"DOWN THESE MEAN STREETS .... THE MEANING OF MUGGING"

by

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This paper is an attempt to briefly present one aspect of a larger collective project being undertaken by members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies on "mugging".[1] In this paper we offer an account of the rise in those incidents previouslycalled"bag snatching" or "robbery with violence", which have, in the last twelve months become publicly redefined as "muggings". For reasons of spacee we have not tried to detail the social reaction to these incidents, nor the uses to which the term "mugging" has been put.[2] During the period we are concerned with, the late 1960's and early 1970's, we believe that "muggings" (or rather, those robberies and assaults which were susceptible to public definition as mugging) did increase, and that West Indian youths from "deprived" inner ring areas were significantly over-represented in the statistics, certainly the predominantly West Indian names mentioned in the newspaper court reports support this. Further support for this argument is to be found in articles by Colin McGlashan (e.g. New Statesman, 13.10.72) who identifies the problems faced by black youths in inner city areas as lying behind the recent statistical rises. This socio-geographical location of mugging is also reinforced (and further compounded) by the activities of special 'anti-mugging' squads, both of London and provincial police, and of the London Transport police, who seem to have largely concentrated their efforts on West Indian youths in these areas.

Basing ourselves on this premise, we believe that the following account of worsening structural inequalities, especially in relation to West Indian youths, together with the way these act to close cultural

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1. We would like to thank all the members of the group for the extensive comments on, and criticisms of earlier versions of this paper.

2. An account of the social reaction can be found in 20 YEARS, published by the Paul, Jimmy and Musty Support Committee, c/o The Action Centre, 134 Villa Road, Birmingham 19. (price 20p.)

options, and demand the creation of new cultural responses, offer a meaningful explanation of why this should be so.

We wish to firmly distinguish, at the outset, between West Indian and Asian communities in Britain, in terms of their differing cultures. The strength and self contained nature of Asian culture, primarily contained in family and religion, and arising from a pattern of colonialism, is very different from the fragmented West Indian culture resulting from the period of slavery which all but destroyed the native culture. This means that Asian teenagers do not experience the worst effects of structural and racial inequalities in present day British society, since they cah, and do, remain within a largely self contained culture. For this reason the situation of Asian teenagers in this country is radically different from that of West Indian adolescents: this may not be the case 10 years from now as the Asian young are gradually acculturated or "westernized". In the text which follows, we thus talk only of the problems of West Indians and not of Asians. This is not to say that Asians do not experience deprivation and racism, simply that they are better protected by their culture from its effects, at the moment.

WORSENING STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES

We take the basic structures of our society to be education, employment, income, housing and race.

EDUCATION:

The situation of many working class children in schools has been one of growing frustration and hostility. This has become visible via a number of developments: the "deschooling" debate and its practical outgrowth the "free school" movement; the concern over R.O.S.L.A. especially in relation to the "unwilling"learner; the concern with the "growing violence and vandalism in schools" initiated by the N.A.S. and later taken up by the D.E.S.; the growth of "pupil power" and the increase in truancy. All these developments are related in that they are both symptoms of dissatisfaction

and responses to it. But to be West Indian has meant to have additional problems: the problems of "identity", of racism, of an ignored or misrepresented cultural heritage, of having to take culturally biased intelligence tests, and of being educationally misplaced.

To discuss all these developments in detail is beyond the scope of this article - a few illustrations must suffice. In 1968 a London branch of the A.M.A. was reported as claiming that bad pupil behaviour, resulting in teachers' nervous breakdowns, was responsible for driving teachers out of London secondary schools; in 1972 the N.A.S. conference was preoccupied with the "rising tide of violence in schools" and the consequent need for more safeguards for its members; and even liberal educationalists, less stridently perhaps, perceived the changing atmosphere: A. Rowe on R.O.S.L.A. (1972) talked of 20% in secondary schools (mostly working class children) being "bored, indifferent or actively hostile", and A. Clegg in a N.F.E.R. document (1973) talked of the group of "violent, resentful children, rejects of a qualification conscious society, becoming more conspicuous."

Given that many working class children are hostile to school, the problems of being West Indian and working class are compounded by the racial element. Where teachers are not openly racist they may be either unwittingly or patronisingly so with, as a consequence, low expectations of their West Indian charges. Text books, more or less overtly, perpetuate racist myths; the curriculum usually ignores West Indian culture or, where the effort is made often presents it through "white eyes", owing to the shortage of West Indian teachers. West Indian patois, unacceptable and incomprehensible to white middle class ears, is held to necessitate remedial language classes. All this takes its toll of West Indian children and many become "self fulfilling prophecies": poorly motivated with low self-expectations they become low achievers; confused and made anxious by a grudging, qualified

or patronising acceptance they become, according to disposition, listless and apathetic, or more commonly, frustrated and hostile.

But whereas the majority of West Indian children perhaps perceive themselves to be school failures, some are officially labelled so by being sent to E.S.N. schools. And here, as elsewhere, West Indian youths are significantly over-represented, as Bernard Coard has so successfully demonstrated, mainly because they have been wrongly placed there (in the case of immigrant pupils, incorrect placement was 4 times as likely to have taken place as compared to white pupils). Nevertheless these mistakes are rarely rectified. These "wrong" placements, the consequence of culturally biased I.Q. tests administered by white examiners (both factors contributing to "depressed" scores) and increasingly, of the referral for E.S.N. assessment of West Indian pupils on behavioural rather than educational grounds, are the final links in the chain of educational discrimination experienced by West Indian children.

EMPLOYMENT:

The period has been marked by a high level of unemployment, and a growing concern with the unemployed school leaver, especially the West Indian school leaver. The immediate post war "boom" has been followed by a period of economic crises and, since 1966 a rise in unemployment to a post war record "high". At certain points the "magic million" has been passed and the percentage unemployed nationally has been of American proportions (4%+), whilst local figures have often been considerably higher. While the official figures were bad enough, trade unions and others have claimed that they were actually much worse because of the numbers not registered. Census figures, released in 1972, confirmed this more pessimistic view.

The reason, simply, is the general disappearance of jobs, many of them permanently. Successive recessions and mechanization have meant a "shake out" of labour in traditional labour intensive industries.

Since this has not been accompanied by a fall in production, this shift from man to machine looks permanent and continuing. To illustrate, up to 1966, new jobs were being created at the rate of 200,000 p.a., since then they have been disappearing at half that rate, i.e. 100,000 p.a. In London, between 1966-70, 400,000 jobs have disappeared, three times as many as would have been reasonable to offset the population exodus (Eversley). This resulted in 1972, in the job area - unskilled and semi skilled - which has been most hit by mechanization, in an unemployed to vacancies ratio in London of 10:1.

But the problem of unemployment has been made worse by being accompanied by a falling cost of living). This existence of a double problem, shared by all the advanced industrial societies, and the nub of their various economic crises, means that a choice had to be made between tackling inflation or unemployment. Since the former seems more politically sensitive, Heath, following the American example, has been preoccupied with incomes (and prices): the problem of unemployment has been criminally neglected.

THE UNEMPLOYED SCHOOL LEAVER:

The number of unemployed school leavers has risen even more sharply than unemployment generally. The Census figures of 1972 revealed a rate of about 8% for teenagers (born in the U.K.), but there were alarming rises in the rates of increase for school leavers: January 1969 saw a 16% increase, and April 1972 a colossal 130% rise. The factors affecting the labour market bore particularly hard on school leavers: their inexperience made them no match for older more experienced men in the declining unskilled/ semi-skilled area; mechanisation reduced the number of craft apprenticeships; and the cut-back on office staff meant that for the first time girls became difficult to place. So we were faced with a growing army of "virtually unemployable" school leavers.

THE WEST INDIAN SCHOOL LEAVER:

If we look at the census figures on unemployment for 1966 and 1971
we find two things: a high rise in teenage unemployment for the period, and,
on both occasions, an unemployment rate for teenagers born in the West Indies
twice that of white or Asian teenagers. Thus the 1971 figures revealed that
16.2% of teenagers born in the West Indies were unemployed. Bad as these
figures are, we believe they conceal the real situation which in many
areas is worse. Since they do not include British born West Indians, the
real extent of the discrimination may have been obscured. Additionally,
the figures obscure the fact that areas of high immigrant settlement tend
to be areas of declining job opportunities and the local rates in some of
these inner city areas are undoubtedly much worse. Finally to this already
grim picture needs to be added the fact of the higher aspirations and
expectations of this generation of West Indians: even where they are "lucky"
enough to get an unskilled job they are unlikely to be satisfied with the
boredom and repetition involved.

INCOME:

The crucial fact about the period is the growing inequality. The
worst sufferers have been ironically the poorest of all: those on social
security, pensions and unemployment benefit. These facts are born out not
only by the poverty "lobby" but also by government statistics, politicians,
and various reports. Peter Townsend, a prominent "poverty lobbyist" has
convincingly demonstrated on a number of occasions Labour's failure to
combat poverty in allowing inequality in real incomes to continue, and in
allowing pensions and social security increases to fall behind wage increases.
Since then the poverty lobby have opposed all Tory legislation on income (with
the exception of the proposed changes in taxation which are not due to come
in for 4-5 years). Thus they spoke out against Barber's tax allowances
(March 1972) as being "mean and inadequate" for those on welfare; against
the poverty "wage trap", whereby a wage rise, because of the loss of

benefits, meant a fall in real income for the poor; against the "wage stop" policy of social security, which, in cases where evidence of past earning could not be produced, or where earnings were already low, was stopping payments at the rate (outdated) for labourers on normal time, despite a Commission's report authorising the payment of an overtime allowance.

Three government reports statistically detail this inequality. Social Trends(3) dispels the myth of the affluent manual worker (non-manual workers were six times as likely to be earning £60 per week as manual ones - 1971); Economic Trends (1972) noted that "the poor continued to get relatively poorer and the rich slightly richer"; and the National Child Development Study, the largest ever commissioned, reported that social class inequalities remained as large as ever. Other reports echoed these sentiments: A.Harrison of Essex University (1972) noted that the rich (£5,000 and over p.a.) had benefited most since November 1969, married couples on £2,500 p.a. with three children had a rise in real income of 11%, a similar family on supplementary benefit had 9%, while married pensioners gained a 7% rise.

Sir Keith Joseph, the Social Services secretary, was not unaware of these facts. He initiated a joint effort by the departments of Social Security and Education with the purpose of outlining proposals to enable people to break out of the "cycle of deprivation" mentioned in the National Child Development Study. But his own views on the subject, wanting to instigate pilot projects to help people prepare for parenthood, in th light of such glaring and increasing structural inequalities, can only make the plight of the poor more desperate. Predictably, immigrants, almost by definition, figure heavily in the poor: "invited" here in the early 1950's they are to be found predominantly in dirty heavy jobs involving long hours and poor pay.

HOUSING:

The basic facts about housing for low income groups are: an increase

in homelessness; a worsening of conditions for those renting privately; poor future prospects; little real advantage in being rehoused; and predictably, West Indians badly affected by all of these factors.

HOMELESSNESS:

The growth of homelessness between 1950-68 prompted the Labour government to institute two studies in order to determine who the homeless were, where they came from, and why they became homeless. Professor Greve's study of London revealed that nearly 50% of London's homeless families, many of whom were Commonwealth immigrants, were homeless as a result of action by private landlords who were finding it increasingly more profitable to sell, demolish or convert to "high rent" property. Other factors we could cite would include the fact that during this same period (1950-68) four times as much low income housing was torn down as was rebuilt; the displacement of large numbers by motorway development and totally inadequate house building programmes.

The related growth of homelessness among the young and single which prompted the coming together of a number of organisations under the heading C.H.A.R. has origins in the decline of the lodging house sector, rising unemployment, rents and house prices, an inadequate discharge system from State institutions (prisons/mental hospitals), and the sheer frustration of (mainly) young West Indians with living in the substandard and overcrowded rooms of their parents (which is added to by the peculiar nature of the West Indian "generation gap" where the authoritarian parental regime is often unacceptable to their children who have become accustomed to the more liberal-permissive atmosphere of Britain in the late '60's). A number of projects, locally and nationally, have been started to deal with the problems of homelessness among young West Indians, problems which have caused concern at all levels.

THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR:

This has always been the worst sector of housing, having

proportionately more unfit dwellings, existing in the most deprived areas,
being occupied by the poorest sections of the community, experiencing
the greatest tensions as successive governments have attempted to reconcile
the antagonisms between landlord and tenant. But it has become worse.
As renting to the poor became increasingly unprofitable, landlords either
sold (as many did between 1950 and 1972 when the number of privately rented
dwellings dropped from 45 to 14 per cent of total housing) or converted
the property into a high rent dwelling (using government grants) which usually
housed less people when completed. The Notting Hill People's pamphlet
Losing Out suggests that whole areas, at the present rate of conversion, could
be exclusively high rent areas by 1980. In order to convert, however,
tenants have to be "removed": Islington, with more homeless than any
other London borough (1972) reported that complaints of harassment and
unlawful evictions went up by one third in the first quarter of 1972.
It is here, in the declining and decaying areas of cities, that most West
Indians have been forced (both by selling and renting policies, and by
the need for mutual support) to take rented housing and to inhabit
over crowded accommodation. As one Birmingham West Indian said:" It's
better to sleep in an overcrowded house than sleep in the railway or the
park, or something like that, and if the West Indians didn't let houses
to their friends, that would happen, definitely." p.66, Black British, White
British; D. Hiro, Pelican, 1973.

PROSPECTS:

Though things are bad, there is every indication that they will be
worse in the near future. The inadequate house building programmes,
coupled with the "explosion" in house prices in the last few years, the
decline in the private sector of rented accommodation, and the notorious
waiting lists for council houses in the major cities has meant that
Shelter are now having to help (in addition to those they "normally" help)
families on average incomes. One third of the families asking for help in
the first nine months of 1972 had an average income of £30 per week, and

two thirds of the heads of these families were in full employment.

Additionally the Housing Finance Act is likely to lead to the "ghettoing" of the poor on the worst council estates, since newer houses are unlikely to be given to those likely to be requiring a large rebate. Finally, the government is planning, in the midst of all this, to reduce housing subsidies in four years time, and to reduce council housing expenditure by 13% (in 1976-7) compared with present expenditure. Due to the depreciation of the Pound, this is obviously an even greater reduction than it appears.

REHOUSING:

The "lucky" few are rehoused. Unfortunately, their problems are not always ended by this move. Coates and Silburn, investigating people rehoused from St. Anne's, Nottingham, found that the people were generally worse off (economically) than before, and that more children were "in poverty". Even where this is not the case, the notorious lack of amenities on many new housing estates and the lack of play space in tower block developments has prompted Dr. Halsey to ask for these areas to be made into Educational Priority Areas.

What we have said up to now concerning structural deprivation applies equally strongly to the white, lower working-class or "lumpen". In terms of absolute numbers, since West Indians form only a minute proportion of the total population in this country, there are obviously more poor Whites than poor West Indians. But we have chosen to concentrate on the problems of West Indians, and from now on, we shall be even more specific. Since young West Indians, we believe, are over-represented in the statistics for "muggings", we believe this approach to be justified. Also, by concentrating on just one section of the poor we can give the kind of specificity we feel is required. However, we do not wish it to be over looked that poor, White teenagers face similar problems, with the exception of racism which we discuss next, and for them, too, "mugging" can

be a (temporary) remedy to these problems as it is, as we shall later

argue, for some West Indian youths.

RACE:

The problems encountered by West Indians in these structural

areas parallel, as we have just mentioned, some of the experiences of the

white working class, but their problems are heightened both objectively

and subjectively by the existence of white racism: objectively, in that

racism acts in the various structural arrangements to worsen the relative

position of West Indians in these areas; subjectively, in the increasing

sense of exclusion and rejection felt by coloured communities in England.

Race is the crucial mediator of those structural inequalities to the subjective

and cultural level, for it is through racism that these impersonal inequalities

are carried by white society and are personally received by West Indians.

Successive immigration acts have become more and more overtly racist,

while public and government discussion has focussed increasingly on the

"immigrant problem" and never the problems of the immigrants. (The term

"immigrant" has, of course, become publicly synonymous with 'coloured').

The terms of reference for debate about the 'immigrants' have been set,

even for the liberally minded, by the concern over numbers, illegal entry

and repatriation.

This Government intervention (stemming originally from the late

1950's) into the "immigrant problem" has provided official confirmation of

what West Indians had already experienced in their day to day interaction

in British society: that they were unwanted outcasts, 'second class citizens'

indeed. What had previously been the individual policy of private landlords,

employers, publicans etc., was now confirmed by the highest authority as

being part of our institutional arrangements.

The West Indian response, confronted by this increasingly

overt racism, has moved through a number of stages[1] from an originally

1. For an extended account see D. Hiro, Black British, White British, Pt.1.

integrationist view of British society towards a more self defensive and self assertive valuation of black identity, drawing heavily of course on the American growth of black power, and demonstrating a sympathy with Afro-American "black brothers". Nevertheless, this final stage is only a 'move towards ...', for the hold of the cultural hegemony exercised by British colonialism over West Indian culture, and the continuing socialization of West Indian children in British schools is not so easily broken, but the contradictions are becoming increasingly visible.

The growing distrust of West Indians for white officialdom may be seen in their declining use of the Race Relations Board - their only formal avenue of redress. The drop in the numbers of complaints, especially in the area of unemployment (where even the small number of successful complaints result in the loss of the job anyway owing to the length of time taken to conduct the inquiry) reflects the increasing dissociation of West Indians from official agencies.

PRESSURE GROUPS AND GRASS ROOTS ORGANIZATIONS:

Parallelling this dissociation, and symptomatic of these worsening structural inequalities has been the rapid growth of both national and local "pressure groups" and "grass roots" organizations in attempts to prevent the situation worsening, and hopefully, to effect changes for the better. Though they vary in political outlook, size, financial strength and organizational structure, they are united in being centred on problems as experienced by black people, on the notion of people's needs before greed, and on the idea of self help through direct pressure and active struggle. Thus during these years, we have seen the development of neighbourhood centres, legal advice centres, "black power" groups, and projects to help young West Indians with education, jobs and accommodation.

Finally in this area there are the police. Once regarded by all as fair and impartial, they are now regarded by many West Indians, especially the young, as racist "enemies" who taunt, intimidate, assault, plant and "trump up" charges: the face to face agents of repression of the "man".

Derek Humphrey's excellent <u>Police power and Black people</u> gives specific
examples of this; the evidence to the Commons Select Committee on Race
Relations and Immigration presents the general picture. In this evidence,
community workers talked of black youths "dreading" police harassment
(Islington), of it being difficult to find any West Indian "who has not had
an unfortunate experience with the police" (Wandsworth), and of a "total
breakdown between police and blacks in south east London" (S.E. London N.C.C.L.
referring to the notorious Lewisham Police Station). The usual police reply
(ironically affirming the breakdown) was in terms of a denial of the
existence of the problem. Scotland Yard, referring to the S.E. London
N.C.C.L.'s complaint talked of the "usual stereotyped accusations".
The situation is worsened by the summary way the police deal with complaints:
investigating themselves, very few complaints are actually substantiated,
and even where misbehaviour is admitted, the usual redress for victims is
an apology. This has led to substantial concern over the need for an independ-
ent element in these investigations, and growing hostility from the West
Indian community.

The preceding sections have tried to indicate that the situation
of the deprived, in the last few years, has been getting worse, that West
Indians bear a disproportionate share of that deprivation, and crucially
for us, young West Indians have fared worst of all. The difference between
the structural situation of young West Indians, many either born here or
mainly educated here, and that of their parents who came here in the early
1950's, is great and crucial. Whereas their parents have never suffered the
subtle racial inequities of the British Educational system, were "invited"
here (albeit to take the heaviest, dirtiest and lowest paid jobs), eventu-
ally found accommodation (albeit substandard and decaying), and were left
relatively unharassed by the police and public, the picture for their
children is radically different. Their education has made them more
expectant and aspirant, while simultaneously, through a subtle and pervasive
(although often unwitting) racism, robbing them of the means (a firm
identity, self respect and the qualifications) of achieving their higher
aspirations; this situation is compounded by the job market, where even
<u>white</u> unqualified working class youths are "virtually unemployable", by
homelessness, and by a changed "mood" noticeable both in the public and
the police. Enoch Powell, the National Front and the media's obsessive
concern with the "immigrant problem" have succeeded in providing a
public focus for concern over housing, unemployment and a rampant
inflation. And the police, in certain places seeing their role as
"expressors" of this new mood, have, as far as young blacks are concerned,

successfully institutionalized this mood. It is in the light of this new
structural situation of young blacks from the late 1960's onwards that we
must seek to interpret their different cultural responses: responses which
are different in kind from their parents', since they are expressive of a
changed structural situation.

CULTURAL OPTIONS:

Whereas structures are largely beyond the control of the individ-
ual, and have their source in the distribution of power and wealth in a
society, cultures represent systematic attempts to come to terms with these
structures. They are thus both subjective responses to objective structural
conditions, and attempts to objectivate subjective experiences of the world,
that is, they are attempts to impose meanings, either directly through
ideas, beliefs and values, or indirectly through a variety of cultural
symbols and artefacts. Circumscribed by structural conditions, they are
necessarily adjustments or negotiations. Created for people and recreated
by them, at any given time there are a number of cultural options available.
Since not all are mutually exclusive and are often interconnected, people
"belong", with varying commitment, to numerous cultures; but some people,
because of their structural situation have access to more cultural options
than others, and may have more power to impose their options on others.
Thus white middle class youths, for example, have access to a wider range
of options than do middle aged West Indians. Similarly, as the following
attempts to demonstrate, middle aged West Indians have more options than
their children.

CULTURAL OPTIONS OF OLDER WEST INDIANS:

As we have suggested, West Indians were by no means unaware of these
structural inequalities, but their confrontation with them is by no means
a simple and direct one; rather they are mediated to them in two different
ways. Firstly, they are mediated by the levels at which such discrimination
operates: that is, the West Indian was not confronted by a racist society

as a whole, but experienced its racism at different points within it, in attempting to find jobs and houses, and in attempting to find clubs and dances at which to spend his leisure time. We all rarely see our society as a _totality_, but only those points of it which are most directly relevant to our immediate interests.

Secondly, the experience of the structural inequalities mediated by previously existing cultural outlooks and expectations. It is within this framework that the experience is interpreted and reacted to, and those interpretations and reactions may come to form the basis for new cultural responses to the situation, In short, neither the society facing the West Indians, nor their cultural responses to it are static: instead as the society and their experience of it changes, so do their reaction to it (and vice-versa: their reactions may call forther further changes in the rest of society).

The basic outlook of the original West Indian immigrants (who began to arrive in sizeable numbers in the 1950's) was integrationist: they saw themselves as coming to live and work as part of the "mother country" (whose colonial education had supposedly shown them the values and way of life of British Society), whose 'enlightened' politicians had once released them from slavery. Consequently their reception in terms of a simple black-white dichotomy (compared with the complex class-colour system of the West Indies) was strongly at odds with their expectations, especially for those of once middle class status, who found themselves forced into manual work. These experiences of discrimination, followed by the racial violence of the late 1950's, left no doubt about their status in Britain, and a number of identifiable cultural adaptations developed.

One possibility was assimilation, to give up one's West Indian identity, to accept totally the life style, culture and identity of the white man (skin lightening, hair straightening etc.). This option was by no means simple, for it was difficult to conceal the fundamental fact

of "West Indian-ness" from whites, however much one psychologically tried to identify with them.

A second related option was that of acceptance of the status of second-class citizen: to take on not the white man's identity, but the white man's definition of West Indian identity, and to make the necessary psychic adjustments. Such an approach was often based on the projection of achievement aspirations onto the second generation and their passage through the education system.

Both these options demand a heavy, psychic price from those who attempt them (both involving the abandonment of one's own identity in favour of one or other of those of the dominant culture), and the alarming rises in the admissions of black patients to mental hospitals seem to indicate that this price is being paid. It may not be stretching the point too far to suggest that schizophrenia (quite literally involving two identities) has become an, albeit involuntary, cultural option for West Indians.

A third option (though less extensive than popular mythology would suggest) was involvement in small scale crime (typically such behaviours as pimping, pickpocketing and drug pushing) which offer both more income and more status than the legitimate job market.

One final major option was the development of a largely self defensive West Indian consciousness. This grew out of a number of factors: the need for mutual assistance between West Indians, especially in housing; the need for self defence following on the Notting Hill and St. Annes's race riots of 1958; and the need to share some sort of cultural life when excluded from so much of England's. These groupings took a variety of forms, ranging from the overtly political pressure groups both at local and national level, through the temporary defensive organisations of 1958, to the re-emphasis of West Indian cultural traditions, for example, fundamentalist Christianity and the "shabeen" (the Saturday night blues party).

These adjustments by no means resolved the problems, and indeed created new ones of their own, being either internally destructive, or subject to being labelled 'undesirable'. Thus the schizophrenic is 'sick', black parties and politics are deviant (and demand the mobilisation of respectable resources to restrain them) and "underworld" activities are criminal.

CULTURAL OPTIONS OF YOUNG WEST INDIANS:

We have said that the structural and cultural arrangements of our society are not static, and it is through their changes that we must come to see the present situation of 'second generation' West Indians. Their structural and cultural situation is crucially different from that of their parents, and that difference is given added tension by the "peculiarly heightened form of the 'generation gap'"in West Indian families in this country that we have already mentioned (but see NOTE below for further amplification of this term).

NOTE This notion of a"peculiarly heightened 'generation gap'" existing in this country between West Indians and their young is a "collapsed" notion in that it subsumes under it a lot of complex arguments about the West Indian family-structure. We can only hint at some of the complexities here. Some would want to argue that slavery, colonialism and a migrant male labour pattern have combined to make the West Indian family structure, in the West Indies, an unstable and fragile unti. We are not convinced that a matrifocal type of family structure - one fairly widespread family structure in the West Indies with its extended kinship networks of older female relatives is unstable or fragile, despite the infrequent presence of the father. Not that this will not produce some problems of adjustment for some young people in some families - in the same way that European nuclear families, with their absence of kinship networks, do. However, we would prefer to argue that underlying any instability there may be in West Indian families in the West Indies, is the endemic poverty. For our purposes though, the emigration of large numbers of West Indian

males to Britain in the '50's, whatever the specific family situation of
the young in the West Indies, typically compounded the problem in four
possible ways:

(1) The pattern of emigration meant that children were usually
sent for after a number of years. They thus had to adjust, on
arrival, both to English society and to parents they hardly knew.

(2) Additionally they often had to adjust to a nucleated family
existence having come from an extended family network of female
relatives.

(3) Further, they might be required to adjust to a step-parent
and to half-brothers and sisters born in Britain since many of
their parents would have contracted new unions in this country.

(4) Their experience of British society, both in schools and
elsewhere, often did not marry up with the rigid, authoritarianism
prevalent among their parents: an authoritarianism resulting from
their own colonial, Victorian education and upbringing.

Obviously not all children experienced all four of these problems. But
nearly all of them would have met enough of them for us legitimately to
talk of a "heightened 'generation gap'".

A number of the parent options have become increasingly closed
for the young. Assimilation, already difficult, has become doubly so as a
consequence of the increasingly overt racism of recent years. A black
skin was always difficult to hide, but now carries even more social stigma.
Acceptance is likewise increasingly difficult. As one's 'second-classness'
becomes even officially confirmed, it is so much more difficult to negotiate.
The experiences of failure, and the institutionalized (white) expectations
of it, add up to a denial of admittance to manhood. Nor is it possible to
rationalize such acceptance by projecting aspirations onto the next
generation, for this generation, unlike their parents, have been through
the education system and are living evidence of the fallacy of such hopes.

Also, they have grown up within the society and have had the chance to
observe for themselves that positions of status and power are almost
exclusively reserved for white, not black, adults. Their experience and
their view of their parents' situation indicates that their predicament
is not the result of individual discrimination and personal misfortune
(e.g. having been educated in the West Indies) but is systematic and all
embracing.[1]

Their experience of British society has also closed the option
of fundamentalist Christianity since its puritan dedication no longer
holds a strong appeal to those exposed to the secular liberalism of
present day Britain, and lacks the support of memories of rural community in
which it is rooted.

Those options remaining open, or opening, for them are those
of politics and crime (and to a lesser extent, in that it may co-exist
with others, drug use). The distinction between politics and crime here
is a somewhat artificial one, for in fact the two are closely connected
(as our account will show) and are for many intermingled.

The political option is linked to the increasing West Indian
identification with the American and African negro struggles, originally
with the Civil Rights movement and then, more forcefully, with Black Power
(partly from their growing visibility and partly from the increasingly
obvious British racism). This move towards an Afro-American-Carribean
'black brothers' identity (based on a recognition of common heritages
and a common struggle) has not always been at the level of articulate,
ideological, and organised politics (though such groups are growing),
for it is precisely these powers which are denied to black youths by
their education. But the especially visible American imagery

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1. And with so many now English educated, traditional employers' accounts
   such as 'he can't speak English well enough', have lost their validity, and
   the racist discrimination between them and their white classmates stands
   revealed.

(e.g. Black Power at the Olympic Games) may be effective in the search
for identity and style. Thus 'black is beautiful' may not always be a
rallying call for the Black Panthers, but does offer an alternative
source of positive identification. Another example of this continuity
of "political" identification lies in the Ras Tafarian Cult and its
return to Africa theme. Echoes of the Biblical imagery of the return
to the promised land of this movement are to be found in much Reggae
music (cf. Copasetic/McGlashan).

MUGGING: A DESPERATE SOLUTION TO A DESPERATE SITUATION:

Both the politics and crime among West Indians have an increasing
edge of desperation, involving more or less articulately the recognition
that the system intends to repress and control them, to deny them their
identity and a place in the society. Thus the stance becomes increasingly
one of self assertive confrontation, whether black power groups against
the police, or violence against 'whitey' on the streets.

For some, then, 'mugging' became the best available solution
for a desperate situation. It supplied the "bread" to supplement a
meagre dole (which is hardly sufficient for one who has to "kill" long
periods of time in a period when little can be done for nothing, and who
is likely to spend little time indoors because of substandard or
overcrowded accommodation). It allows the expression of toughness and
masculinity (the long described cultural value of 'machismo') and thus,
when legitimate avenues lead to failure allows an assertion of identity
and status as "a man". This theme is a strong one in West Indian culture
and is reinforced by the image of the "rudie" in Reggae - the super cool
hooligan who always come out on top . This may be one of the ways in
which such general cultural values are mediated to the level of
individual meaningfulness. More importantly, mugging strikes fear
(individual and collective) into the white population who have for so
many centuries held (both literally and metaphorically) the whip hand.[1]

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1. Compare Tom Wolfe , 'Mau-Mauing the Flak Catchers'.

As the public hysteria has shown, it is indeed a potent example of
"black power". It for once allows them to control the situation.

As we said, the dividing line between politics and crime is an
artificial one, we may see within 'mugging' the attempt to create and
assert a collectively validated identity for blackness (which is parallelled
in the American politicization of black criminals, most visibly in the
case of George Jackson), and to assert at least temporary control over
their own life situation, to seize it back from the hands of those in power.

The difference between 'mugging' and the older West Indian's
criminal options both highlights the changing cultural and structural
situation and is expressive of the present situation of the young. Whereas
the older criminals are engaged in relatively "safe" areas, and where,
in the case of "pimping" and drug pushing there are no "victims", the
younger West Indians' choice of "mugging" seems expressive of a different
mood. Risky, because of coming face to face with the victim, brazen and
reckless, it indicates a growing desperation, an increased alienation,
and latently at least, a "non-ideological politics". As a young West Indian
put it more concisely than we ever could, "Tievin's freedom, man."

BIOGRAPHIES:

We have dealt with mugging largely at the level of general
cultural values. Of course not all West Indian youths are equally
susceptible to the "attractiveness" of mugging as a cultural option:
the majority still find internally destructive ways of coping like their
parents. It is the links between such cultural values and the individual's
biography which are crucial. The individual's career may have developed
in such a way that other possibilities carry more weight (e.g. an increasing
option is involvement in sport), but we would argue that the general
structural and cultural situation of young West Indians make the choice of
the sort of self-assertive political-criminal options we have drawn out
above, rational ones. In this situation, as in the case of this West

Indian youth, violence can be a solution to an intolerable situation.

> " ..... when you go to school here, you realize the difference,
> you're made to realize it. They (the white kids) pick on you.
> First you try to bribe them - sweets, ices the lot. But then
> one day you can't stand it any more. You get vicious, real
> vicious and you lick them."

p.79, <u>Black British, White British</u>, D. Hiro, Pelican 1973.

We could sketch out an 'ideal-type' pattern of involvement (in

mugging) for a West Indian youth as follows:

He leaves school at the earliest opportunity without qualifications and

with a firm belief that White society has taken no real interest in his

educational welfare. His prospects, which he can see only too clearly,

are a series of "dead-end" jobs, interspersed with long periods of

unemployment or more-or-less continuous unemployment. Underemployed or

unemployed (and virtually enemployable) he rows with his parents who do

not fully appreciate the changed nature of the employment situation (from

the full employment of the early '50's to the technological unemployment

of the late '60's) nor the child's hostile response to this situation

resulting from his very different aspirations. The parents blame the child,

the more harshly since their hopes were heavily centred on his succeeding

where they failed. A result of this row, or series of rows (exacerbated

by the overcrowded accommodation) is that the youth leaves home. On the

move from friend to friend or sleeping rough and isolated from parents,

much time is spent on the streets. Here he comes into contact with the police.

They probably see him as idle, apathetic and, in some vague way, a threat,

in his constant bored loitering. Especially if it is late at night they

will probably stop and search him - just to let him know they want no trouble.

Ironically, this harassment and intimidation, oft-repeated, has the reverse

effect. The youth learns, from such experiences, to fear and hate the police.

So, poor, bored, homeless and increasingly alienated, since the

only official agents of society he comes into contact with are

bureaucratic officials in the Social Security and Youth Employment Office

(who will often make him feel it is his fault for not having a job, begrudge him his money and "free" time and often keep him running around after jobs they know he has little chance of getting simply to keep him occupied) and the hated police, he can become desperate. At this point crime can become an option since it is a "solution", at least temporary, to his problems. Mugging, given this situation, is the "perfect" crime: needing no criminal knowledge or skill to execute, it is both "instrumental" (in that it can supplement income) and "expressive", with its violence, of the felt desperation and hostility. This response, resulting initially from overbearing structural arrangements and in a situation of limited cultural options, is triggered off by the biographical circumstances outlined above (themselves the product of this nexus). It is thus comprehensible, meaningful and rational, though desperate and, ultimately, self-defeating.

REFORM OR OVERHAUL?

What then is the "solution"? From what we have argued it is not a matter of more social, community and youth workers and more black policemen: this only deals at the level of symptoms by attempting to ameliorate them. Since the problems are rooted in structural inequalities, combined with limited cultural options, any solution must operate at this level with a genuine concern to tackle these inequalities. Most practically this concern would be demonstrated by a massive donation of funds (without strings) to local Black groups (and to similar White groups) of the kind that, as we have mentioned, are growing.

Dealing with symptoms in a reformist fashion only confirms the notion that the individual is the problem to be dealt with, and helps to hide the real problems the individual West Indian (and poor White) face. If the "individual problem" to be dealt with happens to be black, this confirms and justifies a racist ideology: necessary to elites to justify their privileges and necessary to the white working class to blame, in "scapegoat" fashion, for their deprivations - the visible "cause" of their

misfortune. At either level racism is ideologically necessary to maintain the status quo. Most reforms attempt to "patch up": we would argue that a more radical overhaul is necessary - if we are serious about the problem of mugging.

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