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# In Defence of White Freedom: Working Men's Clubs and the Politics of Sociability in Late Industrial England

## Abstract

While ongoing discrimination in jobs, welfare, and housing in 1970s England belied the social democratic promise of 'equality of opportunity' and the much-touted British value of 'fair play', racism at the door of the working men's club told a different story. For reactionaries and liberals alike, it spoke to the uncertain future of working-class politics in late industrial England. This article shows how the legal and political controversies surrounding whites-only working men's clubs contribute to our understanding of the 'white working class' as a political subject in British public life. Even more, it reveals how—among club members—whiteness came to be invested with feelings of intimacy, kinship, respectability, and independence.

Ivor Brown was a Doncaster coal miner and a member of the Bentley Miners Welfare Snooker team.<sup>1</sup> On a summer evening in July 1968, he

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<sup>1</sup> Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool Central Library, M364 PSS 7.4.1, 'Clubs and Discrimination', *Race Relations: Quarterly Bulletin of the Race Relations Board* 16 (Summer 1973), 4–5, 4.

drove three fellow snooker team members and two friends over to a neighbouring working men's club, the Hyde Park Social Club, to play in the Doncaster and District Snooker League. His friends went in to order a round of pints while he parked the car. As he was signing in as an 'associate' of the club via his membership of the national Working Men's Club and Institute Union (CIU), the doorman told Brown that he couldn't let him in—the club's official rules barred people of colour from entering. Brown was from Jamaica. He had mined the coalface around Doncaster for years and had lived in the UK since 1953. The doorman took him to a noticeboard and pointed out the club's rules.

Five years later, in the summer of 1973, the Race Relations Board produced an article about this moment at the Hyde Park Social Club, with a two-page spread of Brown and a fellow club member playing snooker at their Bentley club (see [Figure 1](#)).<sup>2</sup> Brown's experience wasn't out of the ordinary.<sup>3</sup> But the story spoke to a preoccupation among race relations experts in the 1970s: clubs, particularly working men's clubs, were a new imagined frontline in the Board's quest for 'racial harmony'. While ongoing discrimination in jobs, welfare, and housing belied the social democratic promise of 'equality of opportunity' and the much-touted British value of 'fair play',<sup>4</sup> racism at the door of the working men's club told a different story. For reactionaries and liberals alike, it spoke to the uncertain future of working-class politics in late industrial England.<sup>5</sup> The 'overwhelming question' of the day, wrote Richard Hoggart in 1968, was whether the working class's shared rituals and sense of community could be 'carried over into the more open society'.<sup>6</sup>

Working men's clubs remain bound in the British political imagination to the 'traditional' working class community—appearing repeatedly, in contemporary portrayals at least, as the last institutional bastion of the 'white working class'. In the 2016 BBC One documentary *Last Whites of the East End*, for instance, East Ham Working Men's Club is revered as an

<sup>2</sup> From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the Race Relations Board acted as the statutory enforcer of the 1965 and then 1968 Race Relations Acts. With this legislation, racial discrimination in public services, housing, and employment was made illegal; the law was weakly enforced by the Race Relations Board on a case-by-case basis based on individual complaints.

<sup>3</sup> That year, twenty-nine clubs across the country were under investigation by the local conciliation committees of the Race Relations Board. 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, two public broadcasts sponsored by the Race Relations Board, 'Race Relations Board' (1969) and 'The Referee' (1976), which both rely heavily on sporting metaphors. British Film Institute Archive: Reuben Library, London, Central Office of Information films.

<sup>5</sup> The debate about racism in clubs was also picked up within popular culture in the sitcom *Love Thy Neighbour: 'The Protection of the Law'*, *Love Thy Neighbour*, Thames Television: ITV, 1 May 1975 (Television). For a discussion of race in British sitcoms, see Gavin Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation: Making Multiculturalism on British Television, 1960-80* (London, 2014), 178–230.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Hoggart, 'Shared Rituals', *New Statesman*, 1 January 1968, 584.



Figure 1.

Liverpool Records Office, Liverpool Central Library, M364 PSS 7.4.1, 'Clubs and discrimination', Race Relations: Quarterly Bulletin of the Race Relations Board 16 (Summer 1973), 4–5.

'oasis' for white old age pensioners 'left behind' by in and out migration—the final resting place of the endangered, authentic cockney.<sup>7</sup> Despite the pervasiveness of the image today—of the socially conservative, racist, left behind, 'white working class'—Jon Lawrence enjoins us to 'avoid the lazy stereotypes which assume that English ideas about class were inherently racialized, and that white working-class people were somehow predetermined to be racially intolerant and exclusive'.<sup>8</sup> We

<sup>7</sup> In *Last Whites of the East End*, the white cockney is presented as an endangered species who must turn to the working men's club for familiarity and community. *Last Whites of the East End*, BBC One. 24 May 2016 (Television). See also the BBC Two documentary *Last Orders* that similarly focuses on the Wibsey Working Men's Club in Bradford. English racism remains wedded in public discourse to a working-class identity under threat. *Last Orders*, BBC Two, 7 March 2008 (Television).

<sup>8</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me? The Search for Community in Post-War England* (Oxford, 2019), 155

could counter Lawrence here that we may indeed find a ‘somehow pre-determined’ intolerance, reflecting the structure of the global labour order and the nation-state. But Lawrence rightly insists that alongside ‘instinctive prejudices against outsiders’ ran evidence of ‘popular liberalism’ within some working-class communities in post-war England—producing ‘intense arguments over the meaning of immigration’ *within* the pub, within the club, on the factory floor in the 1970s.<sup>9</sup> Supporting this point, the evidence of the ‘race relations’ archive reveals an extremely uneven social terrain for racialized people in post-war England—a terrain of conditional acceptance, disavowal, violence, and, sometimes, conviviality.<sup>10</sup>

But this archive also offers a window into the maturation of the ‘white working class’ as a political formation in British public life. In a sweeping history from the English Poor Laws to Brexit, Robbie Shilliam argues that the very concept of ‘white working class’ is an elitist construction, ‘an elite

<sup>9</sup> Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me*, 154, 155. On a slightly different track, scholars of what has recently been dubbed ‘new British labour history’ are, in a sense, working to redeem the historical working class in Britain by uncovering its heterogeneity, telling stories of feminised workforces, Black and migrant workers, and queer and cosmopolitan working-class cultures as the history of the British working class, thereby challenging a post-Brexit conflation of working-class labour history with the socially conservative ‘white working class’. See, for instance: Julia Laite, Aditya Sarkar, Laura Schwartz, George Stevenson, ‘Roundtable: The Politics of Class, Past and Present’, *Renewal* 30 (2022), 10–28; Diamaid Kelliher, *Making Cultures of Solidarity: London and the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike* (London, 2021); Jonathan Moss, *Women, Workplace Protest and Political Identity in England, 1968-85* (Manchester, 2019); Sundari Anitha and Ruth Pearson, *Striking Women: Struggles and Strategies of South Asian Women Workers* (London, 2018); and especially Caroline Bressey’s significant archival efforts to recover Black life in Britain in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including Caroline Bressey, ‘Looking for Work: The Black Presence in Britain 1860-1920’, *Immigrants and Minorities* 28 (2010), 164–182.

<sup>10</sup> The term ‘conviviality’ is used here to mean everyday practices of multi-ethnic interaction and intimacy that show an indifference to difference, as discussed by Paul Gilroy and take up within British sociology. See Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* (London, 2004) and Sivamohan Valluvan, ‘Conviviality and multicultural: A Post-intergration Sociology of Multi-ethnic Interaction’, *Young* 24 (2015), 204–221. The evidence consulted to make this point includes significant sampling of over three thousand cases investigated by regional conciliation committees covering Greater London and the West Midlands held in The National Archives. See The National Archives: Public Record Office, Kew (hereafter TNA: PRO), Records of the Commission for Racial Equality and predecessors, Race Relations Board: Minutes and Papers, CK 2. Files relating to the North West Conciliation Committee covering Lancashire and Cheshire as well as substantial archive holdings of the national Race Relations Board in the archive of the Commission for Racial Equality were also consulted. See The Ahmed Iqbal Ullah Race Relations Resource Centre (hereafter AIURRRRC): Manchester City Library, Manchester, Commission for Racial Equality, 1976–2000 (hereafter CRE), GB3228.14. It should be noted that these case files capture very specific encounters between individuals and agents of the state and, therefore, can in no way offer a complete picture of the social complexities of race in 1960s and 1970s Britain. The Race Relations Board archives were first consulted by the author when she was invited by David Feldman to deliver a public lecture on the 50th anniversary of the 1965 Race Relations Act for the Pears Institute for the Study of Antisemitism. The author would like to thank David Feldman for this invitation and for his ongoing generosity and support.

artefact of political domination'.<sup>11</sup> Not a 'natural or neutral category' nor 'indigenous constituency', but a concept produced and reproduced in order to consolidate and defend the racial order of empire. With this, he takes the position that the white working class has rarely been 'self-authored, self-empowered or self-directed'; it is not 'its own progenitor'.<sup>12</sup> Lawrence seems to agree: 'it was not working people who racialized the idea of the English "working class" but academics and journalists', he insists. 'The sooner we recognize that the "white working class" is not a thing, but instead simply an unhelpful media construction, the better.'<sup>13</sup> The 1970s is a key moment to consider these claims: the stark racialization of citizenship consolidated in no small part by the 1971 Immigration Act and elite constructions of whiteness around 'national decline', deindustrialization, and decolonization have had long afterlives. In keeping with a top-down understanding of white identity, there are signs—literally—behind the closed doors of the whites-only clubs of 1970s England indicating a certain key progenitor of their self-identification: we find 'Powell for P.M.' placards pinned to club notice boards here and there. Popular understandings of whiteness, 'the people', and the nation are, of course, deeply bound up with the defence of racial capitalism and the racial state in Britain—whether rooted in a British imperial order or what came after.<sup>14</sup>

But—contra Shilliam—why is it necessary to see whiteness as puppetry? Surely, the English white working classes have been, at moments, agents in their own making? Surely, they have defended their own privileges? What do we do with the respondents (who are *not*, it should be emphasized, only working class) in the case files of the Race Relations Board who in thousands of acts reproduce 'race' and police the boundaries of whiteness? Mohan Ambikaipaker convincingly argues that 'everyday political whiteness' occurs when 'multiple whites, socially intersecting across class lines' build solidarity in order to 'forestall racial justice and secure liberal juridical impunity for racism'.<sup>15</sup> Recognition of 'inter-white solidarity' counters theories that rationalize white racial politics as a non-elite form of cultural resistance.<sup>16</sup> It also recognizes the agency of the white working classes in their own making.<sup>17</sup> Shilliam

<sup>11</sup> Robbie Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor: From Abolition to Brexit* (London, 2018), 44.

<sup>12</sup> Shilliam, *Race and the Undeserving Poor*.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me*, 155

<sup>14</sup> For an important discussion of racial capitalism and 1980s Britain's neoliberal labour regime, see James Vernon, 'Heathrow and the Making of Neoliberal Britain,' *Past & Present*, 252 (2021), 213–47.

<sup>15</sup> Mohan Ambikaipaker, *Political Blackness in Multiracial Britain* (Philadelphia, PA, 2018), 48.

<sup>16</sup> Gurmindia Bhabra, 'Brexit, Trump and "Methodological Whiteness": On the Misrecognition of Race and Class', *British Journal of Sociology*, 68:S1 (2017), S214–S232.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabra, 'Brexit, Trump'.

offers a powerful reading of British political thought in which the hierarchy of oppression of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor is built upon a racial (colonial) order. While this furthers our understanding of the racial politics of welfarism, it remains firmly rooted in elite perceptions. If we turn to the long *durée* of English working-class efforts to secure their own economic and social justice, we must follow the work of sociologist Satnam Virdee. He insists that the ‘racialized other’ has been, at various moments, instrumental to the making of the English working class *for itself*.<sup>18</sup> Democratic socialism, even as it built on values of equality of opportunity, relied on a politics of exclusion—across multiple fronts—in its socialist nationalism. Anoop Nayak’s exploration of whiteness in the context of deindustrialization shows, further, how young men in post-industrial Newcastle actively draw from this inheritance and perform an imagined ‘authentic’ white masculine identity rooted in a Northern labouring tradition.<sup>19</sup> If we turn to the field of critical whiteness studies in the USA, we find rich analyses of how white populations claim space and privilege themselves through everyday sociability, nostalgia, and a cultivated and intergenerational sense of entitlement.<sup>20</sup> We see, too, how whiteness is a ‘social practice’ that transforms itself into a moral economy, unfolding, as Ana Ramos-Zayas argues, ‘not primarily at the macro levels of the state or the nation, but at the intimate levels of everyday life through the control of structures of feelings in neighbourhoods and communities, the protections of social reproduction in the family, and... through ordinary forms of intimacy and kinship.’<sup>21</sup>

The Race Relations Board case files of working men’s clubs offer us intimate stories of working-class life in late industrial England. They show evidence of white solidarity and exclusion rooted in ideas of self-government, civic association, and working-class respectability and kinship. Ultimately, they tell stories of struggles over space, resources, and racial power. While traditional labour histories of Britain frame the early 1970s as a ‘glorious summer’ of industrial militancy against the 1971 Industrial Relations Act,<sup>22</sup> we know that this period must also be understood as a period of transition

<sup>18</sup> Satnam Virdee, *Racism, Class and Racialized Outsider* (London, 2014). See also Sivamohan Valluvan, ‘The Uses and Abuses of Class: Left Nationalism and the Denial of Working Class Multiculture’, *Sociological Review*, 67:1 (2019), 36–46.

<sup>19</sup> Anoop Nayak, ‘Last of the “Real Geordies”? White Masculinities and the Subcultural Response to Deindustrialization’, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 21 (2003), 7–25. Those who don’t have ‘coal in their bones’ are cast as outsiders and a potential threat. Phil Cohen as cited in Nayak, 20.

<sup>20</sup> Ana Y. Ramos-Zayas, ‘Ordinary Whiteness: Affect, Kinship, and the Moral Economy of Privilege’, *Journal of Urban Studies* 47 (2021), 459–64, 459.

<sup>21</sup> Ramos-Zayas, ‘Ordinary Whiteness’, 461. See also Steve Garner’s excellent sociological analysis of the moral economy of whiteness in contemporary Britain. Steve Garner, *The Moral Economy of Whiteness: Four Frames of Racializing Discourse* (London, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Ralph Darlington and Dave Lyddon, *Glorious Summer: Class Struggle in Britain, 1972* (London, 2001).

and uncertainty for working-class identity politics, with some local solidarities increasingly rooted in a 'possessive investment in whiteness'.<sup>23</sup> Whites-only working men's clubs made a direct link between their opposition to the 1971 Industrial Relations Act and opposition to the Race Relations Acts. But the trade union movement was also changing. As Sydney Bidwell, Labour MP for Southall noted in 1976, Black people were finally 'becoming officers in their trade unions and shop stewards in industry', but warned 'in many cases they are not freely taken into club life. That is a factor that is offsetting the progress that has been made.'<sup>24</sup> Whites-only working men's clubs across the country—across Yorkshire, Lancashire, and the Midlands especially—became a point of debate in legal and political circles and a means to reflect on the fate of industrial working class communities in a deindustrializing, multi-racial, and more gender-equal society. Not all clubs were whites-only, but the institution itself came to be associated with a certain reading of English working-class culture: as clannish, atavistic, and incapable of its own liberation.

### Whiteness and the Politics of Sociability

While the working men's club now looks like a vestigial social institution of by-gone days, it was at its high-water mark in the 1970s with over 3.5 million members of the CIU: CIU numbers were never as high before nor since. In some towns and cities, particularly in the industrial north, working men's clubs were regarded as the centre of social life, the beating heart of labourism.<sup>25</sup> In County Durham, 'To exclude coloured people would be to institute apartheid', wrote a club member in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*.<sup>26</sup> Yet in some towns and cities, even in highly diverse areas, clubs held long-standing explicit or unwritten whites-only policies—or 'some form of colour bar'.<sup>27</sup> As George Hall, the secretary for North Wolverhampton Working Men's Club, explained, after its members unanimously voted to reaffirm their whites-only policy the day after Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' speech:

We absolutely have no objection to the coloured workers. We have to face that fact as they have got to go out to work. We work with them. We live

<sup>23</sup> For a sense of the early 1970s as a significant period of crisis and transition within the labour movement, see Satnam Virdee, *Race, Class and the Racialised Outsider*. See also George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia, PA, 2018), and Ramos-Zayas, 'Ordinary Whiteness', 459–64.

<sup>24</sup> Sydney Bidwell, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 918, 27 October 1976, 576.

<sup>25</sup> 'Law Lords give Ruling on Clubs', *Race Relations: Quarterly Bulletin of the Race Relations Board*, 15 (Spring 1973), 5.

<sup>26</sup> Letter to the Editor from A.C. Arthur, 'Freedom and Discrimination', *The Daily Telegraph*, 18 Sept. 1975, 16.

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, 'Odd Man Out', *The Times*, 4 July 1971, which notes that 'Wolverhampton clubs were practically all-white'.

by them. We face that fact quite reasonably. But at night we feel we are entitled to some privacy of our own. And we find round here all the public houses are occupied. . . taken over by these coloured persons. And this club is the only place you can come and get a respectable sit down and a decent pint of beer with your own company.<sup>28</sup>

In 1973, the House of Lords ruled in *Charter v. Race Relations Board* that the East Ham South Conservative Club was exempt from Britain's anti-discrimination laws and free to maintain a 'colour bar', after refusing membership to Amarjit Singh Shah because of his race. This East Ham club was a member of the Association of Conservative Clubs, an association founded in 1894 and built on a long history of grassroots working-class conservatism.<sup>29</sup> According to John Lyttle, the lead 'conciliation officer' for Shah's case at the Race Relations Board, the club was 'to all intents and purposes a Working Men's Club' 'whether the people concerned like it or not'.<sup>30</sup> The club successfully argued in the High Court that, as a private members' club, it wasn't providing services to 'a section of the public' and therefore wasn't falling foul of the 1965 Race Relations Act—its selection process was driven by personal networks and friendship. As one legal analyst noted dryly, the Lords had made clear that this legislation was not intended to penetrate 'the hallowed sanctuary of the Englishman's club'.<sup>31</sup> The following year, the Law Lords ruled in another test case put forward by the Race Relations Board, ruling again that a 'colour bar' was legal; this time, like Ivor Brown, Tony Sherrington had been barred from the Preston Dockers' Labour Club even though he was an 'associate' of the CIU. In *Dockers' Labour Club v. Race Relations Board*, the Lords again emphasized the sanctity of the club as part of the working man's 'private sphere'. Lord Diplock reduced whites-only policy to a question of social preferences: 'differentiation in treatment or individuals is unavoidable' he wrote. 'No one has room to invite everyone to dinner. The law cannot dictate one's choice of friends.'<sup>32</sup>

The local county courts had originally upheld the clubs' right to maintain a whites-only policy, ruling that clubs remained outside the remit of the Race Relations Act.<sup>33</sup> But the Court of Appeals, which was later overruled by the House of Lords' decision, sided with Shah in the case against the East Ham South Conservative Club, ruling that Conservative Party

<sup>28</sup> BBC Sound Archives, London, Radio 4 Special Report, 5 May 1968.

<sup>29</sup> Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party: The Conservative Party in Britain, 1918-1945* (Oxford, 2013), 160.

<sup>30</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/372. Memorandum from John Lyttle to Sir Geoffrey Wilson, January 1972.

<sup>31</sup> R.C. McCallum and F.A. Trindade, 'Dockers' Labour Club and Institute Limited v Race Relations Board: Case Notes', *Melbourne University Law Review*, 10 (June 1976), 442–45, 442.

<sup>32</sup> Lord Diplock as quoted in John Griffith, 'Judges, Race and the Law', *New Statesman*, 22 November 1974, 734.

<sup>33</sup> Rupert Jackson, 'Can Clubs Discriminate?' *The Modern Law Review* 36 (Sept. 1973), 529–32, 529.



membership was not a personal attribute, not a private matter of individual personalities, but was an ideological orientation of a certain section of the public.<sup>34</sup> This, they argued, was essential to the functioning of democracy. On the Preston case, the judges in the Court of Appeals—including Lord Justice Scarman—insisted that *numbers* mattered: four thousand workingmen’s clubs across Britain were affiliated to the CIU.<sup>35</sup> Three and a half million CIU members could take ‘associated membership’ and be entitled to use the facilities of all those affiliated clubs. ‘He may be a lorry driver breaking his journey for the night, or a builder’s labourer engaged on a nearby site’, Lord Denning wrote in his judgment in the Court of Appeal. ‘But no matter who he is, he can go to the club and claim to be admitted. It seems to me that that group of a million associates is “a section of the public”’.<sup>36</sup> It should be noted here that, with rising memberships, working men’s clubs were becoming more open and more like venues in the 1970s. Contestation around the control of racism in clubs nominally revolved around what constituted ‘the public’—or differing interpretations of the words of the 1965 Race Relations Act which made it illegal to discriminate in the provision of goods and services ‘to the public or a section of the public’. But the back and forth of Appeals and Lords rulings also reveals uncertainty around the reach of the state into white social spaces—or the sanctity of those spaces weighed against the potential public order threat of legally sanctioned white segregation.

The clubs themselves spoke of the importance of freedom of association and autonomy. The extension of the law into club life would fail for the same reason that the 1971 Industrial Relations Act failed: it did not reflect the ‘will of the people’. ‘No man should have to be told who to have as his friends in his club. Friendship cannot be forced on anybody’, noted a CIU official representing over two hundred working men’s clubs in South Yorkshire.<sup>37</sup> In the Preston case, the freedom to maintain their own club rules—and the drafting, amending, and voting of rules into being—were held up as an example of healthy civic association and self-government.<sup>38</sup> According to the CIU, clubs offered ‘training in the principles of social life’ and were ‘doing something for this country that no other organization does as well, that is to make people into the finest citizens any country can hope to have’.<sup>39</sup> The history of the working men’s club

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, ‘Can Clubs Discriminate?’.

<sup>35</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Appeal by defendants by judgment of His Honour Judge Sir William Morris on 4th May 1972 at Manchester County Court, The Race Relations Board and The Dockers’ Labour Club and Institute Limited, 24 October 1973, 6.

<sup>36</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360.

<sup>37</sup> A. J. McLroy, ‘Integration Law Angers White Social Club’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 September 1975, 1.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of the politics of associational culture, see Helen McCarthy and Pat Thane, ‘The Politics of Association in Industrial Society’, *Twentieth Century British History* 22 (June 2011), 217–29 and Helen McCarthy, ‘Parties, Voluntary Associations, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Britain’, *Historical Journal*, 50 (Dec. 2007), 891–912.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Movement’s Image must be Improved’, *Club and Institute Journal* (May 1974), 1

movement reaches back to the last decades of the nineteenth century; this was an institution of the 'respectable' working classes which helped to usher in the incorporation of the labour movement into the national body politic. 'To allow people on sufferance is not the function of a club committee', offered the CIU President, adding that all clubs must retain this 'administration' of the club, 'because by it we are keeping up our standards in the social life of Britain'.<sup>40</sup> Here, the sovereignty of the club—and the club's ability to police the boundary of respectability and its residuum—was a kind of political education. Racism and the defence of whiteness were framed around the self-governing autonomy of respectable labouring cultures—again, that 'hallowed sanctuary of the Englishman's club'.<sup>41</sup>

Individual complaints to the Race Relations Board, about clubs or otherwise, very rarely found their way to the courts. Instead, the Board's focus was on a process of 'conciliation' between the complainant and the respondent. If the Board found that a respondent had indeed broken the law, they were usually just advised on the law and required to make an apology and a promise not to break the law again. A case only went to court when the respondent refused to cooperate with this process and the Board believed they had irrefutable evidence of an act of intentional discrimination. Most respondents would respond offended by the implication that they were a 'racialist', with many expressing feelings of victimization from an overbearing state. As the feminist legal theorist Nicola Lacey noted in 1992, the essential problem with both race and sex discrimination law at this time was that the individual complainant had to convince a board or tribunal that what had happened to them was 'abnormal' in a society ordered by these logics.<sup>42</sup> Despite its failings, the paper trail of the Race Relations Board—the thousands of complaints received, its investigations and even the weak efforts at redress—captures revealing snapshots of highly mediated encounters across the boundaries of class, gender, and race, between individuals, institutions, and agents of the bureaucratic state. In total, just a handful of cases found their way to the county courts in the decade that this conciliation procedure was in operation between 1966 and 1977. With financial and legal support from the Association of Conservative Clubs and national CIU, respectively, East Ham South Conservative Club and the Preston Dockers' Labour Club spent years in the courts defending their right to maintain whites-only policies.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>40</sup> President A. Bates full speech is published in 'Annual Meeting: Concern Expressed about Proposed Legislation', *Club and Institute Journal* (May 1976), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Paul Harrison, 'Prejudice and Preston: Society at Work', *New Society* (24 Oct 1974), 212.

<sup>42</sup> Nicola Lacey, 'From Individual to Group?' in Bob Hepple and Erika M. Sryszczak (eds.), *Discrimination: The Limits of the Law* (London, 1992), 99–124, 105.

<sup>43</sup> As the secretary of the East Ham club put it, they were defending a 'point of principle that a Private Members Club is a private organisation of private people'. TNA: PRO, CK 2/372, A. Barnett to Race Relations Board, 22 July 1970.

In the minds of race relations professionals, clubs were essential locales of working-class communities' integration. The 1973 presentation of Ivor Brown's story in the Race Relations Board *Bulletin* followed certain tropes, certain recurring themes, in both how the experience of racism is described among race relations professionals and what overcoming racism might look like. The experience of racism is presented fundamentally as an emotional, individualized experience—detached from the racial logics of the state or immigration regime. 'I felt so humiliated I wished the floor would open up and swallow me',<sup>44</sup> the article quotes Brown. The members of the Hyde Park snooker team were meanwhile 'apologetic and embarrassed'<sup>45</sup> about their club's policies. The *Bulletin* is careful to emphasize Brown's mining credentials and his years in the UK. Brown is described as apolitical, unassuming, and 'convivial': he 'played down the situation' and didn't like 'trying to make people integrate by law'.<sup>46</sup> Hyde Park Social Club is presented by the *Bulletin* as an atavistic outlier—the only one of eighteen CIU-affiliated clubs in Doncaster with a 'colour bar'. Bentley Club appears, in contrast, as the future of Britain's working men's clubs: around Doncaster, there had 'flourished...happily integrated clubs with large coloured memberships'.<sup>47</sup> In this telling, racism isn't overcome by radical politics or by any explicit articulation of anti-racism; instead, Brown's integration is assured by beer and snooker, sociability within the bounds of the same gender and class. This failed, of course, to account for the intimate masculine hierarchies at work *within* working-class communities and the inevitability of Black male authority over white men in a plural society (as shop stewards, as managers, as fathers-in-law—what Enoch Powell construed infamously as the 'whip-hand'). While the Race Relations Board had been 'kicked out of the contest' by the House of Lords, Bentley club members believed that the CIU would institute change without state intervention: 'all it needs is a campaign around the branches'.<sup>48</sup> The photograph of coal miners enjoying a game of snooker—the survival of working-class male sociability free of the politics of whiteness—captured a British 'race relations' dream (see [Figure 1](#)).

Similarly, when debating the extension of the law in 1976, Labour MP Bruce Douglas-Mann (Kensington North) insisted on the power of male sociability: the 'black menace that no one knew' could be transformed into 'Charlie, who lived upstairs, or Joe, whom one met at the bus stop, or John, with whom one drank in the pub'. The personal was political, for liberal-leaning politicians like Douglas-Mann, in that it promised to

<sup>44</sup> 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

<sup>45</sup> 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

<sup>46</sup> 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

<sup>47</sup> 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

<sup>48</sup> 'Clubs and Discrimination', 4.

depoliticize race: 'As soon as those people come into the clubs, it will evaporate and we shall not have the problem.'<sup>49</sup> But there was conflict within the Labour Party over whether to support the extension of race relations legislation—with some not wanting to be seen as 'illiberal' but also under pressure by their constituencies over the extension of the law into club life. As the Labour MP Ted Leadbitter (Hartlepool) noted: 'This forced-feeding of the British public invites stresses and strains in human relationships which is counter-productive to the efforts of all those who believe assimilation and the common-sense of the people within the present law adequate.'<sup>50</sup> The law, according to Leadbitter, was counterproductive to 'racial harmony' in its paternalism, in its failure to trust the 'common sense' of the people. It was in this sense that the defence of whites-only policies contributed to a language of conservative populism among its defendants. While describing racism itself as 'despicable', a *Telegraph* editorial noted: 'This emotive subject brings out the worst not only in some Preston dockers but in self-righteous metropolitan liberals who, by their efforts to "change the hearts and minds" of less-progressive folk, do so much to make matters worse.' Clubs, it concluded, 'must be free to control membership unless the entire concept of freedom of association be undermined.'<sup>51</sup>

Amarjit Singh Shah—the complainant against the East Ham South Conservative Club—was born in India and came to Britain in March 1962 when he was just twenty years old, three months before the enforcement of the 1962 Commonwealth Immigrants Act.<sup>52</sup> East Ham sits along the Thames estuary, next to West Ham, Barking, and Dagenham, at the outer reaches of London's East End. Much of the political story of England's 'white working class'—with its slum clearance, industrial decline, and (most of all) migration—was discovered here.<sup>53</sup> The economy in the Lea Valley was dominated by large and small factories that processed raw materials from around the world, like rubber, timber, and tobacco. While there had been a long-established settlement of 'lascars' around the London docks, post-war East Ham specifically attracted Southern Indian (Tamil and Malayali) and Punjabi settlers looking for semi-skilled factory work in the local area. Between 1966 and 1976, 150,000 jobs were lost in the districts around East London, or around 20 per cent of all jobs, due to

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Douglas-Mann, Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 918, 27 October 1976, 585. Bruce Douglas-Mann and Roy Jenkins both represented the liberal wing of the Labour party and would go on to join the Social Democratic Party (UK) in the early 1980s.

<sup>50</sup> Terence Shaw, 'Labour in Race Bill Dilemma', *Daily Telegraph*, 13 Sept. 1975, 1.

<sup>51</sup> 'Grubby but Rightly Legal', *Daily Telegraph*, 17 Oct. 1974, 18.

<sup>52</sup> TNA:PRO, CK 2/372, Amarjit Singh Shah, Complaint of Unlawful Discrimination, 5 November 1969.

<sup>53</sup> Finn Gleeson, 'Memory, Community and the End of Empire in the Isle of Dogs', *Historical Research* 95 (November 2022), 538–55.

the closing of London dockyards with containerization.<sup>54</sup> One of the largest ports in the world, once the pipeline of the British Empire's goods, was going derelict. Factories soon followed. East Ham remained a solidly Labour constituency throughout these years. Yet, in 1974, 5,000 residents of East Ham's borough of Newham voted for the National Front, the highest of any borough in the country.

In 1969, the year Shah brought his case to the Race Relations Board, he worked for the local post office. His white friend and club member, Charles Morley, described him to the board as an 'Indian Civil Servant', conferring both white-collar status and also a kind of colonial-era respectability.<sup>55</sup> But more importantly, Shah had been an active member of the local Conservative Association since 1966 and had volunteered and used his car for the party during the 1966 General Election.<sup>56</sup> The Association of Conservative Clubs had over 1500 clubs across England, Scotland, and Wales by the 1930s. According to historian Stuart Ball, the provision within these clubs was 'almost entirely social, with beer and billiards their main attractions', yet they also regularly provided a space for Conservative party organizing and for local Conservative councillors to meet the public.<sup>57</sup> They were, in essence, a space for mass democracy. Shah explained to the board that he simply wanted to become a member of the club because the Conservative Association regularly met on the club premises and, as a non-member, he wasn't allowed to purchase anything; 'as a [matter of] self respect I could not accept drinks from others every time' while 'not buying in return'.<sup>58</sup> While his fellow Conservative Association colleagues were in unanimous support of his membership to the club, the chairman of the club told the club's committee that they had 'a duty to the members of the Club and must not be ruled by their personal convictions' (recognition here of Lawrence's popular liberalism—and its limits). Shah was the first person to apply for membership who wasn't white; the chairman lamented that he always knew that 'this would happen one day'. If they granted Shah membership, another committee member added, '70% of the club would leave'. Shah's membership was voted down 5 to 6.<sup>59</sup> A local

<sup>54</sup> The shallow waters of the Thames at London could not accommodate the new vessels required for the shipping containers introduced from 1966 onwards. By 1970, the East India, St Katherine's and Surrey Docks were already closed. Zouheir El-Sahli and Richard Upward, 'Off the Waterfront: The Long-run Impact of Technological Change on Dockworkers', *BJIR: An International Journal of Employment Relations*, 55 (June 2017), 225–27, 226. On containerization, see also Laleh Khalili, *Sinews of War and Trade: Shipping and Capitalism in the Arabian Peninsula* (London, 2021).

<sup>55</sup> TNA:PRO, CK 2/372, Statement of Charles Morley, 4 December 1969.

<sup>56</sup> TNA:PRO, CK 2/372.

<sup>57</sup> Stuart Ball, *Portrait of a Party*, 160.

<sup>58</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/372, Amarjit Singh Shah, Complaint of Unlawful Discrimination, 5 November 1969.

<sup>59</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/372, Statement of Charles Morley, 18 December 1969.

Conservative councillor wrote to Ted Heath noting that this was not the modern conservatism that he or Heath represented.

While Shah's case was the first to go to the High Court, it was the Preston case that was considered more significant, as it was thought to more closely embody 'the social face of trade unionism'.<sup>60</sup> Tony Sherrington—the complainant of the Preston Dockers' Labour Club case—was born in Preston in 1944, the son of a Black American G.I. and a white English woman.<sup>61</sup> He had lived in Preston all his life and was a member of Preston's Meadow Street Labour Club and, through that membership, a paid-up associate of the CIU. He arrived at the Dockers' Labour Club with his wife and another couple; they had all been invited to the club for bingo night and a concert by Nick, whose father was the club's steward.<sup>62</sup> Sherrington was one of twelve associates who signed in that evening. He sat down, ordered a round of drinks and bingo cards. The club secretary soon came over to him, before their drinks arrived, and said 'I want you'. He took Sherrington into his office and said, 'I cannot serve you here.' Sherrington asked 'Why not?' and the secretary responded: 'It is a Committee rule. We do not serve coloured people. You must leave. You can get your money back for bingo and go.'<sup>63</sup> 'All six of us, including Nick and his wife, then left the club and went to a local public house', Sherrington recounted.<sup>64</sup> While East Ham's informal 'colour bar' hadn't been tested until Amarjit Singh Shah, at Preston's Dockers' Labour Club it was written into the club rules in 1952 (and re-affirmed at every annual club meeting since then).

Like the East Ham club, the Preston club had a political affiliation. It had been founded at the turn of the century in a small rented room,

<sup>60</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Letter to Ron Keating, 16 November 1973.

<sup>61</sup> Thousands of American GIs were stationed in Preston during the Second World War. Three miles south-east of Preston, a village called Bamber Bridge saw a major violent confrontation between Black American GIs and white American military police in 1943. While strategically avoiding the use of Jim Crow laws, disciplinary measures were regularly used by the British state to control white women's sexual encounters and relationships with Black GIs. As David Reynolds recounts, in January 1944 in Leicester, 'two factory workers from Preston, aged twenty and twenty-two, were found sleeping in a hut where black GIs were stationed. They were prosecuted under the Defence Regulations for trespass on a military camp and given three months hard labour.' See David Reynolds, *Rich Relations: The American Occupation of Britain, 1942-1945* (London, 1995), 276, 229. One of those young women who was given three months hard labour *could* have been the mother of Tony Sherrington, who was born later that year.

<sup>62</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Tony Sherrington, Statement of Complainant or Witness, 14 September 1970.

<sup>63</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Appeal by differences from judgment of His Honour Judge Sir William Morris on 4th May 1972 at Manchester County Court, The Race Relations Board and The Dockers' Labour Club and Institute Limited, 24 October 1973, 3-4

<sup>64</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Tony Sherrington, Statement of Complainant or Witness, 14 September 1970.

serving exclusively dockers and their wives. As the Preston dock came to employ fewer and fewer men, potential membership was opened up to union members who voted Labour. In 1968, the Preston Dockers' Labour Club moved to new premises. But the culture of the docks remained. Insecurity and toil were endemic to docker life and some members of the club lived with long-term unemployment.<sup>65</sup> The Government's 1967 plans to decasualize and modernize the organization of dock labour came as containerization was, effectively, obliterating traditional docker communities: Preston's dock became one of the most highly mechanized of all British ports and, by the mid-1970s, employed only about 200 men.<sup>66</sup> Alongside mechanization at the dock, the town's major industry, textile manufacturing, was also in a state of transition and decline—with French, Swiss, German, Japanese, Indian, and Chinese textile industries taking over markets once dominated by the Lancashire mills.<sup>67</sup> In an effort to increase efficiency, 24-hour shift work was introduced in most Lancashire mills by the early 1960s. Pakistani, Gujarati Indian, Jamaican, and Hong Kong Chinese migrants moved to Preston in the 1950s and 1960s, with many male migrants finding jobs working the new, less desirable, less family-friendly night shift. It was in Preston in 1965, too, that—as one Labour activist put it—a 'terrifying new development' had emerged for the British labour movement: a major strike led by Black and Asian workers in Preston's Courtaulds rayon factory, unsupported by white workers, became known at the time as Britain's first 'migrant strike', raising the spectre, it was feared, of 'trade unions formed on a purely racial basis'.<sup>68</sup>

There were about one hundred and fifty people in the club for bingo the night in 1970 when Sherrington was asked to leave. Roy Martin, the Manchester-based conciliation officer on the case, collected witness testimonies attempting to show that the event was open to the public and that the club had a history of barring people of colour from public events. He found that (white) women entered the club freely for bingo nights, concerts, and drinks without signing in; many were the wives of club members but others were just 'regular bingo players'.<sup>69</sup> Tellingly, in the legal debates that followed, this free movement of women was *not* taken up as signalling service

<sup>65</sup> See Preston Dock Community History Group, *Images of a Port: Life and Times on Preston Dock* (Preston, 1987). Sherrington's occupation is left blank on his complainant form; it is likely that he was unemployed at the time of the complaint.

<sup>66</sup> Jim Phillips, 'Decasualisation and Disruption: Industrial Relations in the Docks 1945-79' in Chris Wrigley (ed.), *A History of British Industrial Relations 1939-79: Industrial Relations in a Declining Economy* (Cheltenham, 1996), 165–85.

<sup>67</sup> Virinder S. Kalra, *From Textile Mills to Taxi Ranks: Experiences of Migration, Labour and Social Change* (London, 2000), 81.

<sup>68</sup> Ray Challinor quoted in J. Hepworth, 'Britain's First Migrant Strike: Labour Militancy and Racial Politics at Courtaulds, Preston, 1965', *North West History Journal*, 45 (2020-21), 15–20, 19.

<sup>69</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, Carol Moulding, Statement of Complainant or Witness, 17 December 1970.

to 'a section of the public'. Following their solicitor's advice, the club committee did not respond to Martin. The club's Preston-based solicitor also failed to meet with Martin, explaining by way of an apology seven months later: 'it had been indicated that Mr. Martin was coming from London and was a coloured gentlemen and it was believed that he was something to do with an action group.'<sup>70</sup> One witness in the case was a seventy-five-year old honorary 'life member' of the Dockers' Labour Club by the name of George Wignall, an ex-railway employee and an ex-Labour councillor of Preston Town Council. He confirmed that the club had maintained a 'colour bar' for years. A voice of dissent, he also told Martin that he had been involved in a similar incident with his friend Pritam Singh at the club, in a story which echoes Shah's. The Ashton Ward Labour Party met alternating months at the Dockers' Labour Club and another club in the area. Pritam Singh was a member of his Ward Committee and attended meetings at both clubs, until the secretary of the Dockers' Labour Club discovered Singh was attending the meetings and told him, as Wignall remembered, 'to keep out as they did not allow coloureds into the Club.'<sup>71</sup> No complaint was made. But, a few months after Sherrington's complaint had been filed, a storm erupted at a meeting of Preston's Trades and Labour Council.<sup>72</sup> Two delegates—just two—called for the council's 'total break' with the Dockers' Labour Club. At the meeting Michael Robinson, former chairman of the Preston Young Socialists, insisted: 'By not saying "no" now this trades council will be associating itself with the actions of the dockers' club. It is no good us burying our head in the sand. . . . It is no good us criticizing a Tory government for selling arms to South Africa if we can allow a club in Preston to practise racial discrimination.'<sup>73</sup> Harry Jackson, the secretary of the trades council, called for 'calm and a reasoned attitude'. The Race Relations Board had asked them to take no public action so that the Board might reach 'conciliation without recourse to legal action'. 'Our policy is one of non-interference with the domestic affairs of our affiliated bodies.'<sup>74</sup> The Preston Trades and Labour Council delegates voted by a three-to-one margin to maintain its affiliation with a whites-only club. In 1971, this was one of the faces of British trade unionism.

### Private Life and the Liberal State

Debates about the control of whites-only policies in the working men's club movement reflected uncertainty about the boundaries of the state in

<sup>70</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, R. Townson Ellis, Letter to Roy Martin, 28 April 1971.

<sup>71</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, George Wignall, Statement of Complainant or Witness, reported by Roy Martin, 26 August 1970.

<sup>72</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, 'Race Board Tackles Club Row', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 8 January 1971.

<sup>73</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, 'Race Board Tackles Club Row'.

<sup>74</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/360, 'Race Board Tackles Club Row'.



a liberal democracy. When Lord Simon outlined his logic for protecting the ‘colour bar’ at East Ham South Conservative Club, he waxed poetic on the realm of personal expression seemingly beyond the reach of the state and free from oppression:

We all have, we hope, a spark of unique personality. But every one of us plays a number of roles in life. We are children, husbands or wives, mothers or fathers, members of some association, passengers in a bus, cinema-goers, workers with varying status in industry or commerce or profession, adherents of a religious denomination, Parliamentary or local government electors, nationals of a state, together with countless other personae in the course of a lifetime – many in the course of a day – some, indeed, simultaneously. Certain of these roles in the public domain; others in the private or domestic. When the draftsmen used the words ‘provision to the public or a section of the public’, he was contemplating, I think, provision to persons aggregated in one or other of their public roles.<sup>75</sup>

In Simon’s view, to control racism in the domestic realm, broadly defined, was a problematic control of spontaneity and self-expression, the state going too far in the control of personal autonomy. This rested on a particular notion of the club as an extension of private life. Simon insisted that the Race Relations Acts relied on a divide in social life between the ‘public’ sphere and a ‘private or domestic’ sphere by pointing out that the employment provision of the 1968 Act did not extend to employment in a ‘private household’.<sup>76</sup> Homeowners who rented out rooms to lodgers—common in the UK at this time—were also exempt. It remained legal to discriminate against window cleaners, electrical contractors, and repairmen because they entered the home. This was later changed to include only forms of employment that had a level of permanency in the relationship between the person and the household, such as a cook, maid, or *au pair*.<sup>77</sup> Small employers, with fewer than ten employees, were even exempted from the employment provision for the first two years of the 1968 Act. The Conservative Opposition, supporting the ‘intimate relationship’ thesis, argued that this exemption should be a permanent feature of all anti-discrimination law.<sup>78</sup> The Street Report on Anti-Discrimination Legislation suggested that ‘some relationships may well be so personal and intimate that legal intervention is either likely to be ineffective or is politically or socially unacceptable’.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Lord Simon as cited in John Gardner, ‘Private Activities and Personal Autonomy: At the Margins of Anti-discrimination Law’, in Hepple and Szyszczak (eds.), *Discrimination*, 148–71, 151.

<sup>76</sup> Gardner, 155

<sup>77</sup> Bob Hepple, *Race, Jobs and the Law in Britain* (London, 1970), 123

<sup>78</sup> Parliamentary Debates (Commons), 768, 9 July 1968, 378–84.

<sup>79</sup> Harry Street, *Anti-Discrimination Legislation: The Street Report* (London, 1967) as cited in Hepple, 123.

British anti-discrimination legislation, as legal theorist John Gardner explains, was active in ‘transforming the market into a public sphere fit for proactive legal reorganisation’ but nevertheless came to a halt at ‘the second privacy barrier, accepting as unimpeachable whatever has the hallmarks of a genuine personal relationship’.<sup>80</sup> The majority of the Conservative amendments to the 1976 Race Relations Bill, which was to bring clubs within the remit of the law, sought to expand the sphere of ‘intimacy’ and thereby curtail the purview of the (civilizing) state. For some citizens and residents of England, the state did of course regularly encroach on ‘genuine personal relationships’—most obviously within the long-established fields of family welfare and public health and, as Radhika Natarajan explores in this issue, in the governance of family reunification policies among migrants.<sup>81</sup> The claim of ‘privacy’ was, for working-class men, a defence of limited privileges. The club existed, traditionally, beyond the prying eyes of the state: illegal gambling remained a common club pastime throughout the post-war period.<sup>82</sup> ‘When a policeman appears on the steps of the [elite] Reform Club it is hardly of any consequence’, wrote Brian Jackson in his 1968 account of working-class culture in Huddersfield, ‘when he appears outside a Huddersfield working men’s club the air is tense with protective hostility.’<sup>83</sup> The policeman’s uniform, to middle-class eyes, was the mark of a servant, like a bus conductor, but to the working classes, the uniform announces ‘mastery and threat’.<sup>84</sup> The police did not have a legal right to enter the private premises of the club without cause: a condition widely considered under threat by the Race Relations Act.

The Lords’ rulings came after years of white backlash against equalities legislation, which framed British anti-discrimination law as destructive to British liberalism, as an affront to the freedom of the individual. The immediate catalyst for Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech had been the imminent passing of the 1968 Race Relations Act. There, Powell presented equalities legislation as an expression of the overreach of the social democratic state—the British state policing the heart and soul of individuals and the shared cultural norms of civil society as a whole.<sup>85</sup> White Britons

<sup>80</sup> Gardner, 150

<sup>81</sup> As James Greenhalgh shows in his close analysis of contestation surrounding the threshold of the state during World War Two blackouts, there remained long-standing resistance to state intrusions into working-class homes. In the post-war years, the social democratic project built itself around the promise of a universal domestic order and the sanctity of family-centred private life, and yet spaces of domesticity and sociability continued to be cast by post-war urban planners as ripe for state intervention. James Greenhalgh, ‘The Threshold of the State’, *Twentieth Century British History* 28 (July 2017), 186–208. See also Selina Todd, ‘Family Welfare and Social Work in Post-war England, c. 1948–1970’, *English Historical Review*, 129 (April 2014), 362–87.

<sup>82</sup> Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England 1918–1951* (Oxford, 1998), 184.

<sup>83</sup> Brian Jackson, *Working Class Community: Some General Notions Raised by a Series of Studies in Northern England* (New York, 1968), 124.

<sup>84</sup> Jackson, *Working Class Community*.

<sup>85</sup> Camilla Schofield, *Enoch Powell and the Making of Postcolonial Britain* (Cambridge, 2013).

were, he argued, afraid to say what they believed to be true about immigration, afraid that they would be reported to the Race Relations Board; they were, in today's parlance, *victims* of a new political correctness. This was described repeatedly in the media as 'discrimination in reverse'.<sup>86</sup> When the North Wolverhampton Working Men's Club confirmed its whites-only policy the day after Powell's Rivers of Blood speech, with a unanimous vote of 700 members, the members gave the decision a standing ovation.<sup>87</sup> As an editorial in the *Times* noted in 1968: 'The fear of the white community [is] that there will be too much interference by authority into their ordinary way of life. . . .'<sup>88</sup> Lord Milverton similarly insisted in the House of Lords in 1970 that 'the process of trying to change psychological prejudice by Act of Parliament is. . . a violation of the liberty of the individual.'<sup>89</sup> Satire abounded of the Race Relations Board taking up absurd cases that policed an individual's common sense.<sup>90</sup>

In defence of the privacy of the club, working men's clubs and their supporters relied on a masculinist vision of the liberal tradition of the 'Free-born Englishman' in which the liberty-loving Englishman was 'master' of his household: 'the threshold of which defines his power in the "private" sphere.'<sup>91</sup> Yet this was a moment, too, when the illiberalism and violence of the liberal gender order—and faith in unrestrained freedom of the father in the private sphere—was itself unravelling.<sup>92</sup> Still, Mohan Ambikaipaker's notion of 'inter-white solidarity' across class can be found in the political support for the clubs among Conservative MPs, rooted in this masculinist ideal of English freedom.<sup>93</sup> 'It has been a long time since an Englishman's home was his castle', lamented Conservative MP Walter Clegg (North Fylde): 'It is now at the mercy of all sorts of people, such as taxmen, VAT men and gas and electricity inspectors.' With the extension of the Race Relations Act, he noted, 'Here we have another crumbling of the castle battlements'.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>86</sup> H.B. Boyle, 'New discrimination bill "could favour minorities"', *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Sept. 1975, 7.

<sup>87</sup> 'Club Reaffirms Colour Bar', *The Times*, 22 April 1968.

<sup>88</sup> As quoted in Dilip Hiro, *Black British, White British* (London, 1973), 273.

<sup>89</sup> Lord Milverton as quoted in Hepple, 169.

<sup>90</sup> Olivier Esteves, 'The "Scots Porridge Case" of 1969: Bogus Discrimination, the Loony State and the White Backlash Archive', *Patterns of Prejudice*, 55 (2021), 357–74.

<sup>91</sup> Bill Schwarz, "'The people" in history: The Communist Party Historians' Group, 1946–56', in Richard Johnson, Gregor McLennan, Bill Schwarz and David Sutton (eds.), *Making Histories: Studies in History-writing and Politics* (London, 1982), 44–95, 87.

<sup>92</sup> For an important discussion of the persistent silences around child abuse in this period, see Lucy Delap, "'Disgusting Details which are Best Forgotten": Disclosures of Child Sexual Abuse in twentieth-century Britain', *Journal of British Studies*, 57 (2018), 79–107.

<sup>93</sup> Percy Grieve, Conservative MP for Solihull, insisted that 'if the law intrudes upon deliberations of those who are deciding who are welcome in a club and who are not, it is cutting at the root and basis of the whole system of clubs. . . That is true not only of the Carlton Club and White's [Club] but of the Preston Working Men's Club'. Percy Grieve, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 918, 27 October 1976, 582.

<sup>94</sup> Walter Clegg, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 918, 27 October 1976, 557.

The female novelist Honor Tracy explicitly drew the connection between white space and male privilege:

It seems to me to be as allowable for a club to bar those of another race as those of the opposite sex. Most of the famous clubs are only for men, and why not? How people can bear to push in where nobody wants them passes my understanding; and by doing so they merely show their unfitness for club life altogether. . . [We may] yet behold the terror squads of Women's Lib thundering at the door of the Athenaeum and the Reform, while the arrogant bullies behind them cower under the billiard table or lock themselves in the cellar. But for the moment at least clubs are one of the last oases of English freedom, where human beings can do as they like without Miss Poke-Nose and Mr Prius Dementat putting their oars in.<sup>95</sup>

For Tracy, rejection at the door of a private club simply signalled the failure to understand one's place in the social order. Back in 1964, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Joseph Simpson—while objecting to police involvement in implementing a new Race Relations Act 'widely resented by large sections of the public'—offered a revealing argument that echoes Tracy. He blamed people of colour for misunderstanding British social norms: 'the ordinary white citizen generally accepts his place in society and makes no attempt to gate crash places where he would not only feel out of place but is clearly unwelcome. Not all immigrants have the ability to do this and for the most part they are hypersensitive over race and colour.'<sup>96</sup> Here, the parallel to class deference is explicit: the 'ordinary white citizen accepts his place' and the Black man must learn to do so, also.

It is worth noting here that, until at least the late 1970s, British equalities legislation was not, first and foremost, about providing individual remedies to people of colour who faced a hostile state and society; it was rather primarily drafted as a public policy statement, a form of social education for white people. Its weak procedures for redress, its focus on 'conciliation', and its careful emotional management of the perpetrators of racist acts make this clear. It was regularly cast by critics as mere window dressing in Government efforts to pass ever more restrictive immigration laws.<sup>97</sup> The framing of race relations legislation was closely bound up,

<sup>95</sup> Honor Tracy, 'Kindly exclude me in', *The Daily Telegraph*, 16 Nov 1974, 12

<sup>96</sup> Sir Joseph Simpson to R.J. Guppy as cited in Simon Peplow, 'The "Linchpin for Success"? The problematic establishment of the 1965 Race Relations Act and its Conciliation Board', *Contemporary British History* 31 (2017), 430–51, 433.

<sup>97</sup> See Gavin Schaffer for a discussion of the historiography of 1965 Race Relations Act and the wide historical acceptance of the 'dual-strategy thesis', which ties the Race Relations Acts to the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968. Gavin Schaffer, 'Legislating against Hatred: Meaning and Motive in Section Six of the Race Relations Act of 1965', *Twentieth Century British History*, 25 (June 2014), 251–75, 255–56.

too, with the idea that *public* expressions of racism would lead to political radicalization, particularly among Black and white men.<sup>98</sup> For these reasons, radicals were consistent in criticizing British equalities law for being paternalistic, top-down, and depoliticizing.

Both Chris Hilliard and Gavin Schaffer have convincingly shown how the 1965 Race Relations Act was structured by the experience of fascism in Germany and Britain in the 1930s and 1940s, with the 1936 Public Order Act serving as foundational to the criminalization of ‘incitement to racial hatred’ in Section Six of the 1965 Act.<sup>99</sup> Importantly, some of those who worked at the forefront of British equalities legislation were Jewish, with personal experiences of racism.<sup>100</sup> Still, as a liberal effort to transform and educate white people, the Race Relations Acts must also be seen as part of a wider set of ‘permissive’ legislation from the late 1950s onwards, concerned for instance with increasing access to no-fault divorce, reforms in censorship law, ending capital punishment, and the partial decriminalization of homosexuality.<sup>101</sup> Roy Jenkins was Home Secretary for much of that first wave of permissive—or as he put it ‘civilizing’—legislation and returned as Home Secretary to spearhead the passing of the 1975 Sex Discrimination and 1976 Race Relations Acts, which can be viewed as extensions of that work.<sup>102</sup> Like urban planning, ‘race relations’ law was active in the liberal post-war effort to mould a new society. The Society of Labour Lawyers, who were instrumental in the development of anti-discrimination law, explained in 1966, ‘The main benefit of such legislation is in its effect on public opinion. Most people are conformists. If discrimination became respectable most would discriminate; if the law removes such respectability, the same people, whatever their private

<sup>98</sup> For an analysis of the emergence of the ‘conciliation’ process in the 1965 Race Relations Act, see Peplow, ‘Linchpin for Success’. See also Marc Matera’s article in this issue on ‘race relations’ as the control of the politicization of race.

<sup>99</sup> See Chris Hilliard, ‘Words that Disturb the State: Hate Speech and the Lessons of Fascism in Britain, 1930s-1960s’, *Journal of Modern History*, 88 (December 2016), 764–96 and Gavin Schaffer, ‘Legislating against Hatred’.

<sup>100</sup> Take, for instance, Geoffrey Bindman, who was legal adviser for the Race Relations Board (1966–1976) and thereafter until 1983 for the Commission for Racial Equality. In his first job as a trainee solicitor in 1956 in a Newcastle solicitors’ firm that served ‘the local big-wigs and the local aristocracy’, a senior partner told Bindman that he could never become a senior partner in the firm because ‘some of his clients would not put their business in the hands of a Jewish firm, or a firm with a Jewish partner’. Author’s interview with Geoffrey Bindman (19 July 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Chris Hilliard, *A Matter of Obscenity: The Politics of Censorship in Modern Britain* (Princeton, NJ, 2021).

<sup>102</sup> Frank Soskice was Home Secretary during the passage of the 1965 Race Relations Act and was reluctant to support Section Six of the Act because of its criminal sanction. The rest of the 1965 legislation was seen as relatively unproblematic for Soskice, partly because it was a manifesto commitment and partly because it was so weak. When Roy Jenkins took over the role of Home Secretary in December 1965, he included a special provision to review the 1965 Act and report on its workings with an eye to extending provision, which resulted in the 1968 Race Relations Act.

prejudices might be, would be encouraged to offer equal opportunities to their public conduct.<sup>103</sup>

In 1967, Mark Bonham-Carter, the first Chairman of the Race Relations Board, argued that the law itself ‘affects peoples’ beliefs as well as their behaviour’.<sup>104</sup> In other words, law by controlling behaviour shaped emotional experiences. ‘The way in which you behave most certainly affects what you believe and what you feel.’<sup>105</sup> Laws and convention produced racist feelings:

‘In some societies racial prejudice is regarded as respectable. It is supported by custom, by convention and by the law of the land. This is so, for example, in South Africa. It was so for many generations in the southern states of the U.S.A. In such societies the law endows the white population with special rights and privileges and, by so doing, it confirms the white population in its belief in its own superiority.’<sup>106</sup>

Though ‘people say that law cannot make you love your neighbour, cannot touch your prejudices or alter your feelings’, the law can quite clearly ‘make you believe your neighbour is inferior and worse still, make him so regard himself’.<sup>107</sup> ‘If law can make you hate your neighbour, so it can do the opposite.’<sup>108</sup>

The irony of these liberal words on the power of law is, of course, its failure to account for the social effects of British immigration law. The racialization of citizenship status in Britain did not just exist at the borders of Britain. The words of an anonymous Black man-on-the-street interviewed in ‘Week in Week Out’ in October 1971 make the everyday impact of racialized citizenship clear. When asked about the workings of the Race Relations Act, he immediately pivoted to the everyday effects and the police enforcement of the Immigration Act:

...under the Immigration Bill, you know, they say that the future immigrants who come will have to have all these restrictions on them. Now, I want to know how whoever is going to deal with the situation of finding out where all these illegal immigrants are, going to determine whether Harry here is an illegal permit carrier ... pass carrier, like the South Africans, or am I supposed to carry it, or the new chaps, so we all look alike, so if the police are going to deal with this, if the

<sup>103</sup> LSE Archive: LSE Library, London, Society of Labour Lawyers, Race Relations 1966-86, SLL/6/74, Third Report of the Race Relations Committee, November 1966, 14.

<sup>104</sup> AIURRRC:CRE: GB3228.14/1/3. Mark Bonham-Carter, ‘Legislation and the Race Relations Board’, *Race Relations: Quarterly Bulletin of the Race Relations Board*, April 1967, 176–79, 179.

<sup>105</sup> AIURRRC:CRE: GB3228.14/1/3.

<sup>106</sup> AIURRRC:CRE: GB3228.14/1/3.

<sup>107</sup> AIURRRC:CRE: GB3228.14/1/3.

<sup>108</sup> AIURRRC:CRE: GB3228.14/1/3.

employment agencies are going to deal with this... we all look like darkies, are going to be Number One suspect. So, in fact, it will be tension created for the whole community, because everyone is afraid.<sup>109</sup>

'Everyone is afraid', whatever their citizenship status. Whilst people of colour faced the reality of precarity and fear of a 'law and order' state, opponents of anti-discrimination legislation continued to present the Race Relations Board as authoritarian, as an affront to their freedoms. Yet the actual procedures and approach of the Board prioritized maintaining the goodwill of the accused—and massaging public opinion.

Whites-only clubs rejected the influence of liberal middle class 'race relations' reformers, but the club movement itself was a product of liberal reform. The working men's club movement reaches back to the temperance movement and industrialist reformers of the 1860s, embodying the liberal ideal of a civilizing institution against the 'intemperance, ignorance, improvidence and religious indifference' of working-class men<sup>110</sup>—its original mission statement, 'Honour all men, love the brotherhood, use hospitality one to another, be not forgetful to entertain strangers and he that need have friends must show himself friendly.'<sup>111</sup> Lord Rothschild, the Prince of Wales, eleven Dukes, and the Earls of Shrewsbury and Lichfield were among those who supported the founding of the CIU in 1862. With its libraries, evening classes, and alcohol-free space, the working men's club became one bid among many, argues historian Brad Beaven, to impose a 'civilised culture' on the industrial working classes in order to 'neuter an indigenous culture that was perceived as degenerate and dangerous' in the context of the social anxieties of the late nineteenth century city and the quest for 'national efficiency' to man an empire.<sup>112</sup> The working men's club, in this original formation, was modelled on the elite men's-only club, which had itself become an institution of empire and central, as Mrinalini Sinha argues, to the making of a 'colonial public sphere'.<sup>113</sup> Twenty years after its founding, CIU members pushed for a democratic election to elect the central council of the CIU. Working class

<sup>109</sup> AIURRRC:CRE, Transcripts of Broadcasts 1971-1976, GB3228.14/1/10, 'Week in Week Out', BBC Wales, 21 Oct 1971 (Television).

<sup>110</sup> McCarthy and Thane, 'Politics of Association in Industrial Society'.

<sup>111</sup> Tremlett, *Clubmen: A History of the Working-men's Club and Institute Union* (London, 1987), 243. On all CIU associate cards in the 1970s—including the one that Sherrington showed to enter the Preston club—a modernized version of the motto read 'Use hospitality one to another. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers. To have friends show yourself friendly. Love the brotherhood.' As quoted in 'Appeal by differences from judgment of His Honour Judge Sir William Morris on 4th May 1972 at Manchester County Court', *The Race Relations Board and The Dockers' Labour Club and Institute Limited* (24 October 1973) in TNA:PRO, CK 2/360.

<sup>112</sup> Brad Beaven, *Leisure, Citizenship and Working-Class Men in Britain* (Manchester, 2005), 28

<sup>113</sup> Mrinalini Sinha, 'Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India', *Journal of British Studies* (2001), 489–521, 490. Sinha quotes Leonard Woolf, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century,

members took the leadership, the dukes and earls left, and alcohol was served. The club emerged as an institution of the working-class cooperative movement. It became 'one of the most peculiarly British institutions to exist', noted Percy Grieve, Conservative MP for Solihull, 'founded upon a community of interest and enlarged friendship'.<sup>114</sup> As historian Robert Snape notes, the working men's club became a prime example of Robert Roberts' claim that working-class people were able to 'transform themselves from the objects of moral reform to its practitioners'.<sup>115</sup> Importantly, the production of a self-governing 'respectable' working class evident in the development of the club movement coincided with emergent ideas of turn-of-the-century Anglo-Saxonism and the belief that 'white, Protestant, English-speaking men naturally *made* modern nations'—and only they could be entrusted to effectively self-govern.<sup>116</sup> This was a man's world. These ideas of white masculine mutuality and civic association were embedded in the very structure of clubs and remained key to how the CIU presented itself. In 1974, amidst controversies surrounding whites-only clubs, a frontpage CIU editorial noted: 'Club Life is virtually unchanged in the fundamentals of good companionship, mutual aid and self-government.' Clubs maintained these fundamentals, but they were no longer a sea of 'flat caps'. They wore 'collars and ties'; they were family men.<sup>117</sup> They were, the CIU insisted, modern. The markers of working-class identification were falling away and the CIU itself reflected a business management culture, yet its roots in working-class respectability remained.

The CIU provided legal counsel for the four-year case of the Preston Dockers' Labour club, and CIU groups lobbied MPs and met with Home Secretary Roy Jenkins to argue against the extension of anti-discrimination

that the English club was 'the centre and symbol of British imperialism. . . with its cult of exclusiveness, superiority and isolation'.

<sup>114</sup> Percy Grieve, *Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, 918, 27 October 1976, 582.

<sup>115</sup> Robert Snape, *Leisure, Voluntary Action and Social Change in Britain, 1880-1939* (London, 2019), 24.

<sup>116</sup> Dan Geary, Camilla Schofield, and Jennifer Sutton, 'Introduction: Toward a Global History of White Nationalism', in Dan Geary, Camilla Schofield, and Jennifer Sutton (eds.), *Global White Nationalism: From Apartheid to Trump* (Manchester, 2019), 1–27, 3. We can see here parallels with post-civil rights white identity formation in the United States. Thomas Sugrue has shown for instance how in post-war Detroit, whites defined homeowners' rights as an extension of their right to freedom of assembly: they had a right to choose their associates and that right would be infringed upon if their neighbourhoods were racially mixed.' Similarly, Michael Maly and Heather Damage have more recently tracked how working-class and lower-middle-class Chicago whites responded to racial change in their neighbourhoods in the 1960s and 1970s with an emphasis on the value of self-government to preserve segregated housing and communities. See Michael Maly and Heather Damage, *Vanishing Eden: White Construction of Memory, Meaning, and Identity in a Racially Changing City* (Philadelphia, PA, 2015), 7.

<sup>117</sup> 'Exhibition Showed Club Movement's Progress', *Club and Institute Journal*, June 1974, 1; and 'Movement's Image must be Improved', *Club and Institute Journal* May 1974, 1.



law into club life.<sup>118</sup> There were pragmatic ulterior motives within the CIU for defending the private nature of clubs in modern times, not least to avoid copyright and licensing fees and police entry. But officials of the CIU also spoke in abstract terms. In the mid-1970s, the extension of Race Relations Law into their clubs was the CIU's top issue at its annual conferences at Blackpool, where over 1,500 men gathered to discuss club policies. In his 1976 presidential address, Mr A. Bates offered this to the CIU membership:

In my view this Bill can never work for the same reasons that the Industrial Relations Act did not work and had to be taken from the Statute Book. It did not work because the TUC and the workers of this country would not accept it, and it needed their co-operation for it to be workable. In my opinion this Bill will be unworkable because it interferes very seriously with the private nature of clubs, and tries to do something that no human being can ever do with any hope of success. A club is not a club because of the size of its structure but because of the atmosphere of friendship and comes from love or esteem between two or more persons - it can never be ordered by law.<sup>119</sup>

This 'atmosphere of love' was historic and was being attacked by the state on multiple fronts:

[O]ver the years we have seen our privacy attacked from all directions. When I first became interested in club life there were about two people who had the right to enter a club. Now there are about 22. This is by Act of Parliament. We have been in existence for about 114 years and have always run our movement in the interests of the country. Why does Parliament want to interfere with our privacy now, when all through our history we have produced in this country some of the finest citizens that any country could produce as a result of the principles they have learned?

'We shall fight on your behalf. . . we shall defend you', he added. Their cause was maintaining a liberal tradition in modern times, defending the privacy of men.<sup>120</sup>

When the High Court ruled in favour of the Preston club's whites-only policy, a woman named Dorothy Kuya wrote a letter to *The Times* editor. While many Black Britons had little faith in the effectiveness of British anti-discrimination law even as it was signed into law in 1968,<sup>121</sup> Kuya

<sup>118</sup> The barrister who defended the Preston Dockers' Labour Club's right to maintain its whites-only policy was John Griffiths, Q.C. Griffiths would go on to serve as the Attorney General of Hong Kong from 1979 to 1983.

<sup>119</sup> 'Annual Meeting: Concern Expressed about Proposed Legislation', *Club and Institute Journal*, May 1976, 1.

<sup>120</sup> 'Annual Meeting: Concern Expressed about Proposed Legislation'.

<sup>121</sup> Dilip Hiro carried out a straw poll of 'Afro-Asian settlers' in London, Luton, Slough, and Gravesend for the *Daily Mirror* in 1968. He found that a 'third of my respondents had either never heard of the Act, or if they had, were not interested one way or the other. Of those

voices feelings of disappointment and anger at its failure to protect her family's life in England in 1974:

I felt a growing sense of outrage. My niece asked me what it meant, I told her as best I could. . .How can I help her to understand the significance of the decision taken. A decision which means that she, the grand-daughter of a black Nigerian (who has lived in England for fifty years) and great-grand-daughter of a white Liverpool docker, can be excluded from at least 4,000 places of leisure just because of her colour. How can our highest legal minds condone such a racist decision as that made by the Preston dockers club. We blacks are not asking to be invited to dinner in white people's homes, nor are we demanding *the right* to marry white sons and daughters. We just want to have a pint, or a night out when we have the money and the time in a place of our choice. . .It is easy to deport those black people who are not citizens. Those like myself and my niece, who were born here know no other country but England. I for one am determined that she will have the right to go where she wishes when she reaches adulthood (emphasis in original).<sup>122</sup>

The High Court ruling had defended, in her eyes, the maintenance of 4,000 white spaces in England. Implicitly, Kuya rejects the contention that clubs were private spaces by contrasting the right to enter clubs—and the right to a 'night out'—with seeking entry into 'white people's homes'. It is worth noting here that Dorothy Kuya is no unknown name in the archive: a lifelong Communist and anti-racist campaigner, she worked in a north London school and in 1971 founded the influential organization Teachers Against Racism.<sup>123</sup> She would go on to serve as the Head of Race Equality for Haringey Council in the mid-1980s and later chair the largest Black-led social enterprise in Europe, Ujima. After moving back to Liverpool where she grew up, she successfully spearheaded a campaign to build Liverpool's International Slavery Museum. In her 1974 letter to *The Times*, Kuya roots her right to enter the working-class social club in deep family connections, appealing to a working-class archetype as 'grand-daughter of a white Liverpool docker'. Kuya and her niece were, she insists, direct inheritors of the labouring tradition at the docks. But,

who knew of the Act, only a quarter felt that it could be enforced in housing; another third had reservations; and the rest (i.e. two-fifths) felt it couldn't be enforced at all. More than half said that the Act would somewhat ease the problem of discrimination in jobs, whereas a third felt that it wouldn't help at all. Most importantly, 85% said that whites would find loopholes.' Dilip Hiro, 'The White Paper and the Indian Community', *Racial Discrimination: A Guide to the Government's White Paper* (London, 1975), 24.

<sup>122</sup> Dorothy Kuya, 'Letter to the Editor: Colour Bar in a Club', *The Times*, 29 October 1974, 17.

<sup>123</sup> See for instance their journal, *Teachers Against Racism (TAR)*, 1:1 (February 1972). Their most famous campaign was directed against teaching with *Little Black Sambo* books in British schools.

even more, she speaks simply of a Black woman's right to a private life—the right to leisure: 'We just want to have a pint... when we have the money and the time in a place of our choice.'

### Intimacy, White Space, and the Post-war Family Man

Working men's clubs were widely reported to be intimate terrain, yet in the 1970s they were also spaces of public entertainment, hosting bingo nights, concerts, and serving as the backbone of Britain's comedy circuit. A fictional working men's club set in the 'North of England' even became the vehicle for a successful primetime ITV television variety show, 'The Wheeltappers and Shunters Social Club' between 1974 and 1977. Still, within any given club, a man might share membership with his father, his uncle, his brother, old schoolmates, his neighbours and workmates and, on certain days or in certain rooms, socialize with his mother, daughter, aunt, and wife. Ross McKibbin's classic work on the cultures of class in modern Britain tells us that the working men's club was, at least in the first half of the twentieth century, the 'organized heart of male sociability' with thousands of clubs across the country (sixty-five in Bolton alone!) and with a huge proportion of all working-class males active members.<sup>124</sup> Historically, clubs filled a social need. The crooners, the burlesque dancers, the bawdy comedians were, as Richard Hoggart tells it, essential forms of escape—escape from female authority in the home but also from the shared, ever-present danger of poverty and deprivation. In his words: 'The clubs... from a basis of relaxation and pleasure serve innumerable human needs in a community under common pressures of accident, age, and that sudden drop into deprivation which the working-class household fears and seldom forgets.'<sup>125</sup> The club, he explains, had 'an important consolatory value in an unequal society'—even as it shored up gender and racial privileges.<sup>126</sup> The pages of the CIU journal in the 1970s are filled with charity initiatives and notices about members-only CIU convalescent homes. One *Guardian* article in 1975 offers up an evocative description of relaxation inside the working men's club:

[The club] on a Sunday night, and every night of the week for that matter, is a mad energetic romp. A hundred-and-one rabid conversations going on at the same time in the same place. Tobacco smoke everywhere. The off-the-cuff comedians who step up to the nearest microphone... The MC in the downstairs lounge who earns his living as a salesman and compères every evening for free. The whole place is swimming in beer.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>124</sup> McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures*, 184.

<sup>125</sup> Hoggart, 'Shared Rituals,' 584.

<sup>126</sup> Hoggart, 'Shared Rituals,' 584.

<sup>127</sup> Graham Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', *Guardian*, 30 August 1975, 9.

As working men's clubs grew in size, became more open and more like venues with big-name acts into the 1970s, they remained a centre of community life: as jobs were lost to closures or streets were lost to slum clearance, clubs often remained as a point of connection.

It should be added here that, while clubs' bawdy comedy routines may have served as an escape from social convention and codes of respectability, they were also often highly sexist and racist, usually against people of South Asian descent.<sup>128</sup> Some clubs barred Black artists, others barred Black members and guests but accepted Black performers onto the club stage. The Equity and Musician's Union blacklisted a number of clubs that barred Black artists from performing, drawing national public attention to whites-only policies both before and after anti-discrimination law extended into club life. There were remnants of older music hall traditions in 1970s clubs. Comedian Oliver Double remembers watching the typical variety show at a Sheffield working men's club, with an audience that ranged from very young children to old-aged pensioners. It began with two music acts: the first a 'middle-aged boy/girl duo' who performed a 'stiff but well-rehearsed dance routine' in a bolero jacket and a low-cut dress, the second 'a bloke with a silver quiff' who was billed as a tenor and 'bellowed out sub-operatic songs in a deep, wobbly voice'.<sup>129</sup> In *The Uses of Literacy*, Hoggart describes in exquisite detail the group feelings elicited by singers in working men's clubs: songs were sung to 'brings tears to the eyes' with phrases stretched like taffy to create a 'ground-swell of emotion' and the 'warm and pally feeling, of a heavy nostalgia'.<sup>130</sup> After the deep, wobbly-voiced tenor, a comedian took to the stage in Sheffield, sang two 'interminable soul ballads' and then began to tell jokes. Double remembers the 'vicious', 'sheer brutality' of the routine: 'There was... the one about the twenty Pakistanis who are tricked into plummeting to their deaths from the top of a burning block of flats, and the one about the chemist who gives the Pakistani cyanide by mistake then runs after him, not to save him, but because he realises he has undercharged him by forty pence. How they roared at that one.'<sup>131</sup>

By the 1970s, the eulogy for the 'Labour Aristocracy' and, even, the 'English working class' had already, in many ways, been written on television, in politics, and in social research. Critically, this was a eulogy, a nostalgia, a cultural preoccupation, focused to a great extent on certain working-class forms of muscular masculinity. The influential 1956 ethnographic

<sup>128</sup> Gavin Schaffer has done the most to unpack the meaning of racist humour in this period. As he argues, humour 'protects and defends' the audience from acknowledging racism through comic disavowal. Meanwhile, the ability to 'take a joke' (against one's identity) becomes itself a test of Britishness. Schaffer, *The Vision of a Nation*, 183.

<sup>129</sup> Oliver Double, *Stand-Up: On Being a Comedian* (London, 1997), 93.

<sup>130</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy* (London, 1957), 162, 165, 155, 156.

<sup>131</sup> Double, *Stand-Up*, 93–94.

study, *Coal is Our Life*, set the tone for a great deal of this. In it, the Yorkshire mining community of 'Ashton' is presented as frozen in time, with a strictly demarcated gender order and the coal miner himself as the ultimate 'proletarian traditionalist'.<sup>132</sup> Nearly twenty years later, we see the same rehashing of these themes in a *Guardian* article on working men's clubs in another Northern town: 'Westerhope Geordie is a man. There's no doubt about that. He has a wife and family, but they are appendages to his fundamental and superior masculinity.' But then added, 'The whole North East thing, however, is out and presumed dead and was last seen hobbling along the Scotswood Road... a half-finished bottle of Newcastle Brown in one hand and a big stick in the other.'<sup>133</sup> It was admitted in that club that 'wife beating happens' and women were 'second class' in the club with no rights or vote, but still the club members insisted that they weren't a traditional working men's club—this was a place for family.<sup>134</sup> The chairman of the club, Jack Horn, explained:

The old idea of working men's clubs is out. We like to think of ourselves as a social club really - I mean, I'm on management staff, Eddie is, most of the committee are (although we're all men who worked our way up from the shop floor). So to me, there's no class distinction. And there's nothing political in the club either... The club is a social club, and it's a wonderful feeling. It's the whole family really. We involve everybody - the old people, the children... And it's a bloody disaster for a man on the estate if he misconducts himself in one way or another... Expulsion from the club is ostracism from a big part of the life on his estate.<sup>135</sup>

Lillian McCallum was a member of that same club and ran the club's brass band for children. When asked whether she'd like a say in how the club was run, she responded, 'Well, let's face it, Women's Lib. We're going to take over the club, so we say. But it's just a joke really. That sort of thing doesn't matter to us a bit... After all, it's a man's "place" isn't it, a club—that's where we allow them to go to let their hair down.'<sup>136</sup>

Richard Hall highlights that after the Second World War, the semi-domestic world of the working men's clubs helped men navigate and

<sup>132</sup> See Jorg Arnold, 'Gladiators for Women'? The British Miners, Muscular Masculinity and the Struggle for Workplace Rights, 1977-1984/85', *Zeithistorische Forschungen*, 18 (2022), 510-34. McKibbin's *Cultures and Classes* in some ways reproduces this vision of the working class, leaning heavily on studies of towns with a single dominant industry and the strict gender divisions that tended to accompany that.

<sup>133</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>134</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>135</sup> Jack Horn, Chairman of the Westerhope Club, 1975, as quoted in Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>136</sup> Lillian McCallum, member of the Westerhope Club, 1975, as quoted in Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9. To approach McCallum's joking reference to 'Women's Lib', see Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Vernacular Discourses of Gender Equality in the Post-War British Working Class', *Past & Present*, 254 (February 2022), 277-313.

adapt to the tensions and ambivalences of modern masculinities at this time, as clubs provided a liminal space that could hold both the martial, homosocial cultures of wartime and the new expectations of the 'family man'.<sup>137</sup> Some rooms were men-only, while in others women (or, more precisely, *wives*) and children were welcome. In a compelling 1968 account of working-class culture in Huddersfield, Brian Jackson offers an understanding of the importance of club life for the competing intimacies of England's modern, labouring masculinities:

Being the kind of men they were, and leading daily their kind of life, the club members are equally aware of two things. On the one hand the necessary privacies and extensions of particularly masculine life that they required from their clubs, and on the other hand their obligations and indeed, yearnings, towards the world of women and children, the world of 'home'. It was this unresolved conflict which kept urging men we spoke to, to compare their club life with 'home'.<sup>138</sup>

In this period, the club could serve, then, as place to experience the intimate joys and challenges of family life: there were, for instance, 300 children's marching bands linked to working men's clubs just in the North East, with regular parades and competitions and 'all regimentation and drums and colourful uniforms and noise'.<sup>139</sup> But the club was also a 'man's place', a place to 'let their hair down', a place for male relationships within a modern masculine culture. This homosociality—this 'riotous, beer-swilling masculinity-plus-family-life of the club'—likely accommodated an array of intimate experiences, from intoxicated emotional release to feelings of communal sentimentality to experiences of subordination and domination.<sup>140</sup> At one extreme, a club guest of the Norfolk Darts and Social Club in Norwich remembers a disturbing moment in 1979 when a young man was invited on stage by two female sex workers and made to visibly ejaculate in front of the club audience. The scene was remembered as one of purposeful, abject sexual humiliation.<sup>141</sup>

Club life surely abounded with the normal tensions and long-standing animosities of any community. But, critically, the ideal of a homely family atmosphere—a place for family men—became a rationalization for racist exclusion: 'We want a nice quiet place in here', the Chairman of the

<sup>137</sup> Richard Hall, 'Being a Man, Being a Member: Masculinity and Community in Britain's Working Men's Clubs, 1945-1960,' *Cultural and Social History*, 14 (2017) 73–88. Amy Milne-Smith has similarly argued that, for elite men in late nineteenth-century London, gentlemen's clubs were essential locales of 'homosocial domesticity', see Amy Milne-Smith, 'A Fight to Domesticity? Making a Home in the Gentlemen's Clubs of London, 1880-1914', *Journal of British Studies*, 45 (October 2006), 796–818, 799.

<sup>138</sup> Jackson, *Working Class Community*, 64–65.

<sup>139</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>140</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>141</sup> Simon Chapman, interview with author, 8 March 2023.

Preston club explained, 'where we can enjoy ourselves and bring our families without being on edge. We don't want it spoiling.'<sup>142</sup> In the club, we see children's 'socialization into whiteness' through the enforcing of a racial border around a family's social networks.<sup>143</sup> The common refrain was that 'rowdy' West Indians or 'un-assimilating' Asians would spoil the family atmosphere. The closed club door was an expression of the sovereignty of their 'home'; the notion that a club's rationale for exclusion of an individual would need to be explained, whatever the reason, under a new Race Relations Act was itself an anathema.

But policing whiteness was a messy business. Family man Quasim Ali was from Pakistan and had lived in Coventry for thirty-three years. He joined his son as a guest of the Caldmere Liberal Working Men's Club in Walsall in July 1970. This was a CIU-affiliated club, one of fifty in Walsall at the time. His son, Joe Ali, was in his twenties and was a club member. Quasim Ali wrote a letter to representatives of the Race Relations Board in Birmingham to complain of his treatment. Joe Ali, whose mother was white English, was—according to his father—'dark featured' with 'white skin'.<sup>144</sup> After interviewing father and son, the Birmingham-based conciliation officer D.A. Calvert noted that it was 'not possible to tell from [the son's] appearance his Asian paternity'.<sup>145</sup> Joe Ali was one of six children 'all of whom are white'.<sup>146</sup> Calvert described the father as 'formerly a regular in the Indian Army' and 'very well dressed and of impressive appearance'.<sup>147</sup> His gender and class respectability were, in the eyes of the Board, assured. On the day in question, Quasim Ali entered the club with no problem and was standing at the bar with his son, his son-in-law Brian Wesson and their friend Peter Haddock, all with fresh pints of 'mild' in their hands (a picture-perfect vision of intergenerational English working-class homosociality), when he was told: 'This is a private club, will you leave?' Quasim Ali recounted that he turned to his son and said that we do not want any trouble: 'I left and waited outside'.<sup>148</sup>

<sup>142</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9. This echoed George Hall at the North Wolverhampton Working Men's club, with his belief that their whites-only club was 'the only place you can come and get a respectable sit down...with your own company.' BBC Sound Archives, Radio 4 Special Report, 5 May 1968.

<sup>143</sup> Ramos-Zayas, 'Ordinary Whiteness', 462. For a discussion of the emotional commitments of working men to the protection of the family, and its racialization, see also Michèle Lamont, *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class and Immigration* (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

<sup>144</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/2079 Caldmere Liberal Working Men's Club, Quasim Ali, Letter to the Race Relations Board, 20 July 1970.

<sup>145</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/2079, D.A. Calvert to Phil Philpots, 2 August 1970. The Board's conciliation officers' reports are often rich with details about social class and status.

<sup>146</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/2079, Race Relations Board: Report by Conciliation Office, 9 December 1970.

<sup>147</sup> TNA: PRO, CK 2/2079, Race Relations Board.

<sup>148</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2/2079, Quasim Ali, Statement by Complainant or Witness, 5 August 1970. Though the Race Relations Board was unable to prove, in the end, that the club

The club's solicitor later offered this explanation for Ali's treatment: 'Mr. Ali's father was requested to leave simply because it was known that there were no existing coloured members and consequently the gentleman in question was regarded as a stranger.'<sup>149</sup> A month after Ali was turned away, Phil Philpott, another of the Board's conciliation officers, attended a specially called meeting of the Caldmore Liberal Working Men's Club with its General Secretary A. Barton, the President H. Anderson, and eleven committee members. In the committee room meeting, a notice on the wall read 'Powell for Premier'. During the meeting, it was 'quickly made plain that a colour bar existed at the club and that coloured people were only allowed in on game nights. . . [and] not permitted to go to the bar.'<sup>150</sup> At this point in the discussion, an elderly committee member, who had belonged to the club for forty years, spoke up with this telling interjection: 'My son-in-law is coloured. He is a wonderful chap and I idolise him but I would not dream of bringing him to the club. We simply do not have coloured people here.'<sup>151</sup> This was white space. But this line from an 'elderly' club member also highlights the complexities of race, kinship, and working-class sociability. According to the committee members of the Caldmore Liberal Working Men's Club, it was not in their power to change the club's whites-only policy. If they attempted to change it, all the committee members agreed, 'the club members would dismiss us'.<sup>152</sup> The committee's solution: hire a new doorman to maintain the rules on entry requirements, so that they were no longer serving 'the public.' After leaving the club meeting, Philpott noted that around the Caldmore Liberal Working Men's Club were a number of pubs—all with Black and Asian customers. This club, like many others, no longer reflected the actually existing demography of the neighbourhood: it had become, in effect, defended white space.<sup>153</sup>

In an interview with Quasim Ali and his family nearly a year after he was refused service, the Ali family made clear that they understood the constraints of the law, believed that the club was still in breach of it, but also emphasized 'the inadequacies of the Act in respect to Working Men's Clubs'. The conciliation officer then added 'how deeply [the children] felt the treatment meted out to their father who had served the Crown nearly all his active life' was unfair. Ali's white children were of particular

consistently ran an open house and was therefore in breach of the 1968 Race Relations Act, they tipped off the Walsall police that the club had been in criminal breach of the Licensing Act 1964 for serving any white person off the street. See TNA:PRO, CK2/2079.

<sup>149</sup> TNA:PRO, CK 2/2079A.Cotterell & Co. to the Principal Conciliation Officer, 24 April 1972.

<sup>150</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2/2079, Phil Philpott, Notes of a meeting held at Caldmore Liberal Working Men's Club, 24 Caldmore, Walsall, between 6.00 p.m. and 8.00 p.m. on 8th September 1970.

<sup>151</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2/2079, Phil Philpott.

<sup>152</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2/2079, Phil Philpott.

<sup>153</sup> W. F. Deedes, 'Laws that Injure Common Sense', *Daily Telegraph*, 4 March 1976, 16.



concern, in part reflecting the focus among race relations professionals in the 1970s on the so-called 'second generation' and their greater expectations of equality. The officer noted: 'The matter has also been a shock to Mr. Ali's children who were born in this country of an English mother and who until the time of the incident had not considered themselves to be any different from others.'<sup>154</sup> The experience of their father had, the Board feared, unsettled their whiteness.

As we approach these intimate histories of the whites-only clubs, we must build on the wealth of historical scholarship on family, gender, and sexuality produced by feminist historians—such as Laura Tabili, Wendy Webster, Hazel Carby, Elizabeth Buettner, and Anna Maguire—who have tracked how intimacies across 'race' were experienced and charged with classed and gendered meanings.<sup>155</sup> Wendy Webster has shown how white women and their sexualities became guardians of the boundary between 'colonizer and colonized' in post-war nationalist discourses, how film and newspaper portrayals of immigration converged with that of the colonial frontier specifically around the recurring theme of the 'domestic sanctuary' of the white family 'threatened with violation' from Black men.<sup>156</sup> Policing whiteness in the working men's club was no doubt about policing the intimacies between white women and men of colour. But it was not only this. It was also about policing the boundaries of intimacy *between men*, and between friends and family within the club space. 'Historical subjects were always imbricated in complex networks of intimacy', writes George Morris, 'explorations limited to a single relationship can only ever be partial'.<sup>157</sup>

The Preston Dockers' Club chairman John MacFarlane rehearsed an old trope to rationalize their 'colour bar': 'I was in a pub once and I saw six [Pakistanis] go and sit at the same table with a young man and his missus, and they sat there all night with a half pint in front of them starting at her. That kind of thing leads to trouble, and dockers can be rough enough when they want to.' He then added, 'And when these Asians are nattering on in gibberish, you don't know if they're talking for you or

<sup>154</sup> D. A. Calvert, Race Relations Board Conciliation Officer's Report, 23 March 1971, CK2/2079.

<sup>155</sup> Hazel Carby, *Imperial Intimacies: A Tale of Two Islands* (2019); Anna Maguire, "'You wouldn't want your Daughter Marrying One': Parental Intervention into Mixed-race Relationships in Post-war Britain', *Historical Research*, 92 (May 2019), 432–44; Wendy Webster, *Mixing It: Diversity in World War Two Britain* (Oxford, 2018); Elizabeth Buettner, "'Would you let your daughter marry a Negro?": Race and Sex in 1950s Britain', in P. Levine and S. R. Grayzel (eds.), *Gender, Labour, War and Empire: Essays on Modern Britain*, (Basingstoke, 2009), 213–37; Laura Tabili, 'Women "of a very Low Type": Crossing Racial Boundaries in Late Imperial Britain', in L. Frader and S. Rose (ed.), *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1996), 165–90.

<sup>156</sup> Wendy Webster, "'There'll Always Be England": Representations of Colonial Wars and Immigration, 1948–68', *Journal of British Studies* (2001), 557–84, 560–61.

<sup>157</sup> George Morris, 'Historiographical Review: Intimacy in Modern British History', *Historical Journal*, 64 (2021), 796–811, 811.

against you.<sup>158</sup> Trouble, roughness, male violence—the loss of respectability—was just around the corner. In his seminal 1977 sociological study of white working-class boys in an industrial town in the Midlands, Paul Willis describes an ‘ambience of violence’ in their lives, symbolic and physical, and a ‘pecking order’ between them based on the ability to fight but also on ‘masculine presence, being from a “famous” family, being funny, being good at “blagging”, extensiveness of informal contacts’.<sup>159</sup> The club, like the union and the shopfloor, surely produced its own pecking order, its own intimate masculine hierarchies; the sovereignty and structure of club life depended on it.<sup>160</sup> ‘This is *their* territory, their pride, their vicarious ostentation, their toehold on the not so affluent society.’ wrote Paul Harrison in *New Society* about the Preston Dockers’ Club, ‘They can be as cagey as town hall bureaucrats. . . . In a hierarchical society, where they are at the bottom of the pyramid this is *their* bit of power and influence.’<sup>161</sup> In Harrison’s reporting, the Preston club’s whites-only policy began back in 1952, when a Black docker and club member got drunk and ‘insulted a lot of the wives present’.<sup>162</sup> After the incident, the committee set down in its minutes to never allow a person of colour into the club again (these minutes were later destroyed in a fire). But that doesn’t tell the whole story. We find another version of events in the witness testimony of George Wignall in Sherrington’s case file, who remembered: the Preston club instituted this policy in 1952 because ‘a West Indian called Gordon, who is now dead, had served as. . . socials secretary and later its treasurer, and who had been “turfed” out for his dictatorial attitude towards members.’<sup>163</sup> ‘Gordon’ was not just a club member, he had authority. The policing of whiteness was, here, also about the racial politics of masculine hierarchies within working-class life and, critically, the control of Black male authority over the ‘sovereignty’ of the white man.

<sup>158</sup> Paul Harrison, ‘Prejudice and Preston: Society at Work’, *New Society*, 24 Oct. 1974, 212.

<sup>159</sup> Paul Willis, *Learning to Labour* (London, 1977), 35.

<sup>160</sup> Helen Smith and Jon Lawrence have both explored same-sex male intimacy in working-class cultures in the North of England: with Lawrence considering how ‘horseplay’ in the workplace—with its ‘mock fighting, mock kissing, mock embracing’—could have been used as a strategy for asserting hierarchies of masculinity in the shipyard. See Lawrence, 142. See also Helen Smith, *Masculinity, Class and Same-Sex Desire in Industrial England, 1895-1957* (London, 2015).

<sup>161</sup> Paul Harrison, ‘Prejudice and Preston: Society at Work’, *New Society*, 24 Oct. 1974, 212.

<sup>162</sup> Harrison, ‘Prejudice and Preston’.

<sup>163</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2/360, George Wignall, Statement of Complainant or Witness, reported by Roy Martin, 26 August 1970. In another iteration, which the club secretary told a local paper, a Black club committee member became ‘concerts secretary’ but the artists who came to perform at the club ‘did not like being booked by a coloured man’ and ‘there was trouble about it among members’. ‘Coloured man “barred by club”’ *Preston Chronicle*, 4 May 1972.

## Conclusion

Whites-only policies in the club movement cannot be explained away *only* as expressions of communitarian insularity or a British sense of class rooted in place. The case files of the Race Relations Board make clear that those who were barred from entering private clubs as guests or potential members and complained were usually *not* strangers—many were friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours; they give us glimpses of the imperial intimacies of English working-class life.<sup>164</sup> Perhaps these individuals were more likely to complain to the Board. Their close connection to the clubs and to the surrounding communities is striking.<sup>165</sup> The rationale of working-class insularity only goes so far. The 1960s and 1970s saw working men's clubs, with increased memberships, generating significant income from alcohol sales and investing in modernizing club buildings and adding large venues for music, bingo nights, and comedy acts. As one journalist put it in 1975 about a Newcastle club, 'Beer is money and money is beer'.<sup>166</sup> In the heart of Birmingham's largest Black community in Handsworth, Handsworth Central Working Men's Club's membership was extended in 1975 to seven different nationalities, including Greek Cypriots and Poles—yet they had no members who were not white (as they defined it) and, as Kenneth Cottrell the assistant secretary of the club clarified, 'We don't expect any either'.<sup>167</sup> In this club at least, white people who were strangers did not need to remain so. When explaining why Black men were barred from a West London working men's club, a member replied: 'We live in a sea of colour. The club is our oasis'.<sup>168</sup> In these clubs, defensive whiteness itself *made* community.<sup>169</sup>

After the High Court ruling on the Preston Dockers' Club, the CIU National Executive was called to the Home Office to meet with Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, who advised them that a Bill was going to be

<sup>164</sup> See Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*, and Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham, NC, 2015).

<sup>165</sup> TNA:PRO, CK2. For example, a white club member of the Brickcroft Social Club in Rochdale wanted to bring his daughter and his Nigerian son-in-law in as guests and is refused service; a white club member's adopted eleven-year-old daughter is refused entry because she is Black; a Bradford club plays 'friendly matches' with a football team with Asian and Black players and then bars them from using the facilities after the game.

<sup>166</sup> Hancock, 'Ace of Clubs', 9.

<sup>167</sup> As quoted in A.J. McIlroy, 'Integration Law Angers White Social Clubs', *The Daily Telegraph* 12 Sept. 1975, 1.

<sup>168</sup> W. F. Deedes, 'Laws that Unjust Common Sense', *The Daily Telegraph* (4 March 1976), 16.

<sup>169</sup> But the logic of exclusion *was* specific to place. In 1969, the Old Fletton Club in Peterborough, for instance, banned foreigners from membership but not naturalized foreigners or members of the Commonwealth. This was understood at the time to be unusual and directed against Peterborough's relatively large Italian migrant population. 'Working Men's Club bars foreigners', *The Guardian* (28 Oct. 1969), 4.

placed before Parliament making racism within clubs illegal.<sup>170</sup> When the Labour Government's 1975 White Paper on discrimination was published announcing plans for, among other things, an explicit extension of the anti-discrimination law into club life, the words of club members defending whites-only policies appeared across local and national papers. One Birmingham-based club member responded: 'Speaking personally, the Government can go and get stuffed. And I voted Labour.'<sup>171</sup> 'We do not approve of the Government or anyone else now telling us who we should allow in', offered a Sheffield club secretary. A CIU official speaking for all working men's clubs in South Yorkshire predicted an 'angry backlash'.<sup>172</sup>

Jon Lawrence has convincingly argued that the right to privacy was one key component of a tradition of popular liberalism among the working classes of post-war England—a tradition that challenged racism from the bottom up.<sup>173</sup> It was written into permissive legislation, the political articulation of freedom of sexuality, and, even, opposition to the breach of privacy in the police uses of 'stop-and-search' against Black people. We can surely connect popular belief in the right to privacy to the long arc of popular individualism in modern England, ascendant in the 1970s and beyond.<sup>174</sup> Yet, the right to privacy was also fundamental to the emergence of a new politics of white identity in the 1970s. As a generation of feminist historians like Anna Clark, Joan Scott, and Carolyn Steedman emphasized decades ago, we must be cautious in our historical valorization of the liberal traditions of the 'free-born Englishman'.<sup>175</sup> 'The "free-born Englishman defending his home" is abstract', wrote Bill Schwarz in 1982, 'until we know who he is defending it from—Nazi invasion and fascism, or Asians who have moved in next door.'<sup>176</sup> Reflecting the ambiguities of its (colonial) history, liberalism both challenged and defended white supremacy and male privilege in the 1970s.<sup>177</sup> The CIU Executive

<sup>170</sup> George Tremlett, *Clummen: The History of the Working Men's Club and Institute Union* (London, 1987), 242

<sup>171</sup> Tremlett, *Clummen*.

<sup>172</sup> Tremlett, *Clummen*.

<sup>173</sup> Jon Lawrence, 'Labour and the Culture Wars of Modern Politics,' *Political Quarterly* (Jan–March 2020), 31–34.

<sup>174</sup> Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, and Natalie Thomlinson, 'Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the "Crisis" of the 1970s', *Twentieth Century British History* 28:2 (June 2017), 268–304.

<sup>175</sup> See Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley, CA, 1995); Joan Wallach Scott, 'Women in *The Making of the English Working Class*', in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 68–90; Carolyn Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Women* (London, 1986).

<sup>176</sup> Schwarz, "'The people" in history', 88.

<sup>177</sup> Chris Hilliard writes that immigration and racism 'pitted liberal principles against each other: freedom of contract versus anti-discrimination and freedom of speech versus the protection of minorities'. Chris Hilliard, *Modern Britain, 1750 to the Present*, by James Vernon, *Twentieth Century British History*, 30 (2019), 272–75, 274. See also Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thoughts* (Chicago, 1999).

defended white space by framing racism at the door of the club as a question of self-government and the right to privacy, drawing from specific traditions of the British working men's club movement.

In his compelling account of the uses of intimacy as a category of analysis in modern British history, George Morris reminds us that, 'The intimate is not a stable field; like the private sphere with which it is associated, it is open to constant contestation—it has a history.'<sup>178</sup> As the experiences of Amarjit Singh Shah, Tony Sherrington, and Quasim Ali make clear, and following recent work by Hazel Carby and Anna Maguire, we must move to understand the policing of whiteness in modern Britain beyond the post-war British media's obsession with Black-white sexual encounters.<sup>179</sup> This article has attempted to contribute to this by analysing the politics of sociability in whites-only working men's clubs in the 1970s. At this time, new questions were emerging about the future of Britain's industrial culture in a more gender equal and plural society. Individually, these case files capture the contradictions of whiteness, its messiness, its fictions, its inability to describe reality. In aggregate, they show how club members came to invest whiteness with feelings of intimacy, kinship, respectability, and independence—offering up an emotional history, then, of (white) masculinity in late industrial England.

<sup>178</sup> Morris, 'Intimacy in Modern British History', 797.

<sup>179</sup> Carby, *Imperial Intimacies*; Anna Maguire, *Contact Zones of the First World War: Cultural Encounters across the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2021).