun to challenge these limitations.36

We recognize that, over the last few decades, the history of colonialism has served as an animating problem—the raison d’être even—of US-based scholarship and teaching on modern Britain. Empire is mainstream, with the metanarrative of colonialism clearly supplanting the previous focus

33 See Marc Matera, ‘Postimperial Melancholia and Brexit’, Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques, 47 (2021), 9–21. Since the Brexit referendum, Ward has been instrumental in bringing scholars together in conversation to develop new historical understanding of Brexit and its relationship to empire, decolonization and ‘race’, resulting in two important edited collections: Stuart Ward and Astrid Rasch, eds, Embers of Empire in Brexit Britain (London, 2019) and Pedersen and Ward (eds), Break-Up of Greater Britain.
35 For an example of work that does engage forcefully with postcolonial whiteness, see Jodi Burkett, Constructing Post-Imperial Britain: Britishness, ‘Race’ and the Radical Left in the 1960s (Basingstoke, 2013).
on industrialization and the ‘making of the English working class’. Feminist historians in the 1990s were at the forefront of this shift, drawing upon subaltern studies, postcolonial theory, and Black British cultural studies. They found Britain, in Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose’s words, ‘at home with the empire’ by unearthing an everyday domestic imperial culture and deeply ingrained, if sometimes unspoken, assumptions about Britain’s place in the world and the global racial order. But the mainstreaming or institutionalization of imperial history has been uneven and resulted in a diminution of the critical feminist and postcolonial perspectives that once animated it. Both gender and imperial history have been reified as topics or fields rather than treated as critical modes of analysis and analytical lenses or ‘optics’. Recent work in these ‘fields’ and new approaches like the history of emotions often orient them towards relatively distinct objects of inquiry, if not separate constituencies within the profession.

The essays by Radhika Natarajan, Kennetta Hammond Perry, Camilla Schofield, and Rob Waters offer new ways into the history of feeling and the structures of everyday racialization. In various ways, they illustrate how the vaunted British commitment to the sanctity of individual rights and the autonomy of the private realm was circumscribed along racial lines, and how frequently it was violated in the cases of Black and Asian Britons. Natarajan examines the impact of the reformulations of immigration law and policy on South Asian family formation, showing us how race, gender, generation, and immigration status intertwined to produce young South Asian men as simultaneously in need of protection and a threat. The anxieties of the British state toward the male, migrant dependant from South Asia created scrutiny of young men at the border and of South Asian households within domestic state space. Natarajan’s analysis reveals the limitation of approaches to immigration history that treat race as a straightforward descriptive category and which reproduce an account of the family that centres women in their roles as wives and mothers. While Natarajan explores the reach of Britain’s immigration regime, Perry adds to our understanding of the state by focusing on police violence. As colonial policing became more militarized and intertwined with the maintenance of colonial political economy and labour control in key colonial industries during the empire’s final decades, the movement of police officers between the metropole and Ireland or the colonies

39 For a recent imperial history that does engage with the history of emotions and sentiment, see Joanna Lewis, Empire of Sentiment: The Death of Livingstone and the Myth of Victorian Imperialism (Cambridge, 2018).
increased. Likewise, domestic British and (post)colonial models of policing, including uses of weaponry and force, continued to converge after decolonization. However, more work is needed to better understand how British policing became a site to try to resolve what Erik Linstrum describes as a persistent ‘quandary of colonial rule: how to repress rebellious subjects without making martyrs of them’. As Perry notes, while racialized state violence is a major theme in histories of late British colonialism and decolonization, there is comparatively little work on how racial logics and attendant forms of colonial violence shaped the lives of postcolonial subjects in Britain. Perry’s essay adds to extant scholarship on the uses and deployment of violence as a tool of empire and the policing of racialized subjects in Britain by attending to the sensory registers of sight and sound in the archival traces of David Oluwale’s encounters with the state. In the face of an archive of death and dispossession, Perry enacts a different type of archival encounter, one that does not lead to merely replaying scenes of violation and subjection, by dwelling on the sounds that bring into view the embodied experience of racialized violence wrought by the British state. Thinking from and against David Oluwale’s ‘mutilated historicity’ by considering what it articulates sonically offers a means of considering the affective dimensions of state violence as experienced by countless, lesser-known others, such as Somali Mahmoud Hussein Mattan whose life, false conviction, and execution in Cardiff in 1952 are imaginatively reconstructed in Nadifa Mohamed’s 2021 novel, The Fortune Men. The novel seeks to do precisely what reliance on state and newspaper archives alone can potentially foreclose using conventional historical methodologies—to restore sentience and a sense of interiority to a racialized subject and a life cut short by state violence.

Social Democracy

British social democracy, as the essays by Natarajan, Schofield and Waters demonstrate, was at its core a racial contract that, as Schofield puts it, ‘relied on a politics of exclusion’. And yet existing explanations of the making of the ‘social-democratic subject’ and the project of social democracy continue, too often, both to centre white people and to leave whiteness unmarked, consigning the race politics of social democracy to the margins of historical analysis. Taking greater account of the experiences of people of colour and the place of race in the making of post-war social democracy can change our understanding of its sites, processes, and


actors dramatically. Two recent trends in the literature illustrate this dilemma well: the turn to social democracy’s built environment and the return to sociological studies of the 1950s and 1960s.

The recent attention to the vital role of post-war urban planning in shaping social democratic citizenship and subjectivities has certainly acknowledged that, as Guy Ortolano puts it, social-democracy’s urban planners ‘imagined their subjects as white’, and the new planned developments of the social democratic era remained overwhelmingly white resources. If we might therefore name the social democratic project as a white racial settlement then its utility as a chronological marker for twentieth-century British history surely needs revising. If, on the other hand, we recognize that a spatial or material history of social democracy extends beyond the spaces of urban planning that have held the attention of recent historians of the built environment, then we must ask what other spaces need to be included in order to see how social democracy addressed its non-white subjects. This would require a history not of grand designs and new developments, but of the makeshift accommodations into which New Commonwealth migrants, refugees, and people of colour were crammed: the disused air raid shelters, the multiple-occupancy housing, the streets scheduled for often-long-delayed slum demolition, the Nissen huts—the waiting-spaces of social democracy. It would also necessitate a re-evaluation of how state institutions associated

43 The terms ‘welfare state’ and ‘social democracy’ similarly tend to describe, within the historiography of modern Britain, a discrete period (1945–1979) when we see, after the Second World War, the expansion of social rights and entitlements alongside reformed capitalism, or a managed economy of low unemployment, high consumption, and nationalized industries. ‘Welfare state’ reproduces the language of the period, particularly at its demise. ‘Social democracy’ puts slightly greater emphasis on uncovering an ideological orientation, associated with a diverse and sometimes contradictory set of policies, practices, and institutions. It is a term that has been taken up with greater frequency in the US academy (see, for instance, James Vernon, ‘The Local, the Imperial and the Global: Repositioning Twentieth-Century Britain and the Brief Life of its Social Democracy’, Twentieth Century British History, 21 (2010), 404–18). There is value in critically approaching the received keywords of post-war British history. Sam Wetherell’s recent eschewal of ‘welfare state’—using instead ‘mid-century developmental state’—effectively makes new connections, illuminating its links to ‘international development’. Wetherell, Foundations.

44 Guy Ortolano, Thatcher’s Progress: From Social Democracy to Market Liberalism through an English New Town (Cambridge, 2019), 14. Wetherell similarly notes that the council estates that, in his narrative, were the spaces designed to build a social democratic community were usually racially exclusive. In a revealing statistic, he notes that in 1961 just 4.3 per cent of all Commonwealth migrants in the six largest cities in England and Wales lived in council housing, against 23 per cent of all households. Wetherell, Foundations, 78, 99. See also Wetherell, ‘“Redlining” the British City’, Renewal, 28 (2020), 81–89.

45 Wetherell proposes that in the first three decades after the war ‘new council estates were agents, sometimes unwittingly, in the reproduction of white supremacy’ (Foundations, 100).

with social democracy, such as the National Health Service and schools, operated as instruments of racialization. Given the inherent whiteness of the social democratic project, we might ask who bore the costs of social democracy? Waters and Natarajan remind us that the social democratic era of the 1960s and 1970s was a period of intense and intensifying scrutiny of Black and Asian youth, from the border to the street to the research encounter, and provide examples of these Britons’ attempts to navigate, refuse, or critique their construction as a problem.

The recent sociological turn in histories of working-class life and identity during the age of social democratic ‘consensus’ presents a similar dilemma. Though a growing body of scholarship shows the significant influence of late-colonial social science, especially social anthropology, on the rise of sociology in Britain, the question of the fate of metropolitan working-class identities and their politics in an era of unprecedented change dominated the research agenda as the discipline was institutionalized in the second half of the twentieth century. Seeking to understand whether a culture for social democracy could be sustained in the potentially atomizing conditions of affluence and modern urban living, many sociologists followed the working classes from the cities to the new towns and suburbs, focusing their analyses there. Historians who return to their archives necessarily follow these sociologists on that same path, away from the emerging ‘inner city’ and towards the suburbs. But once we see the whiteness of the post-war population dispersals, we see that this

47 While more work is needed, in relation to the NHS and schools see Nicole M. Jackson, ‘The Ties that Bind: Questions of Empire and Belonging in British Educational Activism’, in Kehinde Andrews and Lisa Palmer, eds, Blackness in Britain (London, 2016); Brett Bebber, ‘“We were just unwanted”: Bussing, Migrant Dispersal and South Asians in London’, Journal of Social History, 48 (2015), 635–61; Kennetta Hammond Perry ‘“To tell it as we know it”: Black Women’s History and the Archive of Brexit Britain’, Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historique, 47 (2021), 53–77.


49 In the London case, dispersal migration was ‘almost solely’ white before 1970. Mark Clapson, Invincible Green Suburbs, Brave New Towns: Social Change and Urban Dispersal in
sociological archive, like the archive of planning of the new towns, is predominantly an archive of whiteness. In these circumstances, we not only need to reckon with the implications of the mutual reinforcement of social research and social policy in a system that centred whiteness but also to question the uses to which this archive has subsequently been put as it has been re-appropriated for other research questions—such as in Jon Lawrence’s influential work, in which he employs it to challenge the idea of a decline of ‘community’ over the course of the past half century. In Lawrence’s case, this is part of a project to contest the argument that a neoliberal culture of individualism has triumphed over one that valorized community. Implicitly, his purpose is to argue for the continuing viability of a social democratic politics. But we must ask whose vision of ‘community’ do we see here? As a new generation of sociologists has been returning with increasing vigour to the same old urban centres that many white working-class Britons were offered an escape from, they have identified other conceptions of community active within them—convivial communities, communities-through-difference, which must have as much relevance to any contemporary attempt to dislodge neoliberal common sense about the triumph of the individual. How can historians begin to chart the historical development of these communities in what were swiftly becoming known as the ‘inner cities’? How can a history of social democracy and its cultures of community bring together these


Indeed, ethnic homogeneity could be the motivating force for the studies. Goldthorpe and Lockwood’s celebrated Affluent Worker study chose Luton as its focus precisely because an alternative proposed location—Bedford—was considered ethnically ‘too diverse’ to answer their research questions. Jon Lawrenece, Me, Me, Me: The Search for Community in Postwar Britain (Oxford, 2019), 115–16.

The rise of sociology in the second half of the twentieth century was implicated, as Mike Savage has argued, in the process of building ‘a modern, rational nation which was amenable to intervention and “management”’ (Identities and Social Change in Britain since 1940: The Politics of Method (Oxford, 2010), vii, x).

Lawrence, Me, Me, Me.


divergent conceptions, and what will it do to our understanding of social democracy in Britain as a result?

Several of the essays in this issue gesture towards the limits of archival retrieval. Waters cautions against seeing the archive of race relations research as a resource for social history beyond that of the research encounter itself. Perry raises a vital question: can we use archives of Black dispossession and death for glimpses of Black emotive lives and for constructing histories of Black sentience and affect while keeping in view the violence of the British state? Changing or challenging the story of social democracy in Britain will require not only against-the-grain readings of the archives that have thus far dominated this history—archives which are themselves testaments to projects of racial formation, even if ad hoc—but also alternative, imaginative modes of reconstruction and storytelling. In addition, it will require finding archives produced by and that speak to those people pushed to the edges of the social democratic project, and considering the political, social and cultural contexts and projects of their lives. How might our historical understanding of Britain’s social democratic project change if we were to recognize that Black and Asian self-help groups and community centres (which proliferated with government Urban Programmes funding in the 1970s and 1980s) are, among other things, forgotten fragments of the British welfare state archive?

The unmarked racial constituency of social democracy, as it was realized in the whiteness of the project of class sociology, developed in tandem with and shaped the elaboration of the post-war welfare state. It served as the normative object for the mobilization of resources and the creation of a new social democratic architecture—the New Towns, expanded towns and commuter villages that were developed to accommodate the rising prosperity of white citizens. This process dovetailed with the recruitment of migrants from the New Commonwealth into the dirtier, lower paid, yet essential, jobs in the industrial, NHS and transport infrastructure that white British workers were leaving. Understanding racial formation in modern Britain means understanding the relationship between the production of racial knowledge, which often drew upon

55 Jordanna Bailkin has probably done the most, in recent years, to rethink the received history of the British welfare state by reading its archives against the grain. Jordanna Bailkin, ‘Where did the Empire Go? Archives and Decolonization in Britain’, American Historical Review, 120 (2015), 884–99, and Afterlife of Empire.


colonial sources, and the development of racial policies, including the development of the so-called ‘race relations industry’ in the 1960s and 1970s, as a complex structure of research, policy development, resource management, and state organization by which the fear of Black unrest was met by an ameliorative programme of community development and civic incorporation. It also means, as we go on to propose in the next section, recognizing that the management of industrial decline was not just located on the rural coalfields but also in the ‘inner city’. Fundamentally, it means seeing that the distribution of state and private resources and the making of new institutions, policies, and projects, directed towards or demanded by the differently reconstituted and self-constituting racial groupings, are inseparable from one another.

Deindustrialization

The welcome return of histories of capitalism and labour to historical scholarship on modern Britain has taken place amidst a materialist or post-cultural turn. Oriented towards structural transformations, embodied subjectivity and economic life, this materialist turn moves away from discourse as an agent of change in its own right towards ideas in practice. Yet, it is imperative that this new materialism, with its renewed emphasis on the empirical, on the concrete, does not go down the same intellectual cul-de-sac of social histories past—by relegating ‘race’ and for that matter ‘nation’ to just expressions of false consciousness or, as Paul Gilroy put it in 1987, ‘phenomenal form[s] masking real, economic relationships in a manner analogous to a mirage’. Race, simply put, is at work in the British economy.


Yet, there remains a remarkably stubborn bifurcation of historical scholarship on ‘class’ and ‘race’ in modern Britain, one that relies on keeping two histories apart: Britain’s (post-)industrial history and its (post-)imperial one. The history of social mobility (both geographic and in terms of class identification) and the restructuring of the British economy (or deindustrialization and its profound social effects) are strangely cut off from scholarship on routes of international migration and the global labour market. History, as a discipline, is not unique in this regard. As geographer Jay Emery laments, ‘social scientific inquiry is in danger of reformulating perennial hierarchical conflicts between class, race, and gender, redrawing the explanatory battle lines along deindustrialization versus decolonization’.60 Steven High, a Canadian historian of deindustrialization, voiced a similar concern after the Working-Class Studies Association Conference at the University of Kent in 2019.61 Studies of deindustrialization dominated the conference and seemed to have entered a new ‘golden age’, but their focus was almost exclusively on ‘white workers’, and ‘the scholars and audience [were] almost entirely white’.62 High warned of the danger that the interdisciplinary field of deindustrialization studies was itself contributing to ‘the coding of the working class as white’.63 So should we be wary of following Jim Tomlinson’s call to arms, that deindustrialization is the new ‘metanarrative’ of modern Britain?64 Does it fail us by reifying certain ways of seeing economic life—by reproducing the white male worker as the subject of history and, even, by reproducing the nation-state and the global north as the locus of historical activity? How might deindustrialization studies still enrich the history of race and Britain’s postcolonial condition?


63 High, ‘A new era’.
Both the transatlantic scholarly attention on deindustrialization and concerns over its coding as white must be understood in the context of post-2016 narratives of Brexit and Trump as populist revolts of the ‘white working class’.65 Central to the myth of the post-war Empire Windrush is a vision of what was lost: a homogeneous, communal, and gainfully employed British working class.66 The imagined Brexit-voting, angry and irrational, white working-class man who resides in depressed former industrial areas is, in this sense, the anti-hero of the Windrush myth: the left behind.67 ‘Left behind’ both materially and ideologically, by manufacturing and Labour, he mourns the lost certainties, the lost radical traditions, the lost communities wrought by the globalization of capital and labour. While the whiteness of the social democratic project has remained unmarked, the trauma of deindustrialization is now the foundation myth of the ‘white working class’—especially in post-industrial England and North America’s ‘Rust Belt’.68 With this, not only is the working class reaffirmed as white and male, but political whiteness is made working class—and fundamentally a matter of defensive ‘self-interest’.69 It is a story of lost glory, deprivation, and victimization, like many others, which eschews Britain’s long history of white supremacy—wherein white male heroism can be retrieved in what Fintan O’Toole calls ‘heroic failure’.70

66 For an example of this vision of the effects of post-war migration, see David Goodhart, The British Dream: Successes and Failures of Post-War Immigration (London, 2014).
Historians of working-class life in twentieth-century Britain have shown that there was never such a thing as one homogeneous, stable and cohesive ‘white working class’—or if there was it was localized, short-lived, or produced retroactively through the workings of nostalgia. Instead, as sociologist Steve Garner has explored, whiteness itself was inscribed onto the experience of economic crisis, precarity, and loss. In this issue, Schofield reads the Race Relations Board case files for intimate stories of working-class life in the years of deindustrialization—stories that reveal ‘struggles over space, resources, and racial power’ and new forms of emotional investment in whiteness at the local level. To historize what Garner calls the ‘moral economy of whiteness’, she uncovers the unstable role it played within particular communities, within neighbourhoods and families, in places like Doncaster, East Ham, and Preston. The ‘half life’ of deindustrialization—the persistence of industrial cultures of masculinity, intergenerational tensions, and crisis—brought its own form of re-racialization.

It matters where we look and which communities are tasked with carrying the burden of history. Jorg Arnold has written powerfully about the place of coal mining communities in the British historical imagination—as an imagined volk, communitarian, anti-urban, pre-cosmopolitan—rural ‘ghosts of a by-gone era’. Ironically, Britain’s deindustrial revolution is placed firmly—through this image and the significant events of 1984/85 miners’ strike—in a prelapsarian countryside, in the pit village. Raphael Samuel, in the introduction to his collection of oral testimonies of the miners’ strike, saw in the strike a sign of the ‘village radicalism of nineteenth century England’, with ‘the same attachment to customary rights, the same territorial sense of place’. Samuel described the miners’ politics as ‘radical conservatism’—defensive, resistant to change and committed to a received way of life. As Arnold makes clear, this ‘ruralized’ view of the coal miner living in closely knit village communities was highly selective—focusing heavily on South Yorkshire, the north-east of


75 Arnold, ‘That rather sinful’. 
England and South Wales—and disregarded the less homogeneous coalfields of locales including Nottinghamshire, North Wales, Derbyshire, and Lancashire.

But Britain’s deindustrial revolution happened in the city, including port cities, too, with different stories to tell.\textsuperscript{76} We might look, for instance, to Leicester where statistical and documentary evidence suggests, according to Simon Gunn and Colin Hyde, that the East African Asian and Indian settlement in the 1970s extended the existence of the city’s textile industry for over 30 years.\textsuperscript{77} In a re-analysis of the oral testimonies of residents of London’s Docklands, Finn Gleeson found that nostalgia for ‘participation in empire through the docks’ was woven into the experience of deindustrialization there, and that the area’s residents ‘rarely distinguished between the interconnected losses of imperial purpose and social cohesion’.\textsuperscript{78} Across post-war Britain, as Christopher Lawson’s doctoral research reveals, already existing inequalities (along the lines of race, class, gender, and region) \textit{interacted} with structural economic changes to produce new social, cultural, and spatial outcomes—such that, for instance, the forces of deindustrialization in Oldham, in Greater Manchester, broke apart a thriving multicultural community in the neighbourhood of Glodwick leaving in its wake a ‘segregated, disadvantaged “ghetto”’.\textsuperscript{79} Importantly, Lawson shows, through his close analysis of deindustrialization in Belfast, Oldham and Coventry, that the effects of deindustrialization were felt by women and ethnic minorities ‘as much or more’ than white male Britons.\textsuperscript{80} The highly racialized story of the ‘inner city’ is, of course, also a story of deindustrialization.\textsuperscript{81} The structural crisis of \textit{Policing the Crisis} was, critically, both a post-industrial and post-imperial


\textsuperscript{80} Lawson, ‘Nothing Left but Smoke’. See also John Davis, \textit{Waterloo Sunrise: London from the Sixties to Thatcher} (Princeton, 2022), 320–45.

\textsuperscript{81} Waters, ‘Respectability and Race’.
one. In the deindustrializing city, the policing of economic and social discontent followed established colonial patterns. Riot control techniques honed in Palestine and Northern Ireland were used for the first time in Britain in the Battle of Lewisham in 1977. With this in mind, we need to consider how, for instance, the Brixton Uprising and the excessive use of force in policing industrial disputes such as the Miners’ Strike form parts of a connected history. Disrupting prevailing assumptions and received ideas about decline and deindustrialization require rethinking racial and class geographies, at both the global and regional scales.

But how might deindustrialization studies enrich the study of racial formations in (post-) imperial Britain? Vanessa Ogle urges historians to study decolonization as a financial and economic event, one which continues to shape global economic relationships. It set in motion not only mass movements of people—from countryside to city, from the global south to the global north—but also the expropriation and domestication of colonial wealth. Several of our essays address the economic transformations of decolonization from the outside in—whether from southern and central Africa, from the perspective of migrants, or from outside the door of the working men’s club. As Matera’s essay shows, ‘race relations’ was fundamentally shaped by questions of labour, beginning in the white settler colonies of Africa where the prospect of decolonization and democratic rule threatened extractive industries and political economies based on white supremacy. Britain’s new metanarrative of deindustrialization surely requires a close engagement with the historical forces of empire and decolonization, from the persistence of mining and petrochemical interests in the City of London to the reproduction of a racial labour order. But the nascent field of (post-) imperial British history—or in light of history’s materialist turn—can also be enriched by the insights and approaches of deindustrialization studies, with its focus on trauma and the labouring body, temporality, multi-generational legacies and environmental justice. With these themes in mind, it is clear

82 Stuart Hall et al., Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order (London, 1978).
83 See also Linstrum’s discussion of the use of tear gas in policing the Toxteth Uprising in ‘Domesticating chemical weapons’.
84 See, for example, Kellner, Making Cultures of Solidarity.
that understanding Britain as a (post-)imperial formation—understanding the ‘legacies of empire’—is not only a discursive project of remembering or forgetting the past. Alice Mah’s approach to the concept of ‘industrial ruination’ captures the ongoing social effects of capitalism’s destructive capacity, whether it is from the runoff of mines at the extractive frontier or at the abandoned chemical factory in the post-industrial metropole. Like Ogle, and informed by work in deindustrialization studies, scholars of decolonization might also follow the money: Jefferson Cowie’s *Capital Moves: RCA’s Seventy-Year Quest for Cheap Labour* (1999), for instance, follows America’s leading manufacturer of records and radio sets over seventy years from industrial centres of the Eastern Seaboard to impoverished rural communities in the Midwest and South to Juarez, Mexico—tracking the economic upheaval, abandoned industrial landscapes and community deprivation across regional and national boundaries. Despite its association with populist narratives of the ‘white working class’, this is a field that has brought economic and environmental justice, emotional life and the movements of capital into close conversation.

Whose stories reveal the history of deindustrialization? And whose reveal the history of Britain’s postcolonial condition? In positing an account of the location of deindustrialization and the subjects of its history, idealized narratives of deindustrialization too-often exclude the post-imperial history of migration we rehearse above. If we place the coal villages of Yorkshire in conversation with villages in Mirpur, the Copper Belt, or Jamaica, we see a global history come into view, one in which the relationship between rural and urban is not absolute, but constantly remade by the traffic between sites of racialization, social control, and economic

---


90 This question has also been posed—and deeply explored—by Christopher Lawson in ‘Nothing left but smoke’. 
labour extraction.91 And, if we see the multicultural ‘inner city’ as a site of industrial ruination, histories of economic and environmental (in)justice are blindingly evident. The policing and protest of the racialized labouring body are not only historical expressions of empire and resistance but they also tell a history of the racial logics of managed decline.92 Expanding our view of the geography of deindustrialization not only brings more locations and actors into view but fundamentally forces us to re-examine the timeline and nature of deindustrialization and the consequences of the remaking of Britain’s economy. Just as the histories of industrialization and imperialism are inextricably bound together, so too are the histories of their unravelling.

***

We began in the introduction by calling attention to the collaborative work behind this thematic issue. As a collective, we contend that the role of race in British history cannot be reduced to the history of racialized groups or explicit political articulations of race. Racialization is not limited to the discursive realm or questions of identity and difference but constitutive of political–economic relations and material conditions. The history of race should not be treated as a separate or distinct topic. Employing race as an analytical concept, rather, reveals how race organizes the field of modern British history, often through the operation of unmarked whiteness. We hope that recent developments in the field inspire new collaborations and raise new questions of modern British history, as we have attempted to do above.

We should not assume that this direction of travel will be automatic, especially given that, as we have noted, we are certainly not the first to raise these issues. The globalization of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has shifted public debate about race in contemporary Britain in part by challenging the persistent public amnesia around global and local histories of British slavery and their relationship to the present.93 We hope that this will have deep and lasting effects. But the impact will be minimal if the efforts towards redress remain limited to perfunctory exercises in institutional rebranding and culture

91 We might follow Bill Schwarz’s recent exhortation here to approach the concept of ‘racial capitalism’ not only as a theoretical formulation but—looking back to Cedric Robinson’s 1983 usage of the term in *Black Marxism*—see it also as a question of agency. Marx conceived of liberation from capital as dependent tightly on ‘the proletariat’, on the organized labour of the metropole. ‘By adding the prefix “racial” to capitalism’, Schwarz suggests, ‘Marx’s entire analytical project assumes new trajectories’—and ‘history’ and ‘politics’ are broadened to embrace ‘the urban lumpenproletariat’, ‘the peasantry’, the ‘ill-organized or disorderly’, ‘the wretched of the earth’. Bill Schwarz, ‘Editorial: Racial Capitalism’, *History Workshop Journal*, 94 (2022), 3–4.

92 For a key text on racialized labouring bodies and the lived experience of migration and economic transformation, see Kalra, *Textile Mills*.

As Olivette Otele notes, in the wake of the public outcry of despair and rage after the murder of George Floyd, the performative solidarity that came from UK institutions and companies was ‘incredibly puzzling’ for those who have long fought for racial equality, as these same companies had continually failed to address their own endemic racism. Otele sees an ‘uncanny’ ‘dissonance’ between concern for Black communities in the USA and an inability to connect what was happening in the USA with brutalities against Black and Brown people in and by Britain, both past and present. This dissonance—this exporting or transposing of liberal anti-racist sympathy over there (whether to the USA, the colonial frontier, or Apartheid South Africa) combined with a failure to reckon with it over here—is not a new phenomenon and should be understood as part of the history of ‘race relations’ in Britain. It is rooted in attempts to preserve what Perry terms the ‘mystique of British anti-racism’. The myth of British tolerance and decency (not disconnected, of course, from another myth, the civilizing mission), which historian Tony Kushner and others have spent academic careers working to reveal, understand and challenge, has always relied on using the USA as a foil. In 2020, when Conservative Equalities Minister Kemi Badenoch condemned Critical Race Theory as an ideology that simply ‘sees my blackness as victimhood and their whiteness as oppression’ and insisted that any school teaching of it ‘as a fact’ was ‘breaking the law’, she misrepresented and sought to blacklist forty years of US-based legal theory and scholarly understanding of ‘race’—expertise from which British historians must draw.

Despite decades of scholarship challenging the failure to historicize ‘race’ and racialization in modern British history, ‘Black Britain’ as a field of historical study garnering institutionalization has only recently been ‘discovered’ by British Higher Education. Cambridge, Oxford, Durham,
and Edinburgh, among other universities, have, in the last few years, all sought to hire new lecturers in the field of Black British history. While the possibility of actual academic employment in a scarce labour market may spark new research, and that is of course to be applauded, this institutional growth of the field is best understood as an expression of the neoliberal logics of the British university system—namely, students’ consumer demand (again, in the wake of BLM). The planned radical restructuring at Goldsmiths, specifically their decision to put historians working in the Black British History M.A. programme at risk of redundancy just two years after the programme’s establishment, treats it and other areas of high specialization as ‘mere adornments on a portfolio rather than fields built upon rigorous training and deeply rooted scholarship’ (as the open letter in opposition to the senior management put it). Catering to student demand, their teaching will be filled, they fear, ‘by cheaper, precarious staff, or staff with different expertise’.

We must be wary of institutional demands to sell Black history as a bordered, island-centred British history that affirms the ascendency of a nation-state framework at the expense of a wider horizon of transregional connections and colonial histories. Indeed, Black British history depends upon different accounts of scale to take into account local, regional (post-) imperial, and diasporic trajectories. New scholarship on the history of US anti-Black violence and African-American freedom movements has challenged assumptions of US exceptionalism and isolation by situating race and resistance in transnational regional economies, populations, and networks. More recent work in Black studies embracing transnational frameworks and histories of empire and Black internationalism has also entailed greater attention to the (British) Caribbean presence and reengagement with the contributions of Caribbean and African intellectuals and activists. Recent histories of Black internationalism and of Black

99 And as we write, the convenor of the MA program has resigned citing impossible working conditions. ‘Open letter to Professor Frances Corner, OBE, Warden of Goldsmiths, Council & Senior Management Team’, 14 October 2021 <https://we-are.gold/2021/10/14/open-letter-to-frances-corner/> accessed 20 October 2021.


101 Keisha N. Blain, Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Freedom (Philadelphia, PA, 2018); Keisha N. Blain and Tiffany M. Gill, eds, To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism (Champaign, IL, 2019); Nadia Ellis, Queried Belonging in the Black Diaspora (Durham, NC, 2015); Joshua Guild, ‘You Can’t Go Home Again: Migration, Citizenship, and Black Community in Postwar New York and London’, PhD thesis, Yale University, 2007; Winston James, Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early-Twentieth Century America (London, 1998); Minkah Makalani, In
organizing and protest in Britain, from the interwar period to the Black Power era, situate Britain, especially London, within (post-)imperial and diasporic networks and connections.102

These political and historiographical trends build on the longer transatlantic history of the Black radical tradition and of vigorous debate of the concepts of race, Blackness, and diaspora.103 Across the twentieth century, visiting African American scholars, such as William Boyd Allison Davis and Elizabeth Davis, George W. Brown, Ralph Bunche and St. Clair Drake, played a large role in introducing ideas and approaches to the study of race and race relations in the USA to Britain, though their influence receives far less attention than that of Robert Park and his white colleagues at Chicago.104 The products of these intellectual and political cross currents include foundational but rarely-cited scholarship on Black British history produced by Black scholars at historically Black colleges and universities or published in Black scholarly journals, books, and movement publications in the USA.105


The flourishing of Black British history not only promises to open up British history spatially but it can challenge and reconfigure its central themes. Without attention to racial formation and a broad range of processes and sites of racialization, however, there is danger that the emergence of Black British history as a distinct area of expertise and a career path may reproduce the familiar pattern of peripheralization-through-institutionalization. There is also the risk that Black British history will stand in for the history of racial politics in general and enable the main body of modern British historians to go on as if nothing has happened or to engage with histories of race in reductive ways—by attending, for instance, to the profound and ongoing importance of logics of racial hierarchy in the labour market with a few well-chosen footnotes (usually, Stuart Hall) before getting to the real nitty-gritty of Britain’s story, that is industrialization/deindustrialization and what happened to industrial communities (implicitly white and mostly male) and the rise and fall of their political power over the course of the twentieth century.

We have argued that there remains a need to reckon with the dynamics of racialization in social, economic, and political transformations in post-war Britain and the historical narratives deployed to account for them. We employ the concept of racial formation in this survey of recent scholarship on three major themes in the historiography to highlight the connections between the production of knowledge and objects of intervention, on the one hand, and the dispersal of state and private resources, on the other; to suggest lines of inquiry which cut across the categories and temporal demarcations that organize the field; and, most importantly, to refuse the reduction of racism and racialization to the effects of immigration or deindustrialization, the decline of the working class, and the fracturing of working-class communities. We not only question the usefulness of social democracy, decolonization and deindustrialization as periodizing devices, as opposed to objects of historical and ongoing struggles but also point towards their limitations as concepts enabling us to come to terms with the complex reworking of racial

capitalism in Britain and its (former) empire after the Second World War. Our task here has not been to offer new metanarratives to replace old; it has been to insist on the need to notice the work that race and its absent presence does, historically and in the historiography. We aim to demonstrate that noticing how race operates and attending to how the processes of racialization function to structure political dynamics and socio-economic relations across a range of domains at different scales requires understanding that the study of racial formations cannot be an afterthought or an add-on to analysis. It cannot mark the margins, or the limits of our explanatory frameworks, but instead can provide an essential tool for expanding our lines of inquiry and unsettling what we think we know about the past. Here we offer an opening to consider what else thinking with and through race might show us. We encourage consideration of the untold histories it might bring to the surface and the overlooked connections and fissures across time and space that it might bring into sharper focus, an agenda that we hope will animate new, field-shifting work in modern British history.