

## Race, Empire ... Englishness ...

The British thought on race and racial differences in the latter phases of empire from the 1890s to the early 1960s were of a huge importance. Racial ideas played an important role in British society and politics in light of the decline in Victorian ideas of white Anglo-Saxon racial solidarity. The impact of anthropology is flagrant in shifting the focus on race in British ruling class circles from a classical and humanistic imperialism towards a more objective study of ethnic and cultural groups by the 1930s and 1940s.

As the empire turned into a commonwealth, liberal ideas on race relations helped shape the post-war rise of 'race relations' sociology. Drawing on extensive government documents, private papers, newspapers, magazines and interviews this lecture breaks new ground in the analysis of racial discourse in twentieth-century British politics and the changing conception of race amongst anthropologists, sociologists and the professional intelligentsia.

Since the 1985 urban riots and the more recent rejection of positive action or affirmative action policies, once again, observers have been critical of the British government for being reluctant to fashion a daring policy to alleviate social, economic, and racial frustrations. In the past, they have been accused of fostering a more expedient benign policy of racial indifference because of a desire to promote a colonial policy that would not officially acknowledge the existence of racial prejudice within the Empire and Commonwealth, nor did they want to infringe upon British traditions. Today the Empire has been dismantled, and some of those very traditions have proven to perpetuate an institutional system of racial inequality. Consequently, it is important to know something of the ideas of traditions which shaped Britain's racial ideology, attitudes, and policies. *Race and Empire in British Politics* by Paul Rich, has provided a valuable contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the continuity and evolution of British racial ideology attitudes, and policies. His study is a commendable achievement in understanding contemporary attitudes and events (Lydia Lindsey).

The arrival of large numbers of black immigrants in the 1940's and 1950's marked the opening of an era in national race relations for Britain. The openness of Britain's appearance of civility and tolerance was closing; a new period was beginning, but the new shape of Britain's national racial attitudes and policies

was not clearly visible. At this scene, Rich's study emerges to shed some very important light on this complex discourse on race relations. He does this by building a historical bridge spanning from the 1890's, the last phase of Empire, connecting to the early 1960's, which is the first stage of national racist policies. He maintains that the nature and meaning of racial thinking were established in the last major phase of imperialism. Central to Rich's theme is the continuity of racial thought from the Victorian Age to the present, in the midst of a changing Empire. He purports that, throughout the interwar years, Victorian ideals "continued to be tacitly felt...[and] can be gleaned from the more private thoughts of civil servants and politicians' memoranda and diaries." There was a belief in the inherent superiority of British institutions and in the intrinsic good of paternalism, even though it was not acceptable to express these sentiments in polite middle class circles. He concludes that there is a direct link in the British Imperial experience and present British racial attitudes. He writes, "The British imperial experience from the heyday of Victorian expansionism to the withdrawal from the colonial area in the 1950s and 1960s left an indelible mark on British attitudes towards race and color." (Lydia Lindsey)

Rich argues that the British always have had an intellectual paradigm with racism. They have thought of racism differently at various times predicated on the extent of British personal contact with other races, the degree of informality or formality of the Empire, and the strength or weakness of national economy. In the beginning, when the British were formulating policies for different racial groups in their respective homelands, their arguments were colored with ideas about scientific or biological racism. Later, as the British increasingly had more personal interaction with people of different races within their national boundaries, there was a shift in emphasis on the substance of the debate. There was a move to focus more on eugenics and pathological racism. To convey his position effectively Rich offers a coherent analysis of how "key traditions" of belief on race in British society during a period of considerable social and political change have evolved. These periods of change are marked by three wars, the Anglo-Boer War, World War I, and World War II. He identifies the prevalent racial attitudes before and following the various conflicts (Lydia Lindsey).

Rich opens his discourse with a look at the manner in which racial ideology developed during the Victorian years. He continues with a spurring discussion of cultural relativism by Mary Kingsley's followers. He explains how these liberal

ideas became bogged down in racism after World War I. In the milieu of controversy surrounding the emergence of small black communities and the increasing visibility of mixed offspring, he highlights the growing importance of the idea of Commonwealth and the responsibility of trusteeship. Concomitantly he mentions the strategies and the precepts of other predominantly white nations, including South Africa and the United States. He devotes particular attention to a discourse between the United States and British officials on the discriminatory treatment of black soldiers in the country during the war. This underscores the inconsistency between thought and action among the Home Office, the Colonial Office, the War Department, and private and public sentiments. Continuing, he explains the thinking behind the government to rely on indirect and voluntary means to provide for community racial harmony. Ostensibly, what matters most to Rich is to analyze racist ideology which has shaped national and political interest (Lydia Lindsey).

The author charts a course of change in British racial ideology and policy from bestowing imperial benevolence to vying for internal social control. He contends that Britain's racial ideology has changed from fostering imperial interest to protecting a more parochial and inward national interest. He remarks that the recent Scarman Commission Report, which investigated some 30 urban disturbances in 1981, is reflective of this "new model of domestic colonialism now divorced from the former tradition of imperial paternalism and benevolence." (Lydia Lindsey)

The approach of Rich's study is path-breaking. It is an intellectual history on racial thought and color. He studiously provides a framework within which to enlarge the nature of British racist ideology and black people's place within it. In the past, most of the research on race in Britain has been directed at "race relations." The majority of those works on racial relations and ethnicity has resulted in predominantly sociological and anthropological interpretations. His study, however, like the recent comprehensive book, *Staying Power* (1984), by Peter Fryer, and the collection of social history articles, *Race and Labor in the Twentieth Century Britain* (1985), edited by Kenneth Lunn, has a historical focus. Rich's study offers a detailed and challenging view of racial ideology within the nation before the 1960's. The lion's share of the research on race relations has been from the 1960's onward. He appends a full bibliography of documentary sources including files, reports, and minutes from various departments at the Public Record Office (PRO); papers of statesmen;

newspapers and journals; and personal interviews. He provides the reader with a guide for further research, central to understanding the basis of present-day racial attitudes and policies. Although, Rich's study may be criticized for not sharply delineating the specific attitudes toward various ethnic groups and women within the Empire and Commonwealth, it opens a very important path to appreciating the political complexities of British racist thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and behavior (Lydia Lindsey).

As more researchers make use of the PRO files, there will be greater insight into the pattern of Britain's race relations history and the influences of imperialism. It is hoped that Rich's precepts and other forthcoming perspectives will serve to shape positive policies that will lessen racial inequalities and promote racial harmony (Lydia Lindsey).